

Putting the Family First:
Chinese Wives' Stories of
Migration to Britain

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Abstract

With the increasing outflow of migrants from mainland China, many professional Chinese men have been coming to Britain for further education and employment. Their wives frequently give up their own jobs and come to the UK as following spouses, in order to assist their husbands with their educational and career advancement. Little research has been done on Chinese women overseas in general, and there are even fewer studies on Chinese trailing wives. The aim of my thesis is to apply feminist perspectives to interpret the migration experiences of these Chinese wives. Drawing upon interviews with 22 Chinese wives, I explore and interpret the data to reveal the importance of wifely duty during four different stages of their migration process: their deliberations about coming to Britain, their efforts to set up new homes, their financial and emotional support of their husbands and their becoming family dependants after their husbands' careers are established in the UK. In analysing the interview material, I drew on Delphy and Leonard's account of the marriage contract and the exploitation of women's labour in the family. I argue that, as these women are followers in the migration process, they prioritised the interest of the family. By viewing this migration as a contract; they saw their investment in their husbands as a way to further the interests of the family as a whole. Their internalised traditional roles led to their achievement of self-realisation through the success of their husbands/family. These women's 'self-sacrifice', in turn, bound them more tightly to their traditional roles in the family and to their subordinate status.

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I imagined many times the moment I wrote my acknowledgement, since I was pretty sure of my becoming very emotional when I had to recall this long journey. I still remember vividly that very dark and cold winter morning, when I set up my first interview trip to Manchester. I was caught by Britain's heaviest snowfall of 18 years and my journey seemed endless. That scene reminded me of Robert Frost's poem '*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*' and I could not help asking myself, like that little horse, how many miles I still needed to go. Now, as I look back over, I see so many people supporting me behind and I feel the strength they input on me. I know I am not lonely.

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Author's Declaration

The work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of York. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the thesis has been submitted for any other degree.

Introduction

My mother is a big fan of Chinese female autobiography. On her recommendation, I read Zhou Li's '*A Chinese Woman in Manhattan*' (*man ha dun de zhong guo nu ren*) and a series of books written by San Mao; both were very popular accounts of the authors' overseas experiences and adventures. My very first encounter with Chinese women overseas happened when I embarked on a one-year MA course in the UK. Being the only two Chinese students in the class, I and Xiao Chunhua became very good friends. Soon I learned that she first came to Britain as a trailing wife who had followed her husband many years before in order to advance his academic performance in Britain. With her husband's career success, she started to enjoy a happy life as a 'successful man's wife' and was envied by many of her friends in China. However, my impression of her happiness was shattered after she revealed to me how hard she once worked to support her husband's studies as well as her plan to have a second child as a way of avoiding loneliness. Since I was brought up in a family with my parents sharing a more egalitarian relationship, I was surprised to see the power inequality that existed in some other families. It was her experience, which strongly contradicted the ideas I had about women and family, that inspired me to embark on a PhD project about Chinese women who came to Britain as wives of elite husbands. However, my preliminary literature search was disappointing, since I could find very little relevant research on such women in Britain. The small body of existing literature on Chinese women in Britain was predominantly about female immigrants from Hong Kong in relation to their take-away food businesses. This situation presented me with problems when writing my background introduction chapter (Chapter One). However, on the other hand, it also convinced me of the importance of my research. With the economic development of China, more and more Chinese students have come to Britain to study and have afterwards chosen to stay, so the number of wives who accompany their husbands to Britain is also increasing. Since little is known about these Chinese wives living in Britain, my research is exploratory in nature, with the intention of revealing Chinese wives'

lives in depth. This exploration of these women's experiences is hence timely and necessary.

Immigration has become a hotly debated issue in recent decades with the increasing international population mobility. Being one of the most developed countries, Britain has long experience with immigration, with large numbers of migrants arriving from the early 1950s from Commonwealth countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Caribbean, Africa, and America and Australia (Ford, 2011). With the decline of formal Commonwealth system, the 1980s onwards saw a new wave of Chinese immigration to Britain that has been dominated by multiple origins Chinese from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, and other South-East Asian countries (see Luk, 2009). Britain's enter into the European Union (EU) also facilitates immigration from other European economies, especially Eastern Europe. Although most research focuses more on the male migrants and their experience in the host country's labour market, indeed, a growing number of female migrants in Britain also possess considerable resources in funds, qualifications, and skills (Cheng, 1996). Being fully aware of the cultural, political and economic differences among female migrants, many studies show that gendered and racialized discriminatory practices as well as women's responsibilities in the family domain greatly condition women's migration experience. Therefore I would like to make this point clear that many issues I mentioned in this thesis are not specific to women from Mainland China, but rather common to migration itself.

During the process of collecting and analysing preliminary data on Chinese wives' experiences in Britain, one issue came to be increasingly clear: my participants' responsibilities as women and wives in actuality played a vital role in their entire migration process; their wifely responsibilities conditioned their choices at every stage of their migration experience. Seeing this situation, I adopted Delphy and Leonard's (1992) theory on women and family in order to approach my data and to interpret these women's lives. First, Delphy takes

marriage as a labour contract, by entering which, women become bound to a lower position in the marriage hierarchy. Second, the power imbalance is bound up with the appropriation of women's labour by men, even if she 'contribute(s) towards his maintenance and well-being' (Delphy and Leonard, 1992, p.109). Despite the higher education and career success of these women in China, the tradition of prioritising the husband's success still conditioned them to make sacrifices for the family. Their paid labour was intended to provide a more secure environment for their husbands, while their domestic labour was also undertaken in order to facilitate their husbands' success in the UK. Thus, by incorporating Western feminist perspectives on Chinese women's issues, I hope to make a contribution to the understanding of Chinese women in Britain as well as highlighting the vulnerable positions in which they find themselves due to this migration.

In order to understand the social context in which my participants were rooted, it is helpful to have some preliminary knowledge of China's Confucianism and the discourse of tradition and modernity that is based on it, since the incorporation of tradition within modernity – and vice versa – are two inseparable parts of the reshaping of social development (Jackson et al., 2008; Rofel, 1999; Hobsbawm, 1983). Modernity does, to some extent, imply a continuity with the past (see Jackson et al., 2008; Dallmayr, 1993; Prasenjit, 1991), although tradition is also reinvented 'to suit particular conceptions of the modern' (Jackson et al., 2008, p.5). Being the most influential school of thought in China, Confucianism itself also experienced a few major changes in premodern China; for example, the 'Confucian classics' from the Han (202 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) and Tang (618-907) Dynasties as well as the developments in the Song (960-1279) Dynasty (see Zang 2003; Ko et al., 2003) that set up a society based on a strict hierarchical order in which everyone obeys the rules appropriate to their social status (see Ng, 2000; Stockman, 2000). With its emphasis on patriarchal order and family-centred ethics, Confucianism pursues 'three bonds', namely, loyalty and obedience from ministers to prince, from son to father, and from wife to husband (see Fan, 1997). In order to create social harmony, Confucians invented five power hierarchies to

guide people's relationships with each other: ruler-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, and friend-friend. In an ideal society, under the Confucian tradition, people in higher positions were responsible for looking after their inferiors while their subjects were to be respectful, support their rulers and make sacrifices for the collective good (see Ng, 2000; Shils, 1996).

Meanwhile, people should follow 'ren, yi, li', the three concepts which not only regulated Chinese people's moral behaviour of obsequiousness, submissiveness and compliance (see Stockman, 2000; Fan, 1997), but also cultivated their culture of relatedness, in which all individuals were interrelated and dependent on each other (see Ng, 2000). Under this patriarchal social system, Chinese women were in the lowest position and were regarded as submissive and inferior (see Chapter Two).

It was not until China's defeat by Britain in the First Opium War (1839-1842)¹ that Confucianism began to be shaken, when the Qing Dynasty began cautiously to bring about changes to stabilise its rule; however, one significant characteristic of the reform was a call for Chinese modernity through the reinvention of Confucianism.² The 1911 Revolution led to the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty and the founding of the Republic of China on 1 January, 1912. Meanwhile, criticism of Confucian traditions as being the main obstacle to China's modernity was increasing. It was during the May Fourth period that this criticism reached its peak and Chinese intellectuals blamed Confucian traditions for preventing the release of youthful energy (see Dirlik, 1995; Forges, 1992). On the other hand, scholars also sought innovations in Confucian traditions to create China's own self-identity. This led to the revival of the New Confucianism in the 1930s, which 'sought a reinterpretation of Confucianism as an ethical spiritual system of values' in order to achieve democracy in China (Dirlik, 1995, p.231).

¹ The war between China's Qing Dynasty and Britain was caused by a trade imbalance in favour of China and the input of opium into China by the British East India Company. As the defeated country, China ceded Hong Kong to Britain.

² For example, the famous 'One Hundred Days Reform' in 1898 called for the importing of Western social and cultural systems into China with the aim to 'reinterpret Confucianism to assume the roles of ancient sages' to create China's own modernity (Forges, 1992, p.78).

On 1 October, 1949, communist China was established; Confucian traditions encountered fierce attack during Mao's era and were condemned as a 'feudal remnant' that had to be eradicated (see Stockman, 2000; Rofel, 1999). However, as many studies have pointed out, the communist party in Mao's era in actuality managed to pick and choose among the traditions to facilitate their policies for economic development (see Liu, 2007; Stockman, 2000; Week, 1989), and thus Chinese Marxism represented a continuity of traditional practices. For example, Week (1989) notes the maintenance of patriarchal social relations and traditional ideas about women in Mao's era (see Chapter Two); the setting up of work units (*dan wei*) followed Confucian practices of social hierarchy and social control by the Communist Party (Liu, 2007). In fact, patriarchal traditions were reinforced during Mao's time. For example, in spite of the party's efforts to replace kinship with comradeship, traditional interrelatedness still widely existed (see Whyte, 1974). The Cultural Revolution (1968-1978) to some extent even stimulated this interdependency in which people sought irregular channels for resources as well as self-protection (see Stockman, 2000).

After Mao's death, the rehabilitation of Confucian traditions in China has been more obvious, under the encouragement of Chinese leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin (see Stockman, 2000). The so-called Confucian communitarianism calls for the merging of individuals' interests with those of the wider community, as contrasted with Western individualism. The one-child policy was a good example, when Chinese people were mobilised to change their lives for the benefit of the whole society (Milwertz, 1997). In recent decades, with the development of the Chinese economy, Communism is gradually losing its capacity to inspire Chinese people; under these circumstances, Confucianism is again being adopted as a tool to stabilise the party's political control. The current Chinese president, Hu Jintao, even more specifically promoted a reference to Confucian traditions by promoting a 'harmonious society' to deal with China's social problems (Bell, 2008; Jackson et al., 2008). All the evidence indicates that Confucian traditions are still embedded in Chinese society and have a profound influence on Chinese people.

In the first chapter, I discuss the different ways in which Chinese women have migrated to Britain, with the intention of presenting background information on Chinese women in the UK. In Chapter Two, I present a historically contextualised account of Chinese women and families, since traditional Chinese culture has unavoidably influenced the values of Chinese immigrants. I organise this chapter into four chronological periods, looking at women in the feudal imperial period, the late Qing to the Republican era (1895-1949), Mao's era (1949-78) and after China's Economic Reform (1978 to now). This is followed by a methodology chapter where I reflect on the process of conducting my fieldwork in the UK, my experience of finding interview participants, conducting interviews and methodological concerns about conducting feminist research, as well as some reflections on data collection and analysis.

I present the analysis of my data according to the migration and adaptation progress of my participants in terms of four stages. Chapter Four investigates the women's decisions to come to Britain and how their decisions were related to their wifely role and responsibility. Chapter Five covers the early stages of their lives in Britain. I explore how these women encountered the challenges of creating a comfortable home, financial constraints and their coping strategies, as well as the difficulties and problems in their adaptation process in dealing with mental stress, language and cultural differences. Chapter Six explores the ways in which the women supported their husbands' social and educational advancement, including the strategies they adopted to financially support the family, in particular finding jobs and dealing with conflicts between family and work. Chapter Seven examines their lives after the successful establishment of their husbands' careers and how their husbands' success affected these women's lives, focusing in particular on the issue of being financial dependants. Finally, my conclusion summarises my main findings and the contributions that I have made to the study of Chinese wives in Britain.

Chapter One

Chinese Women in Britain

In order to locate the women in my study within a wider context of Chinese women in the UK, this chapter will consider the different ways in which women from the People's Republic of China came to Britain, with the intention of distinguishing them from Hong Kong Chinese in the UK. Because of the length of time they have been in Britain, Hong Kong migrants have drawn more attention from researchers, who mainly focus on the lives of Hong Kong Chinese in Britain and in particular their engagement in family-run takeaway and restaurant businesses (for example Song, 1995; Parker, 1995; Baxter and Raw, 1988; Watson, 1975). However, the increasing numbers of Chinese from the People's Republic of China who have settled in Britain have now contributed to a more diversified Chinese community (see Chan et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2002; Chau and Yu, 2001). Considering the differences between Hong Kong migrants and migrants from the People's Republic of China,¹ recent studies tend to divide the Chinese community into Hong Kong Chinese and Mainland Chinese, which are the two biggest Chinese communities at present, and to study them separately (Chan et al., 2007). However, the existing studies on both Chinese communities in Britain all overlook women migrants by labelling them as passive followers in their family migration process. The stereotype of Chinese women means that the unique life experiences of these women have remained largely ignored. Under these circumstances, as Lee et al. (2002, p.609) put it, there is an urgent need to 'rethink and reframe the familial strategies of migration in terms of broader considerations of class and gender relations'. Thus, in their research, Lee et al. (2002) revealed the dissimilar experiences of women migrants and divided Chinese women in Britain into three categories: overseas brides, women who migrated with their families and independent migrants. Focusing on the different ways in which women migrated to Britain, however, Lee et al. talked about

¹ This difference is not surprising since the well-established Chinese community in Britain descends from farmers from rural Hong Kong. The new immigrants from the PRC are mostly well-educated with professional skills.

Chinese women under a wide definition but failed to look at the influences that different social and cultural backgrounds could have on Chinese women's migration. While my research is on women from Mainland China, rather than women from other areas, such as Hong Kong or Malaysia, these women have their own immigration experiences and characteristics. Therefore, I would like to borrow Lee et al.'s (2002) idea of classifying women according to their ways of settling in Britain, but to focus on the patterns of settlement of Mainland Chinese women. Extending Lee et al.'s categories, I single out 'trailing wives' into a separate group, as these women are the subject of my research and were incorporated into overseas brides in Lee's classification. I also add in female illegal immigrants, who were not considered in Lee et al.'s research, as another category. Therefore, my five categories are listed as: (i), the early female migrants within family; (ii), overseas brides; (iii), illegal migrants, (iv), independent female immigrants and (v) trailing wives. Although these women have different methods of migration compared to my research group, their identity as women from the People's Republic of China leads to similarities. Knowledge about other groups of women can hence offer a better understanding of my participants' experience.

I begin with the historical background of the first group of women who came to Britain as dependants of their husbands, which was brought about by changes to British immigration laws after the Second World War. Although most of these women were from Hong Kong, a reasonable number came originally from the coastal areas of China (Watson, 1975). Then I will discuss, respectively, women who migrated to Britain through marriage and those who chose to come illegally. Later, I move on to women who settled here as independent immigrants. Finally, I will concentrate on women who came to Britain as trailing wives. As this group of women is the subject of my thesis, I will focus mainly on China's student export flow to present the context in which my participants became trailing wives.

The First Wave of Chinese Female Migrants to the UK

Despite the fact that Chinese women were seen in Britain as early as the 1930s and 1940s, they were few in number, with many of these women migrants coming as wives of Chinese diplomats and intellectuals.² The 1960s saw the largest inflow of Chinese women into Britain, following the migration of their male relatives, who came to Britain to catch the economic boom after the Second World War. In order to remedy the post-war labour shortage, the British Government started to recruit people from the British Commonwealth to help rebuild the country. To cater for the labour demand, a relatively more flexible immigration policy towards members of the Commonwealth was enacted in 1962 to allow people from Commonwealth countries to migrate to Britain more easily (Parker, 1998; Patterson, 1969). In the meantime, many people from southern China fled to Hong Kong as refugees due to China's Anti-Japanese War and the civil war between the Communist Party and the Nationalists (Kuomintang) (Watson, 1975). Some of these refugees then seized the opportunity for further migration and finally came to Britain (Watson, 1975). Seeing British people's appetite for foreign food, especially Chinese and Indian dishes (Watson, 1977, p.183), many Chinese immigrants turned to catering and started food businesses in Britain (see Pai, 2008; Parker, 1995; Baxter and Raw, 1988).

Between 1956 and 1965, a rapid growth in the Chinese restaurant trade was observed, while the rate of immigration from Hong Kong also rose concomitantly. The size of the Chinese community in Britain therefore expanded from 2,200 in 1961 to between 30,000 and 50,000 in the mid-1960s (Ng and Wong, 2007, p.366). While the relatively good pay of restaurant jobs compared with Hong Kong wages tempted Chinese people to migrate to the UK, emigration opportunities were not accessible to everybody. In order to migrate successfully, a chain migration³ relationship had to be established for potential emigrants to make

² See the BBC website at http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/factual/chinese_in_britain6.shtml [Accessed 04/03/2008].

³ Watson (1977) gives a very detailed record of how prospective emigrants from Hong Kong made use of lineage ties in their movements abroad. Before leaving Hong Kong, the emigrants needed passports and entry certificates; these were obtained with the help of lineage leaders who acted as

contact with people already abroad (Watson, 1977, p.189). According to Lee et al., in the Chinese case the migratory movement was organised through village-based male lineages, which only sent young, strong, healthy men, and expected them to return home later. Women were left at home to work in the fields and look after the family, while living on the remittances sent back (see Baxter and Raw, 1988, p.64). Therefore it was mostly men who were selected. Although the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act allowed Chinese men to bring their wives to Britain, it was not until nine years later, when the Immigration Act of 1971 (which came into force in 1973) reintroduced strict immigration control, that a large inflow of Chinese female immigrants started. Because this Act removed the automatic right of entry to wives of men who had already settled in Britain (Baxter and Raw, 1988, pp.64-65), many women rushed to come to Britain before it came into force to join their husbands for family reunions. According to Baxter (1986, p.14), between 1971 and 1973, 90 percent of immigrants from Hong Kong were family dependants, most of whom worked as kitchen hands and cleaners in Chinese restaurants (see Baxter and Raw, 1988, p.67).

For women who had few skills, family-run catering businesses, especially takeaways, came to be the acceptable way of making a living in Britain.⁴ However, working alongside their husbands or male heads of family, these women were exposed to the traditional Chinese patriarchal culture, due to their unique working circumstances (Baxter and Raw, 1988; Song, 1995; Lee et al., 2002). Wives were frequently seen doing the more labour-intensive and low-skilled work in the kitchen, leaving the more important work and business management exclusively to their husbands. For example, by interviewing female family members in Chinese takeaway businesses in Britain, Song (1995, p.290)

intermediaries for all transactions with government bureaucracies. Employers ordinarily provided passage money as an advance on wages. Even the flights were handled by a prominent member of the lineage who owned a successful charter service that operated between Hong Kong and Europe. On the London side, lineage members took care of all the formalities required by the British Government, including work permits and job guarantees.

⁴ The first group of Chinese in Britain ran small businesses in the late 19th century to provide services for Chinese seamen visiting Britain. Starting in the 1920s, Chinese settlers began to make a living in the laundry industry and thus the laundry business increased in popularity. As Chau and Yu (2001, p.116) observed, 'the history of Chinese immigrants in Britain is the history of striking out for survival in the private market.'

identified the phenomenon of ‘kitchen hierarchy’, where the different work roles of the husband and wife were set up in terms of their traditional gender roles. Lee et al. (2002) also revealed that women not only had a lower position in their work relationship with their husbands, but they also encountered pressure from their husbands and in-laws to take on a more traditional lifestyle. In fact, the practice of Chinese filial piety and the ‘live-in’ style made it more likely that parents stayed with their male children; therefore living together with the husband’s extended family meant that daughters-in-law shouldered the responsibilities of looking after all family members. As Lee et al. (2002) pointed out, these women faced obstacles from their in-laws or even from their husbands when they tried to break with this tradition, due to their inferior status in the family and their dependence on their husbands.

Under the kitchen hierarchy, women were always found to be engaged in low-skilled jobs, such as serving at the counter. Although the takeaway counter ‘acted as a protective barrier between the Chinese “inside” and British “outside”’ (Parker, 1995, p.101), women faced a higher risk of racial and sexual harassment, compared to their male relatives. According to Parker (1995), serving behind the counter was both gendered and racialised, with Chinese women often found serving white men. This practice potentially made women the direct target of racist and sexual harassment. This was especially the case late at night, when people were coming back from late-night drinking and ordered a takeaway on their way home (Parker, 1995). Song (1995) also found that not only did female family members have a greater likelihood of encountering racial discrimination, they also had to endure sexual harassment and learn to deal with it. According to Parker (1995), the need to retain local customers and a feeling of inferiority always held women back from defending themselves; toleration seemed the only and best option under these circumstances.

Due to limited education and language barriers, many Chinese women in takeaway businesses had to rely heavily on their husbands in order to make a living in the UK. However, evidence suggested that women were not passively

enduring their disadvantaged situations (see Baxter and Raw, 1988; Song, 1995; Parker, 1996; Lee et al., 2002). Some women skilfully negotiated with their husbands to work full-time outside the family and earned their own wages (Song, 1995), some jointly ran the family business as co-investors with their husbands or simply ran a business themselves (Baxter and Raw, 1988). Under these circumstances, women adopted the strategy of financial independence as a way to break out from the extended family and to gain their own fulfilment and respect from other family members (Lee et al., 2002). However, I would argue that, despite these women's aspirations of independence, they remained restrained within the patriarchal framework, the gender ideology was not shifted and the gender boundary was not broken through. Song (1996, p.289) found that mothers who initially worked outside the family were willing to return to their family businesses because 'childcare was more viable' that way. While Song viewed this as women's freedom of choice, the double burden on these women was also implicated. Seeing their own fate of being trapped in takeaway shops, most women encouraged their daughters to pursue higher education with the aim of not repeating their lives (Baxter and Raw, 1988). Meanwhile, stimulated by their mothers' experiences, Chinese daughters also desired to leave the ethnic enclave and acculturate more into mainstream society (Song, 1995; Parker, 1995).

Overseas Brides

According to Lee et al. (2002, p.611), many Chinese women came to Britain as brides of Chinese migrants or white British men, with the aim of seeking 'an escape route from poverty, an unhappy life at home, failed first marriage, or political persecution.' Transnational brides of Chinese origin are mainly women from Hong Kong, Mainland China and also Indonesia (see Lee et al., 2002); in fact, in the People's Republic of China, the phenomenon of transnational marriage increased with the launch of the 'open door' policy, when Chinese people, especially those in urban areas, suddenly became exposed to the outside world. Many people recognised the opportunities brought by the 'open door' policy and

tried to seize the chance to change lives that they were not satisfied with. For Chinese women, as Liu and Liu (2006) addressed, escaping from an unsatisfactory living environment was not the only motivation for them to enter international marriages. Other reasons, for example the freedom to travel and personal advancement, were also taken into consideration by many Chinese women who chose to marry men from wealthier countries (Liu and Liu, 2006). Thanks to the openness of China's market, their plans were made possible, with many overseas companies investing in China and increasingly more Western people from developed countries travelling to China for business opportunities. For example, Willis and Yeoh (2002) estimated that, between 1997 and 2001, there were about 26,000 British migrants in China, of whom a significant proportion were managers and professionals. Although the increasing number of foreigners in China has made it possible for local Chinese women to marry foreign men, as observed by Willis and Yeoh (2002), nationality is one of the most important criteria for being the 'ideal man' in the eyes of these Chinese women, as reflected in personal dating advertisements in Shanghai (Willis and Yeoh, 2002, p.561):

Are you a reliable and sincere Caucasian/Australian/US guy? A cute well-educated and romantic girl is seeking a long-term relationship leading to marriage.

Mature, professional Chinese girl seeking well-educated over 32 yr old foreigner or overseas Chinese reliable gentleman, with integrity, maturity, health, responsibility, for a sincere relationship leading to marriage.

Among these women, those who worked in white collar jobs in Chinese branches of international companies obviously had more contacts with foreign colleagues and some of them used this as a short cut to look for transnational marriage opportunities for themselves. For example, Yuen (2008) related the story of a woman from the PRC who worked in an international company in China, successfully married her British colleague and finally settled down in Britain. Farrer (2002) also reported the phenomenon of Shanghai white-collar working women pursuing a comfortable life by marrying overseas Chinese or foreigners.

Despite the numbers of foreigners who had moved to China, their segregation from the locals⁵ made them less accessible to local Chinese women. Therefore, some Chinese women resorted to marriage agencies to aid them in their search for a husband (Clark, 2001; Constable, 2005). Marriage agencies started to emerge in China in the early 1980s, with the earliest model being non-profit agencies organised either by work units or branches of the All China Women's Federation. The aim of those agencies was to create more opportunities for single women and men to meet each other (Honig and Hershatter, 1988, p.88). These state-run agencies gradually evolved into private marriage agencies to which people paid fees in order to be added to their clientele and view the agency's database (Clark, 2001). The agencies specialising in international marriage were said to be set up either by brokers in China or jointly with overseas firms (Clark, 2001; Liu and Liu, 2006). According to one investigation, in 1997 there were 145 officially registered matchmaking agencies specialising in finding foreign wives (Davies cited by Vergara, 1999-2000, p.1548). In 1997, WAIA (the World Association of Introduction Agencies) based in London estimated that every year around 4000 British men married foreign brides through mail-order agencies, and the number was still climbing; in fact, transnational marriage in Britain from 1995 to 1997 increased at the rate of 20% every year (Davies cited by Vergara, 1999-2000, p.1548). In order to make the marriage possible, these agencies would first ask their female customers to take salon photos or make videos. These photos and videos were designed with careful attention to produce the image of a traditional Chinese woman who would cater for the domestic needs of her potential foreign husband (Clark, 2001, p.114). Once the woman was selected, or a man showed an interest in her, the agency would provide contact details or arrange dates for the two parties, while professional coaches and help from the agency staff were offered to the women. In recent decades, with the spread of the internet, a new

⁵ It is very common in China's bigger cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, that the local government sets aside certain areas as residential areas only for foreigners. The locations are always good and the facilities are better than the city's average level. Local Chinese people cannot get access to these areas (also see Willis and Yeoh, 2002).

form of dating media, 'online dating websites',⁶ also became popular. However, compared to this new dating method, the traditional marriage agencies offered more professional guidance to their customers;⁷ therefore a higher percentage of successes could be expected.

Recent studies place much emphasis on women's disadvantaged status in the international marriage market and their lack of resources in an abusive relationship, largely due to their immigration status. For example, Constable (2005, p.173) discussed the commodification of Chinese women while men, with their greater financial ability, could in fact 'buy' the bride. Vergara (1999) found that, because of visa restrictions, mail-order brides in the USA are more likely to tolerate an unhappy marriage and this could result in a slavery-like relationship. In a study of Chinese mail-order brides in Manchester, UK, Au (2002) reported a passive tolerance among women in their transnational marriages due to the constraints of their immigration status. In addition, both communication and acculturation difficulties could condition women into becoming dependants (Nakamatsu, 2003, p.188) and to endure a hard life of discrimination. Liu & Liu (2006) also warned about the potential conflicts in transnational marriages when the Western husband desired an obedient and submissive Oriental wife, while women from the People's Republic of China could be less domesticated than women from other Asian countries.⁸

Although Chinese brides are often viewed as passively putting up with their marriages, it is recognised that they also desire and attempt actively to pursue

⁶ Due to the rather casual nature and low success rate of online dating, I would rather leave this area untouched and concentrate on the more professionalised service provided by international marriage agencies.

⁷ According to Clark (2001) and Nakamatsu (2003), these marriage agencies usually provide their clients with a series of services, including instructions on behaviour, makeup, dress and even basic language training to ensure the success of the marriage matching process. I was also informed of similar information from some Chinese overseas brides in Britain. One Chinese acquaintance of mine even told me that the agency she registered with in China gave her an English collection of love poems and told her to send one every day to her online 'date' to win his attention, and that person is now her husband.

⁸ According to Liu and Liu (2006; also Constable, 2005), one reason for most foreign men marry Asian women because they want an obedient and domesticated wife. With Chinese women's high participation in paid work, they could be less likely to conform to this expected stereotype.

their own identities and lives in the foreign land. For example, by examining Filipina and Chinese women, Constable argued that women might use global introduction agencies to ‘achieve mobility through marriage’ (Constable, 2005, p. 186), or to look for an intimate relationship they believed they could not find with local men. Yuen (2008) retold the story of a woman from the PRC who married a British man. Not only did she try to maintain her Chinese identity, she also tried to pass on this identity to her son by speaking with him in Chinese, despite her husband’s objections. Liu and Liu (2006) and Lee et al. (2002) highlighted Chinese brides’ enterprising spirit as they strove for economic independence and attempted to escape from a patriarchal or hostile environment set up by either their husbands’ extended families or their husbands themselves. Therefore, Chinese women who chose transnational marriage appeared to use their marriage as a tool to achieve their own personal goals, such as a more affluent lifestyle with educational and career advancements, although affection was also reported in these marriages. In this respect, as Liu and Liu (2006) noted, they were not passive but actively taking part in controlling their own lives and also showed great courage in doing so.

The marriage opportunities of these Chinese brides provided them with new opportunities to achieve their personal goals; meanwhile, their legal immigration status in the UK shielded them from suffering many disadvantages. Other women, who came to Britain with no legal status, faced more severe circumstances. Without receiving much publicity, female illegal immigrants from the People’s Republic of China worked as invisible labour; survival pressures forced them to compete with their male peers for labour-intensive jobs with no protection of their working rights. Despite their illegal status in the UK, their migration experiences should not be ignored.

Illegal Migrants

Illegal immigration from China to Europe has a long history but has only garnered public attention in recent years after some tragic events. In June, 2000, 58 people from Fujian suffocated to death in the back of a lorry while being smuggled into the UK; also, on 5th February 2004, a group of 23 cockle-pickers drowned when they were caught at night by the incoming tide at Morecambe Bay in Lancashire, England (see Pai, 2008; Song, 2004). It has been estimated that Chinese people now constitute the largest group of illegal immigrants in Europe, with 35% of them in the UK and 26% in France (see Laczko, 2003). The majority of illegal Chinese migrants in the UK, as well as in other developed countries, are people from coastal areas in Fujian and Zhejiang, who have a long history of emigration (see Thuno and Pieke, 2005; Chin, 2003). According to Chin (2003), illegal migrants from these areas are mostly economic migrants, even though they can manage to make a living in their own villages.⁹ Because the flow of remittances significantly improved the living standard of emigrants' families, it could also encourage other villagers to take this risk (see Chin, 2003; Liang and Ye, 2001). In recent times, with an increasing number of workers being laid off in China, more illegal migrants were found to originate from North-Eastern China, where the country's heavy industries and mines are based (Laczko, 2003, p.8), as the closure of these state-owned businesses resulted in millions of unemployed workers.¹⁰ After being laid off, this group of people 'are detached from the system of social welfare which was organised on the basis of state work-unit systems' (Wu, 2004, p.419). Without income or sufficient pensions, they are reduced to extreme poverty after their redundancy is spent, since no welfare system has been

⁹ It was said that the remittances people earn overseas are used for building houses and elaborate temples. As stated by Chu (2006, p.404), approximately 70% of a village's income is used on building mansions by migrants' families in Fujian province. Fujianese emigrant families also have a tradition of building elaborate tombs and temples for their ancestors to thank them for their blessings in making the overseas venture possible (Chu, 2006). In addition, emigrants also enjoy donating to local schools as the school would then be named after the donor (Chu, 2006).

¹⁰ The economic reforms which began in the 1980s in China broke the economic system of state-owned monopolies by promoting the multiple ownerships of enterprises. Under these conditions, the state-owned enterprises gradually lost their advantages with less protection from the government. At the 15th plenary congress in 1997, in order to build up a more efficient socialist market economy, a decision was made to make workers in state-owned enterprises redundant in order to compete with privately-owned enterprises (see Liu, 2007).

established in China to provide benefits for all Chinese citizens (see Wu, 2004). The near impossibility of finding jobs in China and the enormous pressure of supporting their families encourages many laid-off workers, including women, to join the illegal emigrant army (see Chin, 2003, p.56).

The existence of female illegal immigrants and their harsh life conditions in Britain was dramatically illustrated by the Morecambe Bay Tragedy on 5 February, 2004: among the 23 who died, two were women. According to Pai's (2008) estimation, the sex ratio of male to female Chinese illegal immigrants in Britain was twenty to one. Poverty was the main reason for these women, from either city or village, to leave their families behind and desperately join their male Chinese compatriots to work in Britain (Song 2004). A similar motivation was also found in Zhou's (2000) study of Chinese illegal female immigrants in the New York area, USA. As Zhou (2000) stated, the pressure to support their family was huge for these women; while some had husbands earning at home, most women were in fact the sole breadwinners for their entire family. Thus, driven by poverty, these women were willing to work in 'casual labour in the primary sectors of the economy – fishing, agriculture and so on, sectors where the narrative of migration has been dominated by men' (Song, 2004, p.137). In her documentary book exploring the lives of Chinese illegal immigrants in Britain, Pai (2008) also made it clear that all Chinese women who came to Britain illegally had families left behind to support, thus harsh financial conditions pushed them to take on any work they could find in Britain, even those jobs once solely occupied by male illegal immigrants. In some cases, women came to Britain alone, in other cases, they followed their male relatives or friends, and married couples might come together in order to save money more quickly (Pai, 2008). The remittance they sent back home was usually used for their children's education, to pay for their parents' medical expenses or to save money for setting up their own business when they returned to China. For these women, working in Britain was 'a natural extension of their role in China' (Zhou, 2000, p.451). Not only did they shoulder the responsibility for family support, but some of them also faced more

responsibility when their husbands were excluded from paid work for some reason.

With women competing with males for the same labour-intensive jobs, their lives in Britain were even harsher than the lives of other women. From Pai's (2008) description, female Chinese illegal immigrants were often found engaging in two kinds of jobs:¹¹ the labour-selling industry, for instance working as seasonal labourers on farms harvesting vegetables and fruit, or as waitresses in Chinese restaurants; and service-related industries such as domestic workers and as *xiao jie* (sex workers) in massage parlours. Their living conditions were poor, with many of them sharing a single room with a weekly rent between £30 and £50, while some only slept on mattresses on the floor every night to save money on rent. In order to gain more income, women worked 6 or 7 days a week and 12 to 14 hours every day. Moreover, their illegal status forced them to tolerate all kinds of abuses at work. For instance, they were paid much less than the British national minimum wage (usually £3.50 to £4.50 per hour) and heavily exploited by their employers and agencies. They were more likely to be fired due to their less efficient work performance compared with their male co-workers (see Pai, 2008). In addition, they also faced the danger of not being paid or being short-changed for the hours they worked. Under these conditions, some women chose to work in the sex industry in the hope of making money more quickly. It was reported in 2008 that there were around 3000 Chinese women with no legal status working in the sex industry in Britain (see Pai, 2008, p.166). Only a small number of women changed their illegal status by apply for refugee status, those who desperately wanted to stay in Britain usually resorted to marriage in order to change their lives (Pai, 2008).

Due to either internal or external conditions, these women chose to come to Britain illegally. Only very few women transformed their status by applying as refugees, while some married men with legal status (Pai, 2008). While these

¹¹ Here I will borrow information and draw some conclusions mainly from the undercover investigations of Pai (2008), as there are no other reliable resources providing information about the lives of female Chinese illegal immigrants in Britain.

women took marriage as the option to enable them to stay in Britain, there are some other women who came as independent immigrants and settled down in Britain on the basis of their own personal abilities and educational background. They took higher education as a pathway and were offered better opportunities.

Independent Female Immigrants

The late 1990s saw a huge increase in the number of Chinese overseas students, which was characterized by a high proportion of students being sponsored by their parents to go abroad for their higher education (see Biao, 2003). They tended to be post-graduate students, and relatively young. Meanwhile, Britain became a desirable choice for these students, owing to the high quality of its education system, the encouraging policy of the British Government towards international students, the length of courses and the high value and prestige that British qualifications held for Chinese people (Xiang and Shen, 2009). According to HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency), the total number of Chinese students in Britain was 50,755 by 2005 (HESA, 2005). This number increased by 15% in 2008, as *The Telegraph* newspaper estimated, there were about 75,000 Chinese students studying in Britain (Beckford, 2008). The rapid growth in the number of Chinese students in Britain was made possible by China's economic development. Members of China's 'New Rich Class' (*xin gui*), which has emerged since the 1980s, were the first to send their children overseas (Bian, 2002), in the hope that their children would be better able to secure wealth for their family or to consolidate their positions (Xiang and Shen, 2009). In order to secure a better future, ordinary people also sent their only child abroad in the belief that domestic degrees were less valued than overseas qualifications (Xiang and Shen, 2009). Meanwhile, some parents, and the students themselves, were motivated by the thought of gaining unique life experience of a different culture and expanding their horizons (*zhang jian shi*), as they presumed that familiarity and adaptation to another culture could be expected to enhance the student's personal abilities compared to those without such experience (Xue, 2008).

With the increasing inflow of Chinese students to the UK, the number of female students was also rising, thanks to China's 'one-child policy' (Xiang and Shen, 2009). The practice of the 'one-child policy' in cities in China is said greatly empowered urban daughters; without competition from brothers, the only daughter in the family was entitled to her parents' educational investment, which would have been reserved only for boys in the past¹² (see Fong, 2002). At the same time, the 'one-child policy' broke down the traditional practices of filial piety; singleton daughters' full responsibility for their elderly parents was made possible by women's high employment rate, their independent income enabled married daughters to financially support their elderly parents (see Fong, 2002). In this connection, parents were more willing to invest their money in their only daughter in the 'hope for old-age support' (Fong, 2002, p.1103). While admitting the benefits to single daughters brought by the 'one-child policy', Xiang and Shen (2009) also owed the increasing growth of female overseas students to gender discrimination in China's labour market and its effects on female employees. According to Xiang and Shen (2009), this sex discrimination that came alongside privatisation in fact placed huge pressure on women to obtain extra educational credentials in order to secure their positions in the job market.

While some female students settled down in Britain independently, due to the relatively tiny numbers of such women, they became the sub-group that was the least researched among all Chinese immigrant women (Lee et al., 2002). Meanwhile, as students, they also received least attention. As Wright (1997, p.94) put it, the existing literature on international students in Britain tended to be blind to gender differences; the studies focused either on 'the cost-benefit analysis of overseas student recruitment' or on 'collecting the diverse perspectives of overseas students on their educational experiences'. Female students' life experiences were thus left unexamined. However, for these students, the process

¹² Chinese parents believe that success in education is the key condition for their children's future happiness. However, due to the traditional practice of filial piety, sons were expected to be responsible for looking after their elderly parents while daughters were the property of their parents-in-law. Therefore daughters were often required to drop out of school to avoid parents 'wasting their money'. Although this tradition has changed in the cities, the traditional practice is still prevalent in rural areas in China.

of pursuing their desired degrees was not always easy, especially for Chinese women who aimed at PhD level, which took significantly longer than a Master's degree and less funding could be expected in some research areas (see Yuen, 2008). Yuen (2008) reflected on her own work experience as a care assistant in a residential home during her three years' PhD studies in the UK and how her ambition to achieve a doctoral degree helped her to overcome many hardships during her studies. Pang and Appleton (2004) also mentioned the financial struggle encountered by a Mainland Chinese female student in the USA and her strong belief in finishing her education successfully while working full-time as a waitress in a restaurant to support herself financially. Such students survived only because 'they possessed personal fortitude that enabled them to realise their dream of achieving higher education' (Pang and Appleton, 2004, p.521).

Compared with other female immigrants, as Lee et al. (2002, p.629) point out, Chinese women who travelled as independent immigrants actually achieved a more advantaged status with 'greater language skills or professional skills, higher level of educational attainment and greater opportunities to gain financial independence'. Their research showed that independent Chinese female immigrants experienced a smoother acculturation process, and could negotiate better both within and outside the family, facilitated by their better communication skills. As a result of their British qualifications, they were more likely to find better jobs and be socially active (see Lee et al., 2002). For those who were married, the ability to make a financial contribution to their family placed them in a better position to negotiate an equal domestic division of labour (see Lee et al. 2002). Therefore, higher education played an important role in their achievement: it was not only the goal that initially motivated female students to travel to Britain, but was also the tool for them to settle, and furthermore it facilitated their development. Although this group of women may have had an easier acculturation process than other Chinese women, compared with local British people they remained disadvantaged in areas such as employment, academic performance and even in their everyday lives (see Pang and Appleton, 2004; Xue, 2008). In addition, they ultimately suffered emotional stress, isolation

and a sense of loneliness caused by their lack of friends in Britain as well as missing their family and friends in China. This emotional loss could be a drawback compared with those who came with family or had a family waiting in Britain. However, the desire to be a 'worthy woman' (Yuen, 2008, p.71) and the encouragement to pursue their own dreams made them independent immigrants in the UK, and also guaranteed their success in a foreign country. As Lee et al. (2002, p.627) concluded, Chinese women who settled in Britain as independent migrants came 'through education or training'. They saw coming to the UK as a way to achieve independence, but adventure and life fulfilment were also expected.

Instead of pursuing personal success, there are some women who initially came to Britain as trailing wives and finally settled down because of their husbands' choices; this group of women is the object of my research. While their stories will be told throughout my entire thesis, in the following section I will concentrate on the early outflow of Chinese students under sponsorship from the Chinese Government, as that was how most of the women's husbands obtained the opportunity to come to Britain.

Trailing Wives

The phenomenon of trailing spouses is the product of global human mobility and international family relocations. 'Trailing spouse' is a term used to refer to one party who has to give up his/her own career to follow the job relocation of his/her husband/wife (see Harvey, 1998). While the number of trailing husbands is growing, women are often seen as trailing wives, sacrificing their own careers for their husbands, primarily due to the practice of traditional gender ideologies (see Harvey, 1998; Beaverstock, 2002; Yeoh and Willis, 2005). The phenomenon of Chinese trailing wives is a direct result of China's open door policy, when increasingly more Chinese people were given the freedom to study or work overseas and finally settled abroad permanently. In my project, most of my

participants' husbands initially came abroad as students or scholars; only a few immediately started their careers as professionals in international companies or educational institutions. My participants followed their husbands to Britain as family dependants. Because of the very similar emigration patterns of their husbands, it is necessary to explain the early outflow of Chinese students, which started in the late 1970s, as this student outflow not only helped to build the new Chinese immigrant community in Britain,¹³ but also led to the migration stories of my participants.

The emigration flow from the People's Republic of China to developed capitalist countries 'emerges out of and reflects the dramatic economic, political and cultural transformations that have swept across the country since the 1970s' (Landolt and Da, 2005, p.632). The student outflow therefore held particular 'political' and 'symbolic' meanings in China (Xiang and Shen, 2009, p.515; see also Pang and Appleton, 2004). Between the 1950s and the end of the 1970s, China experienced more than twenty years of self-imposed isolation; going abroad (mainly to Western capitalist countries) was an extremely sensitive topic in newly-established communist China, due to the political tension produced by two different political systems: Communism and Capitalism. At that time, China's international student exchange programmes were in a frozen state 'with the Soviet Union being the most important destination country'¹⁴ (Biao, 2003, p.29). During the ten-year Cultural Revolution from 1968-1978, emigration out of China was almost forbidden; people who had relatives overseas were suspected of being spies and were accused of selling China's intelligence to Western capitalist countries; some were put into gaol (see Biao, 2003). It was not until the end of the 1970s that China's former president, Deng Xiaoping, called for students to be sent to advanced countries to learn advanced technologies and experiences (see Biao,

¹³ Emigrants who went abroad during and after the 1980s were 'distinctly urban, had higher rates of education and were employed in white-collar professions' (Landolt and Da, 2005; also see Nyiri, 2001 and Hayhoe, 1990); they are referred to as 'New Migrants' (*xin yimin*) to distinguish them from ethnic Chinese (*huaqiao/huaren*) (see Nyiri, 2001).

¹⁴ The closeness between the PRC and the former Soviet Union in the 1950s and early 1960s was partly due to their similar communist political systems. During that era, Communist China proclaimed hostility towards capitalist countries and practised a pro-Soviet Union foreign policy; therefore the Soviet Union was the only destination for Chinese students to study abroad.

2003, p.29; also Nyiri, 2001). Starting in 1978, China's Ministry of Education began to sponsor selected researchers to travel to Western countries for study, while self-financing study was also permitted (Pang and Appleton, 2004; see also Xiang and Shen, 2009). Meanwhile, the state also encouraged its educational and research institutions to send their employees to Western countries for education. With the institutions covering all or part of the costs, the employees were obliged to return to the same employer after their studies (Xiang and Shen, 2009). Thus, under these policies, two kinds of people had the opportunity to be sent abroad: one was scholars, members of faculties for advanced study; the other was students dispatched and financed totally by the government (see Huang, 2003).

During the 1980s and 1990s, a relatively high percentage of students was sent abroad; most of them were top scholars selected from China's most prestigious scientific, academic and government institutions (Orleans, 1988). However, with a very limited number of scholarships, there was always fierce competition for them. Therefore a gender bias and prejudice in the selection was unavoidable as male candidates outnumbered female in almost all areas of knowledge¹⁵ (Hayhoe, 1990). Meanwhile, the scholarships were highly concentrated on basic and applied sciences, such as engineering, mathematics, statistics and agriculture (Broaded, 1993), which already had a high percentage of male students. The even more limited number of scholarships for basic humanities and social sciences, in which a high proportion of female students were found, further restricted female students' opportunities.

To make sure these students would return to China after their studies, the Chinese Government pressed for more control when selecting the candidates. For example, married people who were already established in certain careers were given priority for government sponsorship since they were more likely to return (see Broaded, 1993, p.282). Strict regulations and punishment were also set up to guarantee the

¹⁵ In addition to the gender bias, under the environment of the *guan xi* system in China, those who had connections with the Government or their work units could enjoy more opportunities to be selected.

return of students (Xiang and Shen, 2009). However, this state project soon developed into a 'student migration' movement that was 'driven by students' own initiatives' (Xiang and Shen, 2009, p.516), with a large number of government-sponsored students choosing not to return to China after graduation. By the end of 1997, only 32 per cent of the 293,000 students and scholars who had gone overseas since 1978 had returned (Chinese Statistical Yearbook, 1998). According to the Chinese Statistical Yearbook (2000), between 1985 and 1999 nearly two-thirds of all graduate students who had gone abroad had yet to return. This estimation was also confirmed by a report published by the China Association for Science and Technology, which stated that, by the end of 2006, there were more than 1.06 million Chinese students who had been sent by the Chinese government to developed countries, such as the USA, Canada and Britain; among these, at most one third had returned to China while the remainder stayed in their new host countries (China Association for Science and Technology, April, 2008). This was especially the case in areas such as science and engineering, where an estimated 90% of graduates remained abroad after graduation (see Tung, 2008, p.302). Cooke (2007) also found that a considerable number of Chinese students, mainly men who came to the UK for their postgraduate studies, as visiting scholars or as temporary researchers, subsequently settled in Britain after obtaining a job.

According to Orleans (1988), China's low incomes, poor living standards and lack of professional opportunities made Chinese students reluctant to return to China. Other factors, such as the recurrent intrusion of the state into individuals' lives, the residual mistrust of intellectuals and related political instability also played important roles in their decisions to stay abroad permanently. These students took higher education as a path to exit China and a tool to make a living in their host countries (see Pang and Appleton, 2004). Although the migration process was difficult and stressful, and these students faced financial, emotional, social and academic problems, some of them managed to extend their visas or obtain permanent residency, depending on their performance in their academic or research areas (see Pang and Appleton, 2004). It was under these circumstances that my participants accompanied their husbands to Britain and finally stayed.

Summary

While the number of Chinese immigrant women in Britain is growing, the patterns of their settlement, their roles and responsibilities in the migration process, as well as their life stories in the UK have remained under-researched. Women are stereotyped as passive followers of their family; the Chinese saying that ‘if you marry a rooster, you follow the rooster; if you marry a dog, you follow the dog’ (*jia ji sui ji, jia gou sui gou*) is still widely practised. Although some other women actively made up their own minds on migration and managed to achieve some personal goals, their identities as Chinese women also meant that they unavoidably encountered certain constraints, and their lives were still closely tied to their responsibilities as women and wives. In this chapter, by dividing women from the People’s Republic of China into five different categories, I have shown the ways in which Chinese women migrated to Britain. Despite the diverse expectations and experiences of these women, their role as women played a very important part in their migration process. In order to provide a better knowledge of Chinese women in China’s patriarchal culture, in the next chapter I will follow a chronological order to discuss women’s positions in the family, which is an essential part of understanding the lives of my participants as well as their definitions of ‘woman’ and ‘wife’ during the different stages of their migration process.

Chapter Two

Women and Family in China

According to Ebrey (2003, p.7), Chinese ‘women’s history is related to the history of the family, how women lived their lives was shaped by elements of family and marriage practice’. Therefore marriage and family play a very important part in constructing Chinese women’s lives. Many studies of overseas Chinese women show that Chinese migrant women, especially the first migrant generation, are still greatly influenced by traditional Chinese ideas in relation to family; this traditional gender code conditions their migration experiences as well as their familial status in the host country (see Lee et al., 2002; also Chan, 2005). Since I am looking at Chinese women migrants who grew up and spent some of their adult lives in China, the influence of traditional womanhood on them is still strong. Therefore it is necessary to understand women and family in the Chinese context, which guides migrant women’s experiences. Drawing on existing literature, in this chapter I will mainly focus on women in the People’s Republic of China since my research addresses migrants from mainland China. I organise this chapter into four chronological periods to offer a historical background of Chinese women in the family: the feudal imperial period, the late Qing to the Republican era (1895-1949), the Mao era (1949-78) and after the economic reforms (1978 to now).

Chinese Women in the Pre-Modern Era

During the thousands of years of the feudal system, Chinese women were confined to the household and positioned at the bottom of the family hierarchy. This gender hierarchy and women’s low status was related to the dominance of Confucianism. The core doctrine of Confucianism was the ‘inequality of everything’ (Hall, 1997) and the achievement of harmony through people remaining content within the social hierarchy. While everyone was categorised

into a certain place in society, women's place was the lowest on the social ladder. According to Confucianism, male and female constituted *yin* and *yang*; women stood for the negative and inferior part while men represented positive and superior (Lang, 1968; Wolf, 1985). In addition, Confucianism placed women into the same group as slaves and inferior men, which greatly reinforced the oppression of women and women's submissive status in the feudal family (Kristeva, 1977). While obedience, timidity, reticence and adaptability were the most desired 'Four Virtues' (*si de*) of women, the 'Three Obediences' (*san cong*) shaped a woman's life like this: she obeyed her father before marriage; she was under the authority of her husband within marriage and finally her son's when she was widowed (see Yu, 2004; Tang et al., 2002). In this way, women were pinned down as dependents and subordinates to their male family members in the Confucian family system. Being a sacrificing wife and mother (particularly of sons) was therefore the only way to pursue status improvement in her husband's home. As young girls, women were trained in their natal homes to help in the household and were taught, mainly by their mothers, to be obedient wives and submissive daughters-in-law. Since the patrilineal family system meant that a woman's position within her own family was temporary, education was not provided by the girl's family as it was 'weeding another man's field' (Andors, 1983, p.13). The practice of foot binding¹ was said to be a means of constraining girls in their houses and making them into less mobile property (Lang, 1968; Hall, 1997). When a girl reached marriageable age, a matchmaker would visit her parents to raise a marriage proposal.² Since traditional Chinese marriage took the goals of the family as primary and the individual's interests were considered secondary (Wolf, 1972), marriage was usually arranged by the heads of two families based on the woman's reproductive capacity and household management

¹ While foot binding was seen as the symbol of femininity in old China, it was a practice of the upper class. Girls had their feet bound with bandages to stop the growth of their feet. A pair of ideal small feet looked like lilies and must meet seven qualifications— 'small, slim, pointed, arched, fragrant, soft, and straight' (Wang, 2000, p.1). While daughters from poor families might also have their feet bound, this practice was designed to have them sold easily as concubines or even prostitutes.

² If the proposed match was agreed, the girl's parents would accept gifts from the matchmaker and leave the girl's personal data to the matchmaker to bring to the fortune teller. If the two people matched, then the bride price would be given and a wedding would be arranged.

skills (Andors, 1983); a daughter had no say in making the decision. The practice of hypergamy was frequently seen in traditional arranged marriage, whereby women from a comparatively lower position married men of higher social status, so that the woman would feel content with her low family status in the in-laws' household (Stacey, 1983). On reaching agreement about the marriage proposal, the bride's family would usually receive the bride price from the bridegroom's family as part of the marriage ritual³ (Andors, 1983; Lang, 1968). The higher the price (usually in the form of gifts) in exchange for the bride, the more honour her family received (Lang, 1968). Thus, women were treated as commodities while the wedding ceremony was performed as a ritual of the transfer of a woman from her parents to her in-laws. From that point, her connection with her natal family was terminated⁴ and the bride became the property of her husband, who had the right to discard her or even sell her according to his own will.⁵

If the wedding ritual announced the marriage status of principal wives (*da lao po*), women as concubines (*qie*) were not entitled to this ceremony (see Watson, 1991). Being another form of marriage, concubinage had widely practiced in China. Women from poor families or low social status were purchased by rich men for family expansion or to show his wealth (see Engel, 1984; Watson, 1991). If the principal wife was 'married' to her husband, concubines were in fact been sold to their husbands, or masters; providing no dowry was an important 'economic expression' of her inferior position in the family (Watson, 1991, p.250). Compared to the principal wife, being a concubine meant a complete cut off from her natal family; she had fewer rights and was assigned even lower rank than the principal wife, who was entitled to monitor the concubine in performing

³ While receiving the bride price, the bride's family also sent a dowry to the groom's. However, this practice is said to have had nothing to do with the bride but was merely the showing-off of her natal family and used by her male family members as a public demonstration of the family's status (see Wolf and Huang, 1980).

⁴ As Wolf (1972) describes, one ritual of the wedding ceremony consisted of the bride's father or brothers pouring water in the yard, which symbolised that the daughter, like the water, could never return.

⁵ Women could be asked to leave their husband's family for many reasons, such as 'being talkative', 'being disrespectful to her parents-in-law' or 'refusing to accept the husband's concubine' (Hall, 1997, p.6).

household work (see Cheung, 1972). Although some concubines were bought by their husbands out of fondness, they were expected to give birth to sons to avoid the fate of being resold (see Cheung, 1972).

While daughters were ‘water out of the basin’ in the eyes of their natal families, in their husbands’ households they were viewed with suspicion and were perceived as representing their natal families (Kristeva, 1974). Patrilineal practice made women outsiders in their husbands’ household and they were treated as intruders by their in-laws. As Wolf (1972) points out, Chinese women were both marginal and essential to the families into which they married. They were needed because they could produce and rear the next generation, yet they were never accepted by their husbands’ families. The lowly status of a newly-married wife in the in-laws’ family could only be improved when she successfully fulfilled her most important task as a wife, by giving birth to male children (Stacey, 1983). Chinese tradition greatly valued sons in the family; people believed that the more sons they had, the more blessings they would enjoy (*duo zi duo fu*). According to the Confucian concept of *wu lun*⁶ (the five cardinal relations), a husband should divorce his wife if she couldn’t give birth to male heirs⁷ (Shek, 2006, p. 277). While the priority to produce a male heir was always present, newly married women would still have to please their mothers-in-law, with whom they had direct contact every day. A daughter-in-law was required to be obedient towards her mother-in-law and to avoid any conflict with her under the demands of filial piety. She was expected to take on the domestic chores under the supervision of her mother-in-law and to carefully learn not to break the existing order of the in-law’s family. However, the hostility between mother in-law and daughter-in-law was always there, as the mother-in-law took the son as belonging to her own uterine family while the daughter-in-law was somehow invading her already-established authority (see Wolf, 1972). If conflicts arose, the daughter-in-law was definitely in a

⁶ In Confucian tradition, *wu lun* means the five most important human relationships: ruler-minister, father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband-wife, and friend-friend.

⁷ An alternative way to get male heirs, for men, was to take concubines. How many concubines a man would marry was totally dependent on his desire and financial abilities.

disadvantaged position; even her husband would not necessarily be on her side. Women's inferior status to their in-laws could also be reflected by their lack of property and the fact that they had no rights even to their own labour. For instance, if they occasionally earned some income from weaving, spinning or embroidery, 'it went to the family and only the father, husband or father-in-law could dispose of it' (Lang, 1968, p.44). Thus, in China's patrilocal marriage, the husband gained sexual access to his wife, while his patrilineage gained claims to her labour and the children she would bear (Watson and Ebrey, 1991). Women's status could only expect to improve when they reached old age and they could receive some respect from the younger generation. In fact, through their male children, women were able to establish their uterine families, which were based on emotional and loyalty ties between the mother and her male children. Therefore, when her son grew up and became head of the extended family, her status was also assured (Wolf, 1972). However, as Kristeva (1977, p.79) puts it, although a woman in a family could gain authority in her old age, 'she will only represent the authority of the in-laws and the husband'. In other words, she was nobody in the family but an agent helping to reproduce the patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal family system.

While married women enjoyed some protection from their husbands, for example life-long support and shelter, women could only marry once in their whole lives as to starve to death was considered a small matter, but to lose one's chastity was a great matter. The cult of widow chastity was such that widows were encouraged to join their dead husbands (see Ebrey, 2003). Widow remarriage only happened when a widow was sold to clear her husband's debts (Sommer, 2005). While a happy marriage for a woman was based on her ability to produce sons and maintain harmony with her mother-in-law, she could only escape an unhappy relationship by running away or committing suicide (Platte, 1988). By pushing women to the bottom of the social hierarchy, Confucianism successfully confined women to a limited social circle. Despite the social revolutions that happened in Republican China to break the traditional feudal rules, the Confucian ideas about

women and family still prevailed, and these have proved to be a difficult obstacle to overcome.

Women in late Qing and Republican China⁸

Women's inferior status started to change during the late Qing Dynasty, when western missionaries came into coastal areas and set up women's schools to spread western concepts of women's spiritual and physical rights and equality (Chin, 2007, p.39). Meanwhile, the Qing government launched educational reforms and sent students overseas to study (Lu, 2004). Under these circumstances, some more privileged women were given opportunities to pursue their education, some even studied in capitalist countries such as Japan, the U.S, Britain and some other European countries. Gradually, women professionals began to be seen in the public sphere, although their careers were confined to 'women's jobs', such as school teachers, secretaries and administrative areas (Chin, 2007; Goodman, 2005). They were still marginalised in society and the patriarchal structure remained untouched. On January 1st, 1912, the Republic of China under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yat-sen was founded. The Republic of China overthrew 5,000 years of China's feudal system; additionally, it encouraged the spread of western democratic ideas. The development of capitalism in China and the introduction of western democracy provoked a cultural clash between western democracy and traditional feudal culture; under these circumstances, the New Cultural Movement was launched with the publication of *New Youth* in September, 1915, which had the aim of searching for a new Chinese culture and people's spiritual liberation.⁹ After that, Chinese women as a whole were given

⁸ The Republic of China (1912-1949) refers to the historical period of time beginning with the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 until the founding of the People's Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. However, during this stage, China was in a state of chaos caused by many wars such as the ceaseless battles between warlords and military commanders (1916-28), the Anti-Japanese War (1937-45) and the Chinese Civil War (1945-49) between China's Communist Party and the Kuomintang (the Nationalist Party).

⁹ Represented by the newly-emerging bourgeois forces, the New Cultural Movement can be read as the conflict between the feudal remains and the growth of capitalism in that historical context. Since the first president, Sun Yat-sen had no military power, he resigned in April, 1912 and Yuan

some place in the discourse of social transformation¹⁰ (Chin, 2007). The women's movement was fuelled by the May 4th Movement in 1919,¹¹ which greatly shook China's feudal remnants. The inferior status of women was criticised and was blamed for the weakness of the nation (see Honig and Hershatter, 1988). With its far-reaching influence, the May 4th Movement helped to disseminate liberated ideas about women and urban and educated women experienced an even freer social atmosphere. According to Lu (2004), many women who participated in this movement later became leaders of the women's movement during the 1920s and 1930s. Women's social rights were further realised through the efforts of many female activists. For example, the promulgation of The Marriage Law of the Republic of China in 1921 challenged the unequal status of women in marriage; meanwhile, it helped to shake the feudal marriage system. The establishment of monogamy was announced by the Law¹² and it was decreed that a couple should have their own choice to enter and/or leave the marriage (see Li, 1994). However, despite women's pressing for their political and social rights, women were excluded from the 1912 Provisional Constitution and had neither voting rights nor equal political rights with men.

The promulgation of the 1921 Marriage Law was welcomed by Chinese youth with its aim of changing the tradition of arranged marriages and replacing it with marriage based on free choice (Lu, 2004). In fact, the resistance towards arranged

Shike took over the presidency of Republican China. Strongly supported by the feudal powers and big landlords, Yuan started to prepare to restore the monarchy in spring, 1915 and was crowned Emperor on Dec 12th, 1915. Although his empire lasted only three months, he stirred a fierce strife between the newly emerging capitalist forces and the existing feudal power.

¹⁰ During this stage, some women, such as Qiu Jin, chose to join the social revolutions to overthrow China's feudal system while some other female intellectuals engaged in writing articles to discuss women's issues. Although the issues discussed in these articles were still women's domestic roles, such as childrearing and household management, Chinese women eventually came into the public view (see Chin, 2007).

¹¹ The May 4th Movement was fired by the refusal of European nations at the Paris peace talks to allow China, as the winning country, to reclaim its authority over Shandong Province, which had been occupied by Japan since 1914. Receiving the news that the corrupt Northern Warlord regime was about to sign that unequal treaty, students in Beijing started to protest. Their action was widely supported and echoed by people all over China and turned into a national movement against feudalism and imperialism. The Northern Warlord regime finally gave in and refused to sign the Paris Treaty.

¹² While the 1921 Marriage Law was targeted at many feudal marriage practices, concubinage, multiple wives and child betrothal were still widely practised in Republican China (see Davis and Harrell, 1993).

marriage among young Chinese was so strong at that time that many young people chose to adopt radical means to reject marriages arranged by their parents. The most infamous social event occurred in November, 1919, when a young woman called Zhao Wuzhen committed suicide in her bridal sedan on the way to the husband she had never met (see Lu, 2004). This tragedy evoked heated discussion among progressive intellectuals. Mao Zedong wrote nine articles about it and condemned the death of Zhao as the result of ‘a corrupt marriage system, a dark social system, a will that cannot be independent, and love that cannot be free’ (Mao, cited in Dong, 2005, p.247).

While people were condemning the arranged marriage system and celebrating romantic love, some Chinese men divorced their wives from their arranged marriages and looked for a New Woman (*xin shi nu xing*) who, in contrast to the traditional old-styled women, was both educated and had a career outside the family (Goodman, 2005; Lu, 2004). The image of the New Woman was developed with the help of women’s magazines and novels, which were headed by male editors and male writers (Chin, 2007). Therefore, some researchers argue that the definition of the New Woman was designed by and for men, catering for their imagination of the ideal modern woman (see Chin, 2007). According to Chin (2007), the most popular women’s magazine at that time was *The Ladies’ Journal*, whose editors and writers were predominately men. This magazine advocated femininity and domesticity to its female audience by coaching women on how to behave in a modern way and manage their households in more scientific and fashionable manner. A similar orientation could be found in *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies* (*xin yuanyang hudie pai*), the most popular genre of novels at that time. Self-advertised as totally against feudal moral values, the authors of this genre strongly encouraged women’s virtue and traditional roles after marriage, by warning women that ‘the world beyond the domestic sphere was fraught with danger’ (Chiang, 2007, p.76). In men’s eyes, a New Woman not only had her own *ren ge* (personhood) and a sense of liberation, but most importantly, she had to be virtuous, although in a modern way (Goodman, 2005). This could partly explain why people’s attitudes towards love and marriage became more liberated but the

family was still just ‘a copy of the old pattern’ (Li, 1994, p.113) and women were still following tradition within marriage. Lu Xun’s *Shang Shi* (Emotional Death) and Zhang Ailing’s *Wu Si Yi Shi* (After May 4th) both described the tragic ending of the New Women who bravely pursued free love but ended up disillusioned with marriage inequality. In fact, even some progressive intellectuals argued that men working outside and women’s staying at home was decided by the natural order and any attempt to break the balance would damage social harmony (see Dong, 2005; Chiang, 2007). The resistance to gender equality was so strong that, although monogamy was legislated by the 1921 Marriage Law, the practice of having concubines was still common; having an understanding and loving concubine was dreamed of by Chinese men. Xiaofengxian,¹³ a famous courtesan in Beijing in Republican China, was set up as a role model and was greatly praised for the sacrifices she made for General *Cai Er*¹⁴ and her loyalty to him when he faced difficulties.

The maintenance of women’s traditional role in the family was also encouraged by female intellectuals, via the introduction of the idea of being ‘good wives and virtuous mothers’¹⁵ from Japan. One leading figure among them was Hu Binxia, who had an overseas educational background through studying in Japan and the USA. Hu encouraged women to stay at home and ‘use(d) it as the base for social reform’ (Chiang, 2007, p.81). In addition, Hu also called for women to shoulder the responsibility of filtering social vices to ‘purify the minds of those in her loving care, which would in turn have the salutary effect of bringing down the number of corrupt officials, avaricious bullies and cruel bandits in society’ (as cited in Chiang, 2007, p.81). While holding up the same doctrine about women and domesticity, some other female intellectuals realised the social restrictions placed upon women and suggested that women pursue higher education while

¹³ Xiaofengxian was the concubine of Yunnan military general Cai Er, who was suspected by the then president Yuan Shikai and was put under surveillance by Yuan in Beijing. There he met Xiaofengxian who accompanied him and offered him endless spiritual support as he underwent many difficulties.

¹⁴ See footnote 11.

¹⁵ This term was firstly invented by *Shimoda Utake* (1854-1936), a famous Japanese female educator whose goal was to educate Japanese women in how to be good wives and wise mothers to serve the nation. This doctrine was therefore created to cater to Japan’s social reforms at that time (see Chiang, 2007).

being good wives at home, for the education they had could be saved and would benefit their quest for rights and power in the future (see Chiang, 2007). With their different stands, these female intellectuals emphasised women's contribution in the domestic sphere and their indirect contribution to their nation in this way. While the improvement of women's status in Republican China was visible, the ceaseless wars during this period meant that it was impossible for women's liberation to gain full attention. Therefore, women's issues were frequently subordinated to China's national crisis during this time (Gao, Y. 2007; Honig and Hershatter, 1988). This situation carried on until the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seized power and the National Party (Kuomintang) retreated to Taiwan. With the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1st, 1949, Chinese women were brought significant improvements regarding their social and familial status (Yu, X. 2004; Milwertz, 1997; Weeks, 1989; Wolf, 1985; Stacey, 1983). It is widely agreed that, since 1949, women have enjoyed much more freedom in mate-choice, divorce and remarriage, as well as comparative equality in family relations, thanks to the marriage laws and other government policies attacking the long-standing patrilineal ideology and kinship organisation (Yan, 2006, p.105). While the improvement was significant, Chinese women were still bound to their domestic roles. Women were mobilised into labour force but their domestic responsibilities were taken for granted; in cities, women's double burden was brought under the tight control of the CCP via the *danwei* system (see Liu, 2007). A freer atmosphere started in the reform era as a result of the weakening of work unit system and the celebration of individualism in Chinese society (Yan, 2009). Hence, I have divided the following part into two sections: the pre-reform era (Maoist era) when governmental control was strong, and the reform stage in which people are being offered more choices. Here, I will focus on the domestic lives of urban women¹⁶ since women in my research all had experiences working and living in urban areas.

¹⁶ Because there are still vast differences between rural and urban China, women therefore encounter different social environments in the countryside and the city.

Women in Mao era (1949-1978)

The pre-reform stage, under the absolute control of Mao Zedong, saw the significant improvement of women's status in China (see Chan, et al., 1998; Croll, 1983). As Croll (1983, p.1) puts it:

After 1949 the new government of China adopted a number of policies and programmes to redefine the roles of women and place them in a position of equal status with men in both the public and domestic spheres. Taken together, the legal, economic and political programmes amounted to a comprehensive four-pronged strategy to: legislate for equality, introduce women into social production, introduce a new ideology of equality and organise women to both redefine and forward their economic, social and political interests.

However, the changes did not take place overnight, but were a result of gradual development. Women were first called 'masters of the country' during the early 1950s, then were promoted into paid labourers in the Great Leap Forward Movement from 1958 to 1960; women's liberation reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution¹⁷ under the slogan of 'women hold up half the sky' and the popularity of the 'iron girl' image. However, as many researchers both inside and outside China argue, women's participation in labour force was part of political system and strategy; despite Chinese women's high participation in paid labour, the gendered division still dominated and women's role in the family remained unchanged (Liu, 2007; Gao, 2007; Manning, 2007; Jin, 2007; Evans, 2002; Cheng, 1998; Rofel, 1991; Weeks, 1989).

Greatly influenced by Leninism and the experience of the Soviet Union, the CCP believed that the only way to liberate women was to promote their participation in paid labour (see Gao, 2007; Wang, 1997). This belief also met the needs of economic development at that time, when China's economy was on the edge of

¹⁷ According to Chinese official record, the Cultural Revolution started in 1966 and ended with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. However, there have been debates from Chinese and western historians on the actual start and end date of this revolution (see Bonnin, 2006; Hao, 1996; Feng, 1991; Gao, 1987). The goal of this greatest political and social upheaval in Chinese modern history was to 're-establish the ideological purity of communism threatened by the revisionists and capitalists over the previous eighteen years and to recreate unpolluted Mao Zedong Thought' (Hong, 2003, p.229). One of the aims of this movement was the promotion of sex equality and the complete liberation of women from Confucianism.

collapse due to many years' war chaos; moreover, the CCP felt the urgent need to demonstrate the 'superiority of communism' to hostile capitalist countries (see Manning, 2007). Under these circumstances, women's participation in the labour force was ideologically and economically driven. The CCP saw women's participation in the productive work as a means of women's liberation; on the other hand, it was necessary to maximum the labour force for economy recovery (see Jin, 2007; Andors, 1983). For instance, in the early 1950s, rural women in Shannxi province were mobilised into the cotton planting industry because of the increasing need for cotton (Gao, 2007). With the purpose to 'achieve breakthroughs in levels of production', given the limited resources (Andors, 1983), the years of the Great Leap Forward Movement saw the rise of women participating in economic production while the CCP sent its male labourers to more advanced industrial projects (see Manning, 2007; Andors, 1983). Therefore, women started to work in sectors that were traditionally considered as 'men's work', including 'the fields of iron and steel, construction, mining, petroleum and the chemical industry' (Jin, 2007, p.189; also Honig, 2000). During the years of the Cultural Revolution, women's participation in labour reached its peak under Mao's proclamation that 'the time has changed. Anything men can do, women can do'. The image of 'iron girls' was created to promote the physical equality of men and women (Hong, 2003, 2000). Motivated by the 'Iron Girl' image and other female role models, women organised their own Iron Girl brigades and teams to compete with their male peers and to celebrate sex equality (see Jin, 2007; Hong, 2003).

While in Mao's time the emphasis was on converting women to paid labour, the CCP enforced many regulations, such as the Regulations on Labour Insurance of the People's Republic of China in 1953, the Regulations on the Protection of Female Workers in 1956, to protect female workers' special needs at work¹⁸ (see Chen, 2004). However, women's participation in paid labour was structured by traditional gender divisions, thus hierarchy and inequality still persisted. Gao, X. (2007) found that, while women in Shanxi province were occupied in cotton

¹⁸ For example, pregnant women or women in their menstrual period were allocated to lighter jobs; free childcare or physical check-ups were also offered in most work-units.

cultivation in the 1950s, the more technical work in cotton planting, such as planting seedlings and pulling up cotton stalks, was exclusive to men. Housewives substituted for male labour only to take over low level tasks in order to release the pressure created by the shortage of industrial labour; women's engagement in low paid jobs such as textiles and the caring sector was universal (Andors, 1983). During the Cultural Revolution, women denounced their femininity and celebrated their sex equality by cutting their hair short, wearing army uniforms, and even engaging in violence as Red Guards (Honig, 2002). However, women were still at the bottom of the heap in the workforce. Through the personal memoirs of the 'sent-down youth' (*xia xiang zhi shi qing nian*), Honig (2000) argues that the different division of labour between men and women still prevailed, while women earned less when performing the same job as men (see also Liu, 2007).

Promoting women into paid jobs was also expected by the CCP to raise women's status in the family. Moreover, the CCP published the 1950 Marriage Law to free women from their dependent status in marriage. Based on the 1921 Marriage Law, the 1950 Marriage Law is said to have brought dramatic changes to women regarding their status in marriage (Croll, 1981; Stacey, 1983). Through this law, the Chinese government conveyed its desire to completely terminate feudal marriage practices such as concubinage, child betrothal and multiple wives and encourage marriage based on mutual fondness and free choices, and married women were also given the right to divorce.¹⁹ (see Davis and Harrell, 1993). The law greatly empowered women in their marital relationships and marital equality was also expected (Croll, 1981, 1983; Conroy, 1987; Evans, 2002). However, women's domestic role in the family still persisted, even the CCP party leaders made it clear that there were certain household chores that women still needed to perform (see Manning, 2007). For instance, during the Great Leap Forward

¹⁹ However, this determination was met by fierce resistance in China's rural areas where traditional marriage practices still prevailed. For example, by giving women the right to divorce, men faced a great risk of losing the money they had paid for bride purchasing. Although rural women were entitled to rights of land-ownership through the introduction of laws on rural land reform announced at the same time (Conroy, 1987), the Household –Responsibility System in 1981 automatically deprived women of land ownership by combining family members' pieces of land under the name of the male family heads.

Movement, women's duty, according China's Women's Federation, was not only in socialist construction, but also to create and maintain family harmony (see Manning, 2007). Women were thus perceived as 'mothers at home and labourers with special needs' (Manning, 2007, p.144). During the Cultural Revolution, while the Iron Girl image was popular and the CCP emphasised women's physical equality with men, women's responsibility towards their families and childcare was actually taken for granted by the CCP.²⁰ Xue (1999) concluded that women felt proud of their contribution towards their work and society during the Cultural Revolution, while those who cared only about housework were perceived as contemptible. By relying on women's own attitudes towards their household chores, however, Xue failed to analyse the equality inside the home. In fact, although the significance of 'toughness' and 'hardness' was celebrated, women's domestic burdens remained unchanged. Liu (2007) found that women during the Cultural Revolution era still perceived the husband as being the head of the family and positioned themselves in accordance with the patriarchal hierarchy. The gender code of women's subordination and self sacrifice was not broken (Jin, 2007; Liu, 2007; Evans, 2002; Honig, 2000). Indeed, research has shown that, in Mao's era, the patriarchal requirements of wifedom and motherhood were actually extended: women's duty was not only to serve their small families, but also to serve the state²¹ (Manning, 2007; Evans, 2002). Despite the double burden, women still enjoyed their 'liberation', as working was a means to break through their domestic boundaries and to experience the outside world (Gao, X. 2007). Moreover, women were proud of their contributions to socialist construction; working outside the home enhanced women's self confidence in their own strength and also won them respect and dignity from their male family members when their work could contribute to the family income (Jin, 2007; Andors, 1983).

²⁰ For example, Honig (2000, p.99) found the honouring of women's domestic roles in the Cultural Revolution media and articles such as 'Housewives start factory from scratch in central China province', 'Housewives co-op in Shanghai makes tele-communication equipment' and 'More Peking housewives join productive labour'.

²¹ According to Manning (2007), before 1949, the CCP had placed much emphasis on womanhood in relation to the socialist construction, believing that their biological abilities to perform domestic work would be enhanced, which would be eventually socialised. Women were taken as 'naturally responsive to particular responsibilities' based on their biological characteristics (Evans, 2002, p.339).

On the one hand, women were promoted into paid labourers to improve their family status; on the other hand, the CCP reinforced women's domestic role via the *danwei* system²² in urban areas. Established in the early 1950s, the *danwei* system refers to China's work organisations or work units. As Shaw (1996, xi) defines it, the work unit is 'a basic social cell that receives and executes various policy programs of communist party and government'. Under the *danwei* system, workers not only received free housing, food, education and other welfare benefits,²³ but also lifetime employment ('Iron Rice Bowl') in their work units. In the meantime, the CCP could exercise its social control by taking *danwei* as a 'governmental agency' (Shaw, 1996, xii). Although the influence of *danwei* on Chinese people began to diminish after 1978, it held an important position in the pre-reform stage as people not only worked for *danwei*, but also lived and belonged there²⁴ (Liu, 2007; Shaw, 1996); moreover, women's domestic role was also regulated by this system. I will discuss it here.²⁵

The *danwei* system is said to have been copied from China's traditional pattern of production by the family unit; therefore the traditional patriarchal family system and Confucian practices were never removed (Liu, 2007; Wang, 1995). This argument is echoed in the feminist point of view that the work unit system is a 'patriarchal clan system that centred on the three major principles of honouring the emperor, respecting the father, serving the family' (He, cited in Liu, 2007, p.65). The dominance of the *danwei* system in urban areas enabled the CCP to 'regulate women's domestic lives and their life chances' through *danwei* leaders (Jackson et al., 2008, p.9). *Danwei* leaders, as representatives of the CCP, were given the right to intervene in all aspects of an individual's life, such as family planning, housing allocation, medical care and maternal relations (Liu, 2007;

²² All my participants had experiences working and living in *danwei* in China. Therefore I will concentrate on urban women's life experiences in *danwei*.

²³ For instance, most work units provided support service stations such as nurseries and dining halls to lessen their female workers' double burden (Liu, 2007; Korabik, 1993).

²⁴ It was not until the reform era that the influence of *danwei* on individual persons began to diminish significantly (see Farrer, 2002; Shaw, 1996).

²⁵ Although the *danwei* system still exists in the post-reform era, it was set up and dominated during the Maoist period; therefore I decide to discuss women's lives in their work units in this section.

Farrer, 2002; Shaw, 1996; Bian, 1994). As Liu (2007, p.141) puts it, ‘Confucian familial protocols, theoretically rendered obsolete by socialism, had been redeployed in various forms in the daily practice of *danwei*’s control’ (see also Farrer, 2002). Therefore, instead of helping to remove traditional patriarchal practices from women, the work unit system instead reinforced their burdens in marriage. Liu (2007) and Honig and Hershatter (1988) found that the work unit leaders took an especial interest in marriage matchmaking,²⁶ acting like matchmakers in traditional arranged marriage practices. Women who resisted such arrangements could face punishment by the denial of wage increases and job promotions (Liu, 2007; Shaw, 1996). The practice of housing allocation by work units also posed problems for the female workers. For instance, only male workers were entitled to a housing allocation, while female workers were expected to live in their husbands’ work units. The housing allocation was actually a transformation of the patriarchal practice of women joining the men’s ‘family’, which therefore reinforced female dependency on their husbands (Liu, 2007). Meanwhile, those who lived with their in-laws were put at the bottom of the family hierarchy; their status was little different from the daughters-in-law in old China (Liu, 2007). By moving into the husbands’ work units, women also experienced isolation due to their unfamiliarity with *his* colleagues and the separation from their own friends and workmates. As outsiders, sometimes they were also excluded by their neighbours and had to endure hostility from them (see Liu, 2007). Thus, the *danwei* system in fact set up a patriarchal socialism (see Farrer, 2002). However, under some circumstances, the interventions of *danwei* in people’s personal lives could provide some protection for women’s marital rights. Diamant (2000) and Xiao (2010) both noted that wives resorted to their husbands’ work units when the husbands had extramarital affairs. Hence, the involvement of *danwei* in personal lives was used as a strategy by women to safeguard their own rights. Moreover, it would be unfair to say that the CCP turned a blind eye to women’s double burdens, since the CCP did try to lessen women’s domestic

²⁶ According to Liu (2007), matchmaking was a very popular workforce culture as the Chinese believe that matchmaking can not only benefit the matchmaker but also bring blessings for her entire family (here I use ‘her’ because matchmaking was one of the few occupations women could do in old China and this tradition seems to have carried on since women take a special interest in doing this).

duties by setting up public services such as dining halls, childcare and other facilities to guarantee women's full participation in socialist construction (see Gao, 2007; Jin, 2007; Manning, 2007; Hershatler, 2005).

Women after the Economic Reforms (1978 to present)

After Mao's death, particularly after the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held in December 1978,²⁷ a more relaxed political atmosphere emerged. Mao's idea about the equality of men and women was questioned on the grounds that it 'not only denied differences between the sexes, but was also bad for the social development of women as a group' (Xue, 1999, p.143). Calls for women's femininity, respectfulness and self-sacrifice revived and women's traditional roles as household carers were stressed (Xue, 1999; Milwertz, 1997; Robinson, 1985). While women's participation in paid labour was still taken to be important, the idea of women as 'virtuous wives and good mothers' was also re-emphasised by the CCP (Robinson, 1985; Weeks, 1989). Weeks (1989, p.507) quotes from a 1982 Shaanxi Province radio broadcast:

Within the household, the main role of the female head of the family is to insure the stability of family relationships such as harmonious relations between husband and wife, support of the aged, education of the young, proper arrangement of the children's weddings, and organisation of the family's regular activities. The state of women's thinking and the height of their moral values are related to the level of civilisation in the family. Likewise, every family's level of civilisation directly affects society. Therefore, giving full play to women's enthusiasm in building spiritual civilisation is a question of utmost importance.

²⁷ The Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was a turning point in Communist China's policy, during which the CCP decided to shift the focus of the Party's work from class struggle to socialist modernisation (*si ge sian dai hua*). A decision in favour of economic reform and opening up to the outside world was also made.

According to Weeks (1989), during the 1980s the women who were set up by the CCP as role models were often those who shouldered the burden of domestic responsibilities single-handed to maintain family harmony.²⁸ In fact, the new definition of a virtuous wife and good mother required women to take care of both their work and their families (Xue, 1999; Milwertz, 1997), and sometimes women's domestic responsibility was given top priority. Milwertz (1997, p.164) asked a woman in Shenyang what a virtuous wife and good mother meant:

It meant to honour my mother-in-law, which means to treat her as if she were my own mother. To be a good wife, to mind my home and my job and to ensure that my child is healthy, and that his education is coming along well. To support my husband in his work by ensuring a good support base for him.

Scholars both inside and outside China argue that the revival of the virtuous wife and good mother, begun in the early 1980s, was encouraged by the CCP. Stacey (1983) states that the feudal remnants surviving in the PRC were actively defended by the CCP and adopted for its own benefit. By examining women's under-representation in the Chinese political arena, Bauer et al. (1992) argued that it was the unchanged notions of gender and patriarchal practices that prevented women from entering the more powerful social positions. This point was echoed by Korabik (1993) in her research on the disadvantaged position of managerial women in their work units. Inside the family, Weeks (1989) found that the CCP in fact actively defended some feudal practices relating to women's role in the family, while blaming the negative effects brought about by these practices on the feudal remnants in society (see also Milwertz, 1997; Robinson, 1985; Stacey, 1983). Hence, women were continuously expected to sacrifice their own interests in order to maintain familial and social harmony (Weeks, 1989). Wolf (1985) found the governmental propaganda on women proved successful, as women were convinced that managing their roles as wife and mother was an important part of being a 'socialist new woman' (*shehui zhuyi xin nu xing*). Scholars further

²⁸ When I was a child, an aunt of mine was awarded 'wu hao er xi' ('five good' daughter-in-law) because of her kindness to her in-laws and her whole-hearted support of her husband. Her achievement was publicised by our local newspaper and she was even invited to give a talk at the local branch of *fu lian* (Chinese Women's Organisation).

explained that, since Chinese women had not experienced a sexual revolution like women in western countries, it would be necessary to call for ‘women’s consciousness of themselves as women’ to regain the capacity for self-liberation (see Barlow 2004, p.262).

In rural areas, the Household-Responsibility System (*jia ting lian chan cheng bao ze ren zhi*) was established as part of the economic reforms. While farmers benefited profoundly from it, this system further consolidated the already-existing patriarchal ideas, with men being appointed as the leaders of the family production unit while women’s subordinate status was reinforced²⁹ (Robinson, 1985). In cities, women’s domestic roles were widely emphasised; however, people assumed that the practice of China’s one-child policy, begun in 1978, would greatly lessen women’s family burdens as there would be only one child for mothers to look after. Milwert (1997) also found that the pressure of the double burden was one of the reasons urban women welcomed the one-child policy. Yet, instead of liberating women from their domestic chores, the one-child policy in fact expanded women’s burdens because the cultural assumptions were retained (Milwert, 1997; Weeks, 1989). Women were put under more pressure from their in-laws and husbands due to the desire to produce a male heir, the dominant attitude of exalting males and demeaning females (*nan zun nu bei*). Some women who gave birth to girls were verbally or physically abused by their husbands’ families and female infanticide was often reported (Liu, 2007; Milwertz, 1997; Weeks, 1989). For those couples who desired additional children, it was always women who faced mandatory contraception, fines and the loss of benefits or jobs³⁰ (see Liu, 2007; Fong, 2002; Bian, 2004; Croll et al., 1985). The desire for a perfect one child also required women to devote a great deal of time

²⁹ The Household-Responsibility System commenced in 1981. Under this system, the farming lands were divided into private plots by individual family units and farmers were allowed to keep their output after paying a certain amount to the state. Hence, the emphasis was on household production rather than the collective production of Mao’s era. Although this system benefited Chinese farmers financially, more pressure was placed on women’s biological role as reproducers by the desire to have more male labourers in the family.

³⁰ As Bian (1994) has pointed out, the implementation of family-planning programmes was the responsibility of *danwei* and women were under the close supervision of their work units. They not only underwent forced abortion and the use of obstetric health services imposed by their *danwei*, but was also required by their work units to leave their jobs (see Liu, 2007; Croll et al., 1985).

and energy to her child's education, since it was always the mother's job to train and educate children (see Milwertz, 1997; Robinson, 1985). However, the efforts women put in to caring for their only child, especially their daughters, could be said to help them to build up their modern uterine family and furthermore secure care from their children in old age (Fong, 2002; Milwertz, 1997).

Beginning in the 1990s, the state-owned economy gradually gave away to a more flexible market, and a diversity of enterprise ownership, such as collective enterprises, joint-venture enterprises and private enterprises were encouraged by the Chinese government to boost economic development. China's *danwei* system has become progressively less important; as a result, governmental intervention has weakened and the medium through which the CCP previously kept the Chinese people under close supervision has been removed. People are given more freedom and individualism is celebrated (see Yan, 2009). Influenced by these social circumstances, women's choices towards marriage and the family have also diversified. Some women became full-time housewives; some young women consider money to be the most important factor in forming a relationship, some choose to be the second wife or mistress (*er nai*) of rich men (Lang and Smart, 2002; Zhang, 2011). Extramarital affairs and divorces are becoming more common, premarital sex and cohabitation are also practised among Chinese youth (see Farrer, 2002; Cheng, 1998). However, the patriarchal definition of femininity still prevails, and some highly educated women are regarded as unmarriageable due to their independent *ren ge* (individualised self).

First of all, the sexual division of labour is still unchanged within the family. With the high proportion of women in full-time employment, women's domestic tasks still persist in double-worker families. While the family domain and the institution of marriage have been recognised in the western context as a core barrier to gender equality (see Mill, 1869; Delphy and Leonard, 1994), Delphy and Leonard (1992) show that women not only have to take on most housework, they also need to deal with the conflict between housework and their schedule as paid workers (see also Hochschild, 2003). It has been increasingly common for Chinese women

to sacrifice work due to the fulfilment of their wifely roles. In her research, Cooke (2007) finds highly-educated Chinese women gave up overseas career opportunity because of their family responsibilities in China. Women's need to devote much time and energy to family also affected their career promotion to higher ranks (see Yang et al., 2000; Korabik, 1993).

Compared to women in dual-career families, women who are redundant from their work units are passively becoming full-time housewives, due to the limited job opportunities for them. Following China's transformation from socialism to 'a marketized society' (Hanser, 2005, p.584), the permanent employment system (*tie fan wan*, 'iron rice bowl') was smashed and workers, for the first time, were required to sign and renew their labour contracts with their work units, usually every five years (Liu, 2007; Farrer, 2002). In order to renew the competitiveness of state-owned enterprises, millions of Chinese workers were laid off, the majority of whom were women. They were required to go back home and leave the limited job opportunities to men, or otherwise look for job opportunities in non-public enterprises. In actuality, this group of women has had great problems in becoming re-employed. Since the 1990s, sexualised femininity has developed in China and female youth and beauty is increasingly glorified (Liu, 2008; Hanser, 2005).³¹ Most of the laid-off female workers are in their middle age (see Liu, 2007), and are perceived as having failed to adopt 'new feminised identities and practices' and being out of step with China's modern development (Hanser, 2005, p.585). Thus the discrimination against middle-aged women is much more severe. Liu (2007) also indicates in her study that most laid-off female workers had difficulties looking for jobs. As a result, the problems they encountered in the labour market reinforced their domestic role inside the family. Some of them became full-time housewives and offered free domestic service to their families.

³¹ For example, young beautiful women are used as window dressings for shows and the government openly sponsors beauty contests for local economic development (Liu, 2008; Hopkins, 2007). Although sexualised femininity was always associated with modernity, it is regarded as a further return to the subordination of women.

While this group of women has chosen to stay at home unwillingly³², the emergence of China's New Rich class (*xin gui*) has brought a new type of full-time housewives – the wives of the privileged class. They choose to be full-time housewives (see Xiao, 2010), probably with the encouragement of their husbands, who perceive the ability to keep an unemployed wife as the symbol of their personal success (see Zhang, 2011). While many wives see it as a way to escape from their double burdens (Xiao, 2010), they are being used as trophies for men to display their manhood (Zhang, 2011). This not only encourages women's dependence on men, but also strengthens the patriarchal nature of Chinese society in the long run.

Seeing their disadvantages in society, many women hope to gain upward mobility via hypergamous marriage (see Fong, 2002). They desire to marry upper class men, regarding marriage as a ladder to a better life (Honig and Hershatter, 1988), although in fact hypergamy produces inequality within marriage. A survey carried out among urban Chinese people in 2003 (see Toro-Morn and Sprecher, 2003) shows that traditional values in mate-selection preferences are still influencing China's young generation, with men emphasising women's physical beauty and youth while women pay more attention to the earning capacity, jobs and social status of their potential husbands. 'Dating man of big money' (*bang da kuan*) is now a fashion; becoming the mistress of a rich man is no longer shameful to some young women (see Toro-Morn and Sprecher, 2003; Yu, 2004; Farrer, 2002). In fact, many women, rural and urban, choose to be 'mistresses' (*er nai*) of wealthy men in exchange for financial support³³ (see Zhang, 2011; Shen, 2005; Lang and Smart, 2002). In some coastal areas the category of *er nai cun* (the second wife village) has emerged to accommodate women in the same situation. This revival of the practice of polygyny, as Ong (1999, p.154) says, 'is one of the many ironies

³² It was already the case during Mao's era before and after the Great Leap Forward.

³³ The practice of the second wife was first begun among men from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and other countries who stayed in China regularly, and they were later joined by the wealthy and powerful men in mainland China. As found by Zhang (2011) and Lang and Smart (2002), there tends to be a sexual contract signed before setting up such a relationship with specified responsibilities and obligations for both parties as well as the contract duration.

of late capitalism that pre-modern family forms and female exploitation, which the communist state had largely erased in the cities, are being resurrected.’ Since the initial enforcement of the one-child policy in 1978, the first generations of singletons have now reached adulthood. Many researchers hold a positive view about women’s empowerment associated with this policy. For instance, Fong (2002, p.1101) argues that the one-child policy has helped in the transformation of Chinese society from ‘a patrilineal, patrilateral and patrilocal one to a bilinear, bilateral and neolocal one’; the once ‘parent-centred’ family has transformed into a ‘child-centred’ family (see also Liu, 2007; Bian et al., 1998). Being ‘the only hope’ in the family, single girls have been given equal attention to single boys (Liu, 2007; Fong, 2004). Also, compared to male singletons, only daughters enjoy advantages in many aspects. For example, Fong (2004) finds that, while boys will have the responsibility of purchasing the marital house, parents with one daughter do not have such a worry and can instead invest that money into their daughter’s education. Robinson (1985) and Milwertz (1997) also held a positive view about the change in daughters’ domestic roles in marriage, saying that a more egalitarian distribution of housework responsibilities could be expected.³⁴ Young women in Liu’s (2007) study expressed their disapproval of self-sacrifice towards their own families and a desire for equality in the domestic division of labour. However, with these young women’s development of a stable self (*ren ge*) and as they become spiritually and financially independent, they are perceived as a far cry from the traditional wife and mother (see Barlow, 2004). Due to ideas that men should be higher than women in every respect, they are more or less seen as a threat to their spouses’ masculinity within marriage, since they will not be obedient wives or be subdued ‘into the demanding, emotionally laborious female roles of wife, housekeeper and child care nurse’ (Barlow, 2004, p.261). Parish and Farrer (2000) also worried that the empowerment of some Chinese women could make the role of husband less important and useful in marriage, and that therefore such women were having difficulties in finding husbands. This social

³⁴ When Xue (1999, p.147) asked the opinion of a kindergarten girl as to whether she would like to cook for her husband’s whole family when she grew up, the answer was a definite: ‘I would not like to.’

phenomenon of *sheng nu xian xiang* (women left on the shelf) has now gained wide recognition in China as a potentially serious social problem.

Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the complex historical background of Chinese women and the family, within which Chinese women migrants were deeply embedded. Therefore, I organised my chapter in chronological order according to the different historical stages of women in pre-modern China, women in Republican China, women in the pre-reform era and women in the post-reform stage until now. By taking their domestic lives into account, I examined how gender structured Chinese women's lives under the influence of Confucianism, especially after the founding of the People's Republic of China, in which Chinese female migrants spent some of their adulthood. In the following chapters, based on the accounts of migrant women themselves, I will show how gender structures women migrants' decisions and encourages them to make sacrifices for the sake of their husbands.

Chapter Three

Researching the Lives of Chinese wives: Methodological Issues

One of the principles of my work is to allow people to speak for themselves...and in return to communicate to them, in our conversations as well as in my writings, that it is their words I seek and not material for the generation of something that ultimately transcends their words and hence their lives (Cottle, 1978, p.xii).

The aim of feminist research has been widely recognised as enabling the silenced to speak, as this quote from Cottle indicates, to let women tell their own stories. In order to promote a better mutual understanding and recognition when women interview women, the success of research is based on many elements, such as the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, the power balance, and the researcher's standpoint of reflection and reflexivity at the analysis stage. While promoting rapport and equality, some other problems also follow. For instance, Finch (1984) warns that feminist research which is based on a rapport relationship has a potential to over-exploit the interviewees. Regarding the power balance, Glucksmann (1994) also points out that it is impossible to erase the power inequality as the researcher has the final rights to interpret and process the data she has collected.

Informed by this debate, I started my fieldwork in January 2009,¹ intending to explore the 'real lives' of Chinese trailing wives who came to Britain as the dependants of their husbands. In order to fully understand these women's migration experiences, I designed my fieldwork to chart the course of my interviewees' lives from the time they made their decisions to come to Britain, through their adaption to life in Britain, their work experience, and on to their present lives, including their plans for the future. Despite my careful planning, my research did not go smoothly since I had problems at every stage of my fieldwork. Because of the relatively small number of Chinese migrant women and their

¹ The fieldwork lasted for nearly four months.

scattered locations, I struggled to find participants; being a researcher with a better educational background yet junior age, I had difficulties in negotiating the power balance between me the researcher and the researched; my effort to maintain an outsider position proved to be in vain during the interview process as I was taken to be a member of the Chinese community. However, my identity as an unmarried woman sometimes excluded me from my participants and created gaps in understanding. Moreover, the influence my participants had on me during the fieldwork also provided me with a deeper understanding not only of these Chinese wives but also of myself. In this chapter, I will trace back the whole process of my fieldwork in chronological order, by firstly talking about my fieldwork design, then issues arising while I conducted the interviews, and finally finishing with the data processing and writing up.

Research Design

Choosing Research Methods

There have been long debates about the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative research in sociology. From a feminist researcher's point of view, the two methods represent a 'gendered description of ways of knowing'² (Oakley, 2000, p.42). Quantitative research mainly emphasises the collection of social facts or documents the operation of particular relationships between variables (Jayaratne and Stewart, 2008, p.54). With its focus on the detachment between researchers and the researched (Maynard, 1994, p.11), it has been seen as objective and masculine (see Oakley, 2000). Compared to quantitative research, the qualitative approach appears more subjective and feminine with its focus on individual lives and the promotion of an understanding of a particular subject (see Oakley, 2000; Jayaratne and Stewart, 2008). In order to combine the advantages of both methods, in recent decades, some feminist researchers have introduced 'mixed-methods', using both qualitative and

² Oakley (2000, p.42) further added that the 'gendered description' here refers not only to different sexes, but also to the powerful and the powerless, for example women and ethnic minorities, who are excluded from the white male mainstream.

quantitative methods to represent feminist values (see Jayaratne, 1983, pp.140-61; also Leckenby and Hesse-Biber, 2007). However, qualitative research is still widely used in the area of Women's Studies because of its ability to reveal the 'subjective experiences and meanings of those being researched' (Maynard, 1994, p.11). Face-to-face interviews have been used by feminist researchers 'to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect' (Kvale, 1996, p.6). The aim of my research is to explore the lives of immigrant Chinese women in Britain as dependants and the reasons behind their choices. The nature of this study is thus a far cry from claiming certain social facts. Moreover, the in-depth interview is ideal for the researcher 'who has little hope of gaining a large and representative sample' (Plummer, 1983, pp.86-87); the relatively small number of potential research participants and the difficulty of making contact with them made it impractical for me to circulate questionnaires.

When designing the fieldwork, I also thought about using group discussions to stimulate 'personal and conflicting viewpoints' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.150). During my pilot fieldwork, I tried to hold a small group discussion but changed my plans very soon after one of my intermediaries, who was also an interviewee, told me not to mention her personal issues in front of another woman she was about to introduce to me. According to her, there were things that could not be known in her social circle; but since I was an outsider, she felt safe in letting me know. Therefore, she took some of her experiences as highly personal and did not want to 'cause gossip among other people.' Her words made me realise that, although group discussion might work well for some open topics with people feeling free to exchange their stories and opinions, in my research, since some topics are highly personal,³ this way of collecting information would not work in protecting my interviewees' confidentiality. Moreover, the scattered

³ Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) and Liu (2007) also mention that group discussion works well on some sensitive topics when the researcher wants to learn the viewpoints that are hard to get access to openly. However the results of the discussion could depend very much on the relationship of the interviewer and the participants, the trust the interviewees have in interviewers, the atmosphere of the meeting and the sense of safety when talking openly.

locations of my interviewees presented an obstacle to organising group discussions.

Designing the Questions

In order to achieve the best research data, I designed my questions in a flexible way, hoping to leave my participants free to set the agenda. My questions were structured to be open-ended to capture the unique experiences of my participants while I, as the researcher, still had some control over the responses to those questions (see Hesse-Biber, 2007). As good data collection was the basis of my further analysis, my interview questions were designed to cover all aspects of my interviewees' migrant experiences: the reasons for them to migrate; the process of fitting into an unfamiliar environment, their role in their husbands' advancement, as well as their present family lives (see Table 1). Being flexible also enabled me to shift focus under some circumstances in terms of each interviewee's unique experience.⁴ The order of questions was also re-arranged in accordance with the individual starting point of each interview;⁵ however, all the themes and sub-topics were covered in each interview.

The first theme was designed to explore the reasons why my interviewees came to Britain as dependants of their husbands, as well as the extent to which the responsibility and duty they felt towards their families shaped their decisions to come with their husbands. It was also intended to identify the considerations behind their choices and the feelings they had about leaving China. The second theme addressed the difficulties women might have in settling into a different environment. This included their first impressions of the UK, the process of trying to set up a new home, the efforts they made to fit into the new environment and

⁴ For example, some of my interviewees had a lot to say on a certain issue while appearing not interested or very reluctant to talk about another; I thus focused on that certain issue and let them fully express themselves. The reason I did not intervene was that I realised the danger of frustrating their desire to talk and to create a feeling that I was not interested in their stories.

⁵ In some cases, as soon as I introduced the main theme of my interview, my interviewees would start talking without me asking any questions. Thus, during the interview, I had to re-arrange the order of questions and refer back to the issues they had not covered in their talk.

their interpretations of their responsibilities at this stage. The third theme was about their efforts to support their husbands and families while they settled down. The background reading I had done suggested that female migrants, especially those who had higher educational background and professional work experience in their home countries, were the most vulnerable group in a host country's labour market. Therefore it was very important to know what had supported my participants all the way through. The last part of the interview concerned their everyday life after the family had settled down in Britain, with the aim to view my interviewees' family status and their unique life stories at this stage. By including their plans for the future, I hoped to explore their choices between family responsibilities and personal interests in more depth.

Table 1: Interview questions

Themes	Sub-topics
Migration decision-making	Interviewees and their husbands' education and career background in China. When did they migrate? Who applied as the main applicant? What were their own considerations? Was there anything that was hard to leave behind?
Fitting into the new environment	The first impressions about the UK; Were there any differences between expectations and reality? How did they manage to set up a new home? What difficulties did the migrant wives first encounter? What helped them to overcome all the difficulties?
Stage of settling down	Did they have difficulties at this stage? Why? What kind of efforts did they make to overcome the difficulties? Did they work? What kind of jobs did they have? How did they feel during this stage?
Present life	Interviewees' daily routine; their own opinions and stories about their place in the family. Do they feel content with their status so far? Any plans for their self-improvement? Their future plans (e.g. do they plan to go back to China in the future)?

Finding Interviewees

Finding interviewees was a time and energy consuming process. When I first started my pilot research, I underestimated the difficulty of this process and hoped to easily catch some interviewees by ‘trying-my-luck-on-the-street’.⁶ I presumed that as my prospective interviewees and I were all Chinese women, a sense of trust and recognition would have already existed, thus there should not be any obstacles between them and me⁷. Propped up by this false belief, I spent a lot of time on the street trying to ‘catch’ some interviewees. Once I started, I found it was actually much harder than I had imagined. First of all, I suddenly found that in fact I became the biggest obstacle in this process since I constantly felt shy about appealing to strangers to agree to an interview. If I found some woman who looked as if she fell into my category, I had to follow her for about five minutes to make a careful observation (mainly to see if she looked friendly or in a good mood); at the same time, I had to gather all my courage to initiate the greetings. What always happened was that by the time I felt I was completely ready, I had already lost my target. In some cases, I did manage to talk with some women and explained my reasons for stopping them, but eventually I was turned down. One woman asked me if I wanted her to do a questionnaire, but after I told her that I needed to do a face-to-face interview which would last at least an hour, she told me directly that her everyday timetable was very tight and she did not have that time. A fairly depressing case happened when I was in London’s China Town spending a whole day walking up and down along the main street looking for potential interviewees. As it was not a weekend, there were not too many people on the street. All the women I talked with were either Chinese refugees or students working in Chinese restaurants. I was even stopped by one woman who asked if I needed some help with my status (she told me she could sell me a refugee certificate for some amount of money). Later, I mentioned my experience

⁶ Taking it as a very experimental attempt to my fieldwork, I did not give my strategy enough consideration in relation to interview pleas without intermediaries or gatekeepers. Besides, I also overlooked the issue of personal safety since I was interviewing women coming from the same country as myself. It was only after my supervisor learnt about my experiences and reminded me about those issues that I realised the defects of my practice.

⁷ As Finch (1984, pp.70-88) puts it, the common experiences as women can contribute a lot to the establishment of a friendly relationship between the researcher and the researched.

to a friend and she had a good laugh about it. She told me that it was because of the clothes I wore (as I started my fieldwork during a very harsh winter, I was wearing a long thick padded coat that day)⁸ and the facial expression I wore when walking on the street. (I think I must have looked really suspicious when I was looking for interviewees on the street, as all the time I was looking around, following someone, trying to chat with people and then looking around again. Now when I look back, I also feel that my behaviour resembled that of a criminal.) That was how I dramatically finished with my street-hunting strategy. Through this means, I only found two interviewees, Hao Yuxin (43) and Zhang Fang (35).⁹ Hence, with the process of my fieldwork, I began to question my confidence about my 'insider' identity and the neglect of other important channels. I realised that, due to the sensitivity of my research, the Chinese wives would not feel safe to reveal their very personal stories to a stranger, they probably felt the need to know something about me and my background before participation; in this case, an intermediary would be very helpful between me and my participants to establish mutual trust.

Realising the importance of having an intermediary, I resorted to a Chinese association in a big city near York. I first contacted Miss S, the person in charge of the Women's Project, through email. She replied to me quickly and asked for my research project via e-mail. About a week later I received a phone call from her, and she told me apologetically that she had asked most of the women in her association but only one (Su Linqing, 35) would like to participate in my interview. Later, during my interview with this woman, she told me the reason she wanted to participate was because she thought I was a very good friend of Miss S and therefore decided to do her a favour since, as a newcomer to Britain, she badly needed help from her. When I told her that Miss S and I were just acquaintances,

⁸ Those padded coats are very common in China against the harsh winter. As I discovered after this incident, the images of illegal migrants from China are always of people wrapping themselves in this kind of thick coat with a scarf around their heads to cover their faces.

⁹ I changed each individual's name in order to protect the privacy of my participants.

her attitude changed and she refused to let me tape record the interview.¹⁰ In order to find more participants, I asked Miss S if I could work as a volunteer in her project. I hoped that, if women in this association had more contact with me, they would be more interested in participating and would have more chance to get to know me and my research project. My identity as a PhD student in Women's Studies helped me as Miss S told me that there were six people on the waiting list to be volunteers, but as 'you have some professional knowledge in this area, you are the most welcome.'

My job in that association was to be an English class assistant and an interpreter for those who did not speak English. I was asked to go there once a week and usually spent a whole day there. This job turned out to be a great help for me to contact more Chinese women, although the majority of them were from Hong Kong and Malaysia. Gradually, I got to know Bai Kexin (42), Yuan Wanfang (43), Gao Meizhen (43) and Xin Ya (47), who were four women out of only six (a fifth was Wife Su whom I had interviewed earlier) from Mainland China. Although I managed to interview them finally, I waited for a month before they agreed to an interview. All these women had tight daily schedules, which resulted in their low attendance in the class. Even if they came, they often hurried home after the class and left me no chance to chat with them. Secondly, my lack of consideration created some unnecessary trouble when I first contacted them. At the very beginning when I talked with the fifth woman (the one who refused to be my participant), I revealed to her carelessly that I came to work in the association in order to find interviewees for my PhD research. This might have made her doubt my motivation for being a volunteer, as she told me immediately: 'so that is why you came here to work? That is what I was wondering: how could somebody be willing to do an unpaid job when she still has fees to pay'. I could guess that she took my being a volunteer as motivated by some private agenda and thus that I did not intend to offer real help. After that, she showed a cold politeness towards me, which was quickly passed on to other women. I tried to ignore their negative

¹⁰There were six women who refused to be tape recorded; however, I had my diary with me, and was able to jot down what they said and transcribe it immediately into my diary after the interview to make the data as accurate as possible.

attitude to release the tension. The atmosphere gradually changed with my efforts to offer them all the help I could. Bai Kexin became the first one to accept my interview, then Xin Ya, Gao Meizhen and Yuan Wanfang.¹¹

In order to find more interviewees, I asked all my friends and my supervisor if they knew anybody who could be interviewed; hoping that through this way I could then accumulate more interviewees through snowballing. It again confirmed my assumption that the help of intermediaries in my case was really important as I found the rest of my 15 interviewees via this method. One of my friends became an interviewee (Xiao Chunhua, 42), and she also introduced her friend to me (Wei Xiaoping, 46). Another friend of mine Wang introduced Feng Jia (39) and Jia Zonghong (43), then Feng Jia helped me to find Pei Xiangong (38), Cao Shanshan (40) and Qi Xiaowa (39). My supervisor recommended one of her former student Lili. From Lili, I got to know Ni Xingzhen (40) and Ke Huifang (49). Ke Huifang also introduced me to her friend Tan Zhihua (45), and Tan Zhihua introduced me to four women who sent their children to the same language school every Saturday afternoon: Guo Xumei (37), Mao Juan (45), Wang Qiong (44) and Ren Ruiyun (35). Another interviewee introduced by my supervisor was Duan Ruirui (41).

¹¹ While these women appeared friendly among each other, they were always curious about each other's personal lives; since there were some things they felt it inappropriate to ask face-to-face. However during the interviews, for example when I asked one woman to describe her daily routine or her identity as a dependant, she then asked me what other wives had said about it or if other wives thought the same as her. Under these circumstances, I had to reiterate the importance of confidentiality and refuse to answer her questions.

Figure 1 Links between researcher, the intermediary and the participants

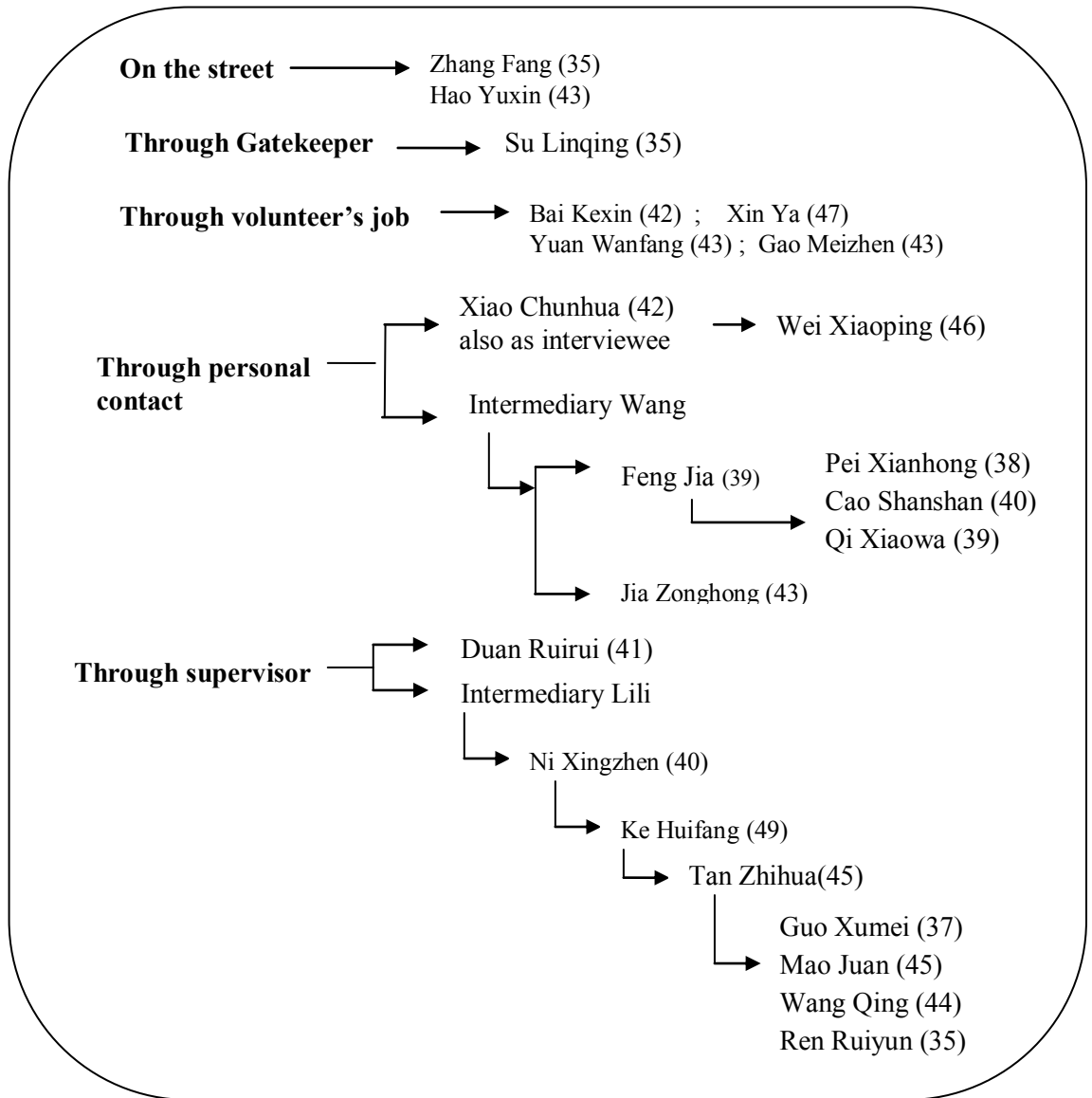


Table 2: Demographic data of the 22 interviewees

Name	Personal information						Husband's Educational level/Occupation in Britain
	Age	Years in Britain	No.of children	Educational Level	Occupation in China	Occupation in Britain	
Bai Kexin	42	> 10 yrs	1	B.A.	Manager in Dongbei Area	Part-time Restaurant Worker in Manchester	B.A./ Engineer
Cao Shanshan	40	>5 yrs	1	College	Bank Clerk in Jiangsu Province	Self-employed in Manchester	B.A./ Engineer
Duan Ruirui	41	>10 yrs	1	B.A.	Editor in Nanjing	Librarian in London	PhD/ Researcher*
Feng Jia	39	<5 yrs	1	College	Nurse in Liaoning Province	Restaurant Worker in Leeds	PhD/ Student
Gao Meizhen	43	>10 yrs	2	College	Office clerk in Beijing	Part-time Worker in Manchester	PhD/ Lecturer
Guo Xumei	37	<6 yrs	1	B.A.	Management in a Northern Chinese city	Part-time Babysitter in Nottingham	Researcher
Hao Yuxin	43	>10 yrs	1	B.A.	Designer in Nanchong	Care Assistant in London	PhD/ researcher
Jia Zonghong	43	>10 yrs	1	High School	Office Clerk in Suzhou	Part-time Cleaner in Leeds	Master/ Acupuncture Practitioner
Ke Huifang	49	>10 yrs	2	B.A.	Business Woman in Hebei Province	Warehouse Worker in Nottingham	PhD/ Lecturer
Mao Juan	45	>10 yrs	2	College	Factory Worker in Liaoning Province	Housewife in Nottingham	B.A./ Self-employed

Ni Xingzhen	40	<5yrs	2	B.A.	Accountant in Shanghai	Warehouse Worker in Nottingham	PhD/Student
Pei Xianhong	38	<5yrs	1	B.A.	Dean in a Chemistry Lab in Henan Province	Cleaner in Manchester	PhD/Student
Qi Xiaowa	39	>10yr	1	B.A.	Manager in Beijing	Warehouse Worker in Manchester	PhD/Engineer
Ren Ruiyun	35	>3 yrs	none	B.A.	Interpreter in Beijing	Cashier in Nottingham	PhD/Student
Su Linqing	35	<1yr	none	College	Nurse in Hunan Province	Housewife in Manchester	PhD/Student
Tan Zhihua	45	>10 yrs	2	B.A.	Senior Nurse	Housewife in Nottingham	PhD/Lecturer
Wang Qiong	44	>10 yrs	1	Master	University Teacher in Chengdu	Part-time Worker in Nottingham	PhD/Lecturer
Wei Xiaoping	46	>10 yrs	1	High School	Librarian in Sichuan Province	Warehouse Worker in Milton Kynes	M.A./Designer*
Xiao Chunhua	42	>10 yrs	2	B.A.	High School Teacher in Chongqing	Warehouse Worker in Milton Kynes	PhD/Lecturer
Xin Ya	47	>10 yrs	2	B.A.	University Teacher	Cashier in Manchester	PhD/Lecturer
Yuan Wanfang	43	>10 yrs	none	B.A.	Designer in Nanjing	Care Assistant in Northampton	PhD/Lecturer
Zhang Fang	35	<6yrs	none	B.A.	High School Teacher in Zhejiang Province	Part-time Restaurant Worker in York	PhD/Student

*These husbands' occupations have been disguised because their real occupations can make them recognisable.

Conduct Interviews

Making Appointments

Once women showed their interest in participating, I contacted them via e-mail¹² to explain my research and the possible questions I would ask, so they were offered enough time to make a final decision. To encourage women to be my participants, I also assured them that I would only conduct one interview with them and would not contact them after the interview in order to put them at their ease (see Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Reinharz, 1992). In addition to this, I also informed my interviewees in the e-mails about their rights as my participants, e.g. that they could stop the interview any time they preferred, or they could refuse my tape recording or note-taking. Once the interview plan was set up, I was then asked by every woman to go to their cities to conduct the interview. Depending on the degree of trust they had in me, the interview location could be at an interviewee's home, in a café or another public place. As she noticed in the context of her own research, Hall (2004) pointed out that being invited as a 'stranger' and 'outsider' into an interviewee's home was an important signifier of the interviewee's acceptance. Generally speaking, if the interviewee had a good personal relationship with my intermediaries, the interview was held in her house; otherwise the interview was held in a public place. From the place I was asked to go I could sometimes predict the openness of my participants and prepare my interview accordingly. However, sometimes interviewing in a public place worked better since such environments always encouraged women to be more relaxed. On the other hand, their houses appeared not to be the best places for conducting the interview when there were other family members, usually children, around, as their presence tended to freeze the interview atmosphere.

There were always difficulties in making appointments with Chinese migrant women. According to Sprague (2005, p.128), conducting qualitative interviews

¹² My interviewees would not give me their mobile numbers straight away as mobile numbers are taken as private information and shouldn't be passed to just anybody. But as they came to know my research better, most of them were willing to give me their contact numbers.

with less privileged people, such as women, the poor and ethnic minorities, is difficult as they have little control over their time. This was especially true for my participants since their roles as mothers and housekeepers in the family demanded a great deal of their time. In most cases, the interviews were set in the day time as it was the time their children went to school. One participant was a full-time housewife and had two daughters to look after. She told me that I could only interview her at the weekend when her husband was at home. But later, during the interview, she told me that she had to lie to her husband about going out alone and her husband was annoyed and had moaned all morning. For those who worked, the jobs they took also offered limited autonomy. For example, one of my participants told me that she had to work as a babysitter in a Chinese family from 8am to 3pm every day from Monday to Friday, then hurry home to prepare dinner. On the Saturday and Sunday, she also worked a part-time job in a Chinese restaurant. Therefore there was unlikely to be any time gap left for my interview.

Conducting Interviews

My interviews with Chinese wives varied from one and a half to two hours in length. As none of my interviewees felt confident in speaking English, all interviews were conducted in Chinese Mandarin. This practice not only provided me with a better understanding of the data, but also enhanced the strength of my interviewees' stories. I kept a notebook during each interview to write down some reflections and ideas that might flash into my mind during the interview. Most interviews were tape-recorded, but some women refused to give me permission to use the tape recorder, thus I took detailed notes during these interviews and transcribed my notes as soon as they were finished, thus assuring the accuracy of my data. Moreover, as some interesting data was also raised during casual discussions after the interview, I could always record these in my dairy as well.

Creating rapport

The importance of creating rapport during face-to-face interviews has been well recognised in the area of women's studies¹³ (see Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005; Goodwin et al., 2003; Phoenix, 1995). During my three months' fieldwork, I accumulated some useful strategies to build mutual trust when interviewing Chinese women. First, as the Chinese saying goes: *shen shou bu da xiao lian ren* (this literally means a person with a friendly smile on his/her face is not likely to be refused), which speaks to the importance of a proper attitude in the Chinese context. By showing my friendliness to my interviewees, I also wanted to ease their anxiety when talking with a stranger about their private lives. In this connection, a small joke or an appropriate compliment also worked well to reduce the distance between my interviewees and me. For example, when I first started my pilot research, I was to meet a participant at the railway station in her city. As I arrived, I saw a slim, baby-faced Chinese woman in a red Gap hoody jacket standing outside WHSmith. As she looked like a teenage girl, I didn't take her as the one I was expecting until I phoned my interviewee's mobile (we had exchanged our contact numbers via e-mail). I immediately saw that 'young girl' searching for her mobile in her pocket. After we introduced ourselves to each other, I told her why I could not come up to her. She was amused by my impression of her and had a good laugh about it; her good mood carried on all through the interview. In another case, when I conducted an interview with a woman who was a former designer in China, I was very impressed by her taste in interior design and told her how much I liked her house's style; she was very happy and offered to show me around her house; thus our interview started with the things she had brought from China and the memories behind them.

¹³ There is another opinion that a close rapport with the researched can make the researcher 'lose distance and objectivity; over-identify with the individual and group and forgo the academic role' (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p.367); however I felt that it was really hard for me to keep a certain distance when my participants were sitting next to me and willing to share their personal stories with me.

In Chinese culture, it is a very good practice to bring small gifts¹⁴ when you visit a friend for the first time (see also Liu, 2007). Although most of the women had been living in Britain for many years, I believed that Chinese tradition was still deeply rooted in their minds and therefore I stuck to my Chinese way of doing things. It turned out to work well. Every time I went to see an interviewee, I took them a box of chocolates or a small Disney toy if they had children, and told my interviewees that I brought a gift for the whole family or their children. In a Chinese context, the family interest is always more important, and children especially are given priority, hence my interviewees felt much happier about my buying gifts for their family and children instead of for them. Also, Chinese people have a tradition of *qianrang*;¹⁵ telling them the gift was not for them could allow them to accept it without feeling any embarrassment. Moreover, an appropriate demeanour was also vital in establishing rapport, especially with women who were senior. I did not position myself as a researcher but as a humble and equal friend, which made me more easily accepted by my participants.¹⁶ They welcomed a friend to share with them the confusions they had about their lives instead of a distant researcher. In order to create a sense of familiarity, I also paid attention to ‘impression management’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.83). I wore very casual clothes and made my image suitable for a ‘good Chinese student’, which image would not impose any negative feelings on my interviewees¹⁷ and could help them to identify with me more easily. With all the tips, I strongly believed that my sincerity and my real interest in the life stories of my interviewees played the most important role in the success of the interviews. It would be hard for me to communicate effectively with my interviewees if I were not really interested in their stories. For me, a researcher who lacked research

¹⁴ Chinese people call these gifts *jian mian li* (the gift for first visiting).

¹⁵ This word is very difficult to translate as it implies too many meanings. Here it means being polite by initially refusing the gift before accepting it.

¹⁶ As most of my interviewees’ husbands were/are engaged in academic work, research work was not unfamiliar to them. I found that posing myself as a researcher in front of my interviewees gave them a strange impression that I took myself as somebody and they would show a ‘so what?’ attitude as it was something their husbands had already done many years ago.

¹⁷ Most of my interviewees are in their late thirties to late forties; therefore they tend to be more conventional than younger Chinese generations. In their eyes, modern girls are not very ‘steady’ (according to one of my interviewees), are unable to concentrate on their studies and are not reliable at all.

experience and who was junior to my interviewees, showing a respectful attitude was essential for building up rapport with my interviewees.

Emotion work in research

Feminist researchers are aware of the importance of respecting the feelings of their interviewees (see Kvale, 1996; Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1981). More recently, studies have also started to emphasise the effects that in-depth interviews can have on interviewers. Many researchers have argued that face-to-face interviews can put the interviewer into a vulnerable position when she identifies too closely with the interviewee's experience and therefore taps into their emotional distress (see Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Hubbard et al., 2001; Bendelow and Williams, 1995). As Burr (1996, p.176) puts it, 'the effect of being involved in, and in a sense, sharing the private world of people in despair, can be a psychologically and emotionally wrenching experience'. However, the emotional cost is regarded as 'all part of the job' (Sampson et al., 2008, p.923) and cannot be avoided in the fieldwork process, as Denzin (1984, x) describes it:

Emotionality lies at the intersection of the person and society, for all persons are joined to their societies through the self-feelings and emotions they feel and experience on a daily basis. This is the reason the study of emotionality must occupy a central place in all the human disciplines, for to be human is to be emotional.

Although my research was not highly sensitive, the exploration of Chinese wives' lives was still full of psychological stress. First of all, my questions on the migration experience took the majority of interviewees back into the hard times they went through when they first arrived in Britain. This made me feel uneasy, especially when some of my interviewees started to become emotional when answering a certain question. One of my interviewees told me later, after the interview, that she couldn't maintain a peaceful mind for a long time as the topics we talked about touched the 'the deepest cut' in her heart, which she had not dared to face for a long time. Another one told me how, after the interview, she had a restless night reviewing her life path in Britain and how it reminded her of

the things she wanted to ignore. Thus I began to feel guilty every time I was about to start an interview; I had to keep reminding my participants of their rights to terminate the interview or refuse to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable.

Second, while doing the interview, some women would stop at some sensitive point when I was sure there was important information they were keeping back; their silence indicated to me that it was a certain area they did not want to mention; however, the sense of empathy towards my participants always stopped me from pressing the questions further. Although I realised that, being a researcher, I should not bring my personal feelings into the research, it was hard to be professional under those circumstances. Most of the time, my interviewees were willing to share their sad memories with me. When I was listening to their stories, I became excited about the good data; however, I would then feel shocked by my selfishness for evoking other people's sad experiences for my own benefit. Not only had I felt disturbed by the negative effects my interviews imposed on my interviewees, but also their painful life stories could echo in my mind for days or weeks, which was something I had never thought about before the fieldwork. I was surprised to find that I could be affected by somebody's stories for so long.

While the emotion work can be disturbing for qualitative researchers, it is also somehow inevitable as 'if we undertake to study human lives, we have to be ready to face human feelings' (Ely et al., 1991, p.49; also see Gilbert, 2001a, p.9). In fact, as some scholars point out, emotion work also requires judgement and it helps to set up a social and emotional bond between interviewer and interviewee (see Gray, 2008, p.937; also Ahmed, 2004b). As Gray (2008, p.937) says, 'feeling and emotion are powerful motivational factors in the design and conduct of research projects and shape the relationship between the researcher and his/her object of study as well as understanding and interpretation'. During my interviews, I always became emotional, and I finally decided not to hide these feelings. I showed my empathy by nodding, gesturing and facial expressions to show my interviewees that I was concerned about their stories and treasured what they told

me as something really important. I remember when one of my interviewees started sobbing, I passed her a tissue, switched off my tape recorder and sat there quietly to give her comfort. At that moment, I felt that the role playing between us changed from interviewer and interviewee to friends. In some other cases, when my interviewees mentioned their feelings of isolation and loneliness in Britain, it reminded me of my own experience; I just openly admitted to my interviewees that I had the same feelings. By doing so, my interviewees and I were connected together and they became more open in talking about their stories.

Power balance between interviewer and interviewee

According to Oakley (1981), the interview is a mutual interaction. The researcher should invite intimacy by being open about herself to the participants via talking about herself and answering participants' questions. While I was fully prepared to initiate these topics, there were always inquiries about my personal experience before the interview, which they perhaps took as an exchange for the personal stories they would reveal to me later. Therefore I was in their debt; I was not only willing to talk about myself, but I was obligated to do so. Most Chinese women would admire my willpower to carry on studying for so many years and my desire to do a PhD degree using a second language. But if they had to choose, they said, they would rather be in the family. Some made their opinions clear that too much education was no good for women as women's rightful place was always in the family. One of my interviewees, after learning that I was single, told me brutally:

The reason a man wants a wife is to get somebody to look after his family, and a woman will always look for somebody who can provide a free dinner voucher. As you have read too many books, you won't be willing to be burdened with housework or simply your busy everyday schedule won't allow you to do it ... Unless you are lucky enough to find a domesticated man, who are not only very rare but also won't meet your standards.

Although these discussions helped me to understand Chinese women's ideology about their family status, their arguments also deeply disturbed me during my

fieldwork, just as Sprague (2005, p.123) warns, ‘interviewees can project beliefs and fears onto the investigator’. It was not until after the fieldwork that I realised that my worries came from the Chinese patriarchal ideas deeply buried inside me; although many years’ study in women’s studies have helped me to wash away some of these ideas, deep down, I was still trapped in them. Therefore my research told me things not only about the women I researched, but also things about myself (see also Steier, 1991).

The reason my participants kept giving me advice could be because they were all senior to me,¹⁸ married, and most of them had children. In terms of being women and wives, they regarded themselves as teachers and treated me like their pupil who, according to one of my participants, ‘is still full of romantic imaginations about life’. Therefore, my experiences from my fieldwork led me to disagree with Reinharz and Chase (2002, pp.221-38) about the impact of a researcher’s self-disclosure on participants. According to them, the more the participants know about the researcher, the more they try to please her in their responses. Their argument is right in some sense when the researcher is the more privileged party; however, my junior age and lack of life/marriage experience significantly reduced my power as a researcher.

In order to show respect, I needed to wrap up my questions in a polite way so that my participants would not feel offended. With this unbalanced power flow, I found it was sometimes hard to take a leading part the interview as my participants could be very sophisticated in their way of talking. One of my interviewees was a leader in her former Chinese work unit; during the interview, she discoursed on issues that had nothing to do with my questions and either ignored my questions or shifted the topic into another direction. I also met a participant who had apparently just had a quarrel with her husband, so that interview turned out to be an outlet for her anger as she kept complaining about

¹⁸ In Chinese culture, the status of a person in the family and in society is often defined by one’s age; that is a virtue of showing respect to elders. This tradition was also reflected in Liu’s (2007, p.18) research when she acted as a junior ‘without voicing any disagreement and played the role of a learning junior or daughter who was very modest and interested in listening to their stories’.

her husband. Although I managed to calm her down, her account was definitely affected by her bad mood. I tried to call her to arrange another interview but she refused me straight, claiming she had talked too much about her private life already and there was no need for me to see her again. Although Kvale (1996, p.116) suggests that the interviewer should be aware that the openness of the interview may lead interviewees to over-disclose information they later regret, how to discourage the participants from over-revealing certain information can be another serious problem.

As some feminist researchers argue, the researcher should always hold the balance of power during the interview and place limited control over their own involvement to avoid a power imbalance (see Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Tang, 2002; also Hubbard et al., 2001). However, when interviewing women who were senior and more experienced than me, I found it really hard to control the interview direction, especially within China's cultural background where juniors are low in the hierarchy and are only supposed to listen to what elder people say and act accordingly. While under some circumstances I had to uphold my professional identity to guide my participants, my unmarried status made me inferior in front of them and the power became unbalanced in favour of my participants. Nevertheless they still talked freely and enabled me to gather rich data.

The influence of my identity as 'insider' and 'outsider' on filtering the data

Glucksmann (1994, p.158) warns that 'oral testimony could never, by its nature, provide an unmediated account of anything (as) the experience is mediated by memory, and the memory by the circumstances in which it is elicited'. Therefore I felt that the interviewer's knowledge about the interview topic was vital to judge the reliability of the interviewees' accounts. When doing my fieldwork, my identity as an 'insider' who had some similar overseas life experience to my interviewees helped me greatly on checking the data of the Chinese wives. For example, when talking about her life in Britain during the settling down stage, one

interviewee told me how she had to carry several heavy shopping bags on her own and walked thirty minutes home when she first came, as she did not want to waste her very limited money on bus fares. I then asked her how much the bus fare was at that time, she gave out the answer quickly and even told me how much that money equalled in Chinese *yuan* which, she commented: ‘is enough to take a taxi (in China)’. I recalled when I first came to Britain; I also had that experience of walking to save money on transport; moreover, I had that habit of converting British pounds into Chinese *yuan* and then deciding what to purchase and what not to when I was doing the shopping. Based on my own experience, I could tell that her story rang true. Another example was when I tried to explore an interviewee’s feelings about her first job in Britain:

Interviewer: How did you feel when you started your first job in Britain [as a kitchen assistant in a Chinese restaurant]?

Interviewee: I did not think anything.

Interviewer: Really? I was quite excited when I first got a job and was earning some money.

Interviewee: Oh yes, I was very excited about it. [Then she started describing her feelings].

Here my insider identity was used as a probe to explore my interviewee’s own feelings by raising my follow-up questions. According to Oakley (1981), the interviewer’s sharing of her own experience with her participants can work well under some circumstances when there is a feeling of ‘strangeness’ between the interviewer and interviewees and rapport needs to be set up effectively. Without such experience, this precious data could be missed and a distance could be created by my participants refusing to take me as belonging to their category. When asking follow-up questions, I bore in mind the importance of not asking questions which were too leading. But in this context, my question did prompt the conversation; moreover, my participant gave an extended account, rather than confirming my own stand.

Although I could be seen as an ‘insider’, my identity kept vacillating as sometimes I became a total ‘outsider’. This was especially true when my interviewees talked about their thoughts on being trailing wives and the sacrifices

they made on behalf of their families. My own identity as a single educated woman who has received many feminist ideas about women's equality made me personally reject those women's choices. This difficulty was also enhanced by my own experience with my family,¹⁹ I had to rely on books, novels and even the experiences of my grandmothers and aunts to understand my interviewees' standpoint. Despite these shortcomings, my identity as an 'outsider' actually put me in a more professional position; it helped me to analyse certain data with a more critical eye.

Ethics, informed consent and tape recording

The informed consent letter is to inform the interviewees about the aims of the research, as well as the associated risks and benefits, such as the protection of interviewees' privacy, confidentiality, gaining consent, and their rights to terminate their participation at any time during the interview (see Kavle and Brinkmann, 2009, p.70). Presenting an informed consent letter, as Thorne (2008, p.461-462) puts it, can also be seen as revealing the attitude of the researcher towards his/her interviewees, to show respect for interviewees' autonomy and dignity, rather than treating the researched as just research objects. Before starting my fieldwork, I was very optimistic about my interviewees' willingness to sign the letter as I took it as a legal protection for my participants 'by extending a right to be left alone' (Thorne, 2008, p.468). However, when doing pilot field- work, I surprisingly found that signing a consent letter could make my interviewees uncomfortable. In some cases, as soon as my interviewees saw me taking out the letter, their faces changed and I could sense their wariness. Their usual reaction was to make a very careful study of the letter, and then most of them told me that there was no need to sign it as long as they had orally agreed to accept my interview. There were a few women who actually did sign the letter after I told them its legal effect if there were any misuse of their data on my side.

¹⁹ My mother worked at management level in a very big Chinese work unit all her working life. As her work unit was very far from home, she had little time to look after the family. It was always my father who shouldered most of the domestic chores while fully supporting my mother in her work.

When we bear in mind that most of my participants lacked a sense of safety due to living in a foreign country, it becomes easier to understand their reactions towards informed consent letters. Since these Chinese women had migrated to Britain as the dependants of their elite husbands, they were more likely to rely on their husbands to deal with ‘big’ issues in/outside the family; they might consider that signing a document with a stranger without consulting their husbands was risky. It might also be because that they presumed that the interviewer, with better language ability and a greater knowledge background, might play language games in the consent letter to treat the data unfairly. Also, since all my participants worked in the *danwei* system back in China, they all had personal dossiers kept in their work units (see Liu, 2007).²⁰ There might be a psychological shadow hanging over these women that anything which existed on paper could be filed in their dossiers and generate a negative influence, thus they would refuse to sign any papers to avoid getting themselves into trouble. Although I was fully aware that getting the informed consent letters signed was also the most effective way of protecting the researcher from any potential dispute related to the data usage, following suggestions from Jaggar (2008, p.460) that feminist principles of ethical research should respect the dignity and integrity of the researched, I orally informed my interviewees about my research and recorded their oral consent to participate instead of pressing them to sign consent letters. However, none of my interviewees asked me how I would deal with the data or what methods I would adopt to protect their confidentiality. This phenomenon, I think, could be the result of their lack of knowledge about interviews and data protection²¹ which, to them, were more on a professional level. However, I also sensed from this phenomenon that most of my interviewees obviously lacked the concept of protecting themselves with the help of legal documents.

²⁰ The dossier system was first established in the former Soviet Union and adopted by many Communist countries like China. Every individual’s study, work and life performance, as well as their political orientations, are filed in their dossier; nobody, even the individual themselves, could get access to the dossiers unless permitted.

²¹ For ordinary Chinese people, interviewing is a very new phenomenon and can only be done by news reporters (see Liu, 2007; Tang, 2002). Using personal experience for analysing data is not very popular in China and therefore people do not have that alert on how to protect their privacy.

Depending on the trust my participants had in me, some of them refused to be tape-recorded and only allowed me to take notes. I fully understood the caution of these women as I was also aware that my research reached into people's private lives and 'things behind the door'. As the Chinese saying goes, *jia chou bu ke wai yang*²² (the corresponding phrase in English is 'do not wash your dirty linen in public'). Firmly holding to this theory, it was another reason they said 'no' to my tape-recorder. Unsurprisingly, this presented a very awkward situation for me. I found it difficult to take word-for-word notes while still having to think about my interviewee's words and in the meantime prepare to raise the next question. To avoid missing any important information, I re-wrote the notes as soon as the interview was finished, usually on my train journey home. But, interestingly enough, this group of women could always provide some really good data. It was probably because my interviewees in this group did not have to worry about the consequences their words might bring as there was no evidence left, so they could feel more open to say what they wanted.

Leaving the Research Field

The reciprocity produced by a successful interview always carried on even afterwards. Some of my participants offered me hospitality and invited me to their family gatherings. One participant even wanted me to join her for a trip to France. While I collected information from these women, I felt a degree of obligation to maintain the friendship instead of leaving the research field 'professionally'. Hence, an 'unarticulated tension between friendships and the goal of research' (Acker et al., 1996, p.69) began to disturb me. All the existing research concentrates on the interview process, and few mention the interviewer-interviewee relationship beyond the interview situation. This can be important, especially if the participants take giving an interview as doing the researcher a favour and therefore expect a return from the latter, which could be especially true

²² One of my interviewees told me after I asked why she did not want to be tape-recorded, 'you know in this city (I got to know her in a Chinese association, which I shall talk about in detail in the next paragraph), the Chinese circle is so limited. I do not want my stories being recorded and discussed by everybody'.

in the Chinese context. However, my identity as a busy student saved me in this sense as my participants all understood my everyday busy schedule. Their understanding made me feel very guilty as I knew that, due to their relatively small social circle, these women had few friends and some of them felt deeply excluded and isolated, therefore they would have liked to make friends with me after the interview and would have liked keep in touch with me regularly. I really appreciated their friendship, and I sometimes found it hard to refuse their invitations since they had offered a favour to me.

Data Processing and Writing up

All my interviews were conducted in Chinese Mandarin. In order to keep the original colour of the data and to better understand the underlying meaning of each word, I transcribed the data in Chinese and only translated selected quotes into English after analysis. In the transcription process, many researchers have mentioned their reluctance to review interviews (Warr, 2004; Darlington and Scott, 2002). As Dickson-Swift et al. suggest, transcribing powerful stories can be an emotional experience for researchers (Dickson-Swift, et al., 2007, p.337). For me, reviewing the tape records was another hard aspect in my data collection process. While doing the interview, when the researcher is unaware of what kind of story will come up, there is not much time to think and analyse the meaning behind each story. However, listening to the recordings gave me another chance to taste all the stories. The process of transcription became another opportunity to re-live the memories in my mind and to recall these women's bitter experiences. In some extreme cases, I couldn't even bear to transcribe my data immediately after the interview as the transcription process dragged me back into those stories and sometimes I had to leave them for a while until I was psychologically ready.

During the transcription process, my power as a researcher started to reveal itself as I became the one with final power to interpret the interviewees' stories. Many researchers have mentioned the problems that arise during transcription, such as

deliberately ignoring small details by deleting certain words to make the data look tidy and understandable (such as *ers*, *ohs* or pauses during the interview) (see Standing, 1998; also Edwards and Ribbens, 1998). Moreover, there are also problems with including facial expressions and the interview atmosphere, which could be very important for data collection. In order to avoid such problems, I carefully tried to include all the detailed information in my transcriptions and used brackets to record the interviewee's emotions, such as laughing, sobbing and sometimes their gestures. However, sometimes some editing was necessary for the sake of clarity.

I transcribed all the interviews, giving all my participants pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Instead of translating all the data into English, I did a preliminary selection and analysis of my data, and only translated the selected quotations for later analysis. With the four main themes that had already been designed to structure the interviews (see Table 1), I went through each transcript, cutting and pasting selected quotes to relocate them under their relevant themes. I also made a careful study of the 'remains' of each transcript in order to identify if there were any other issues my participants had mentioned, and this was how a number of sub-themes were generated during my data analysis process. For instance, many women talked about the different customs in Britain compared to China when they recalled their adaptation to British culture and society. I was also informed of women's concerns about living in a foreign country in their old age. Thus, in this way, I was able to extract some useful data to enrich my account of their migrant life experiences.

Interpreting the information in interviewees' data is another very important element during research (see Kvale, 1996). As my interviewees told me their stories in Chinese, I was not only able to gain a good understanding of their stories with the help of my mother tongue, but I also translated the data into appropriate English after I had fully understood the information behind it. When translating the quotes, I always avoided using formal language to avoid erasing the individuality of each participant. I tried to retain the linguistic diversity while

keeping the original meaning of my data in order to gain ‘conceptual equivalence or comparability of meaning’ (Birbili, 2000). However, ‘their own distinctive ways of speaking’ (Standing, 1998, p.191) became more or less invisible through my translation. In the process of translation, I found that the translator’s emotional involvement could also influence the outcome (also see Vulliamy, 1990, p.166). It is unavoidable for the translator to choose certain words to strengthen or lessen the impact of data, or impose their own feelings on certain issues through translation. There was always a struggle between being professional and standing by the side of my participants during the translation process. A specific instance occurred when an interviewee mentioned how her husband reacted when she wanted to pursue a higher degree in Britain. She used a term *zhe teng* to describe her husband’s attitude towards her plan. The term *zhe teng* is very colloquial in Chinese and can be used to describe either quarrelling or fighting; it could mean that her husband didn’t talk to her, moaned at her, quarrelled with her, or even presented more violent behaviour. I attempted to translate it into the husband ‘fought’ with my interviewee but then realised this could produce bias, thus I used the sentence ‘he was strongly against it’ to describe her husband’s attitude. When I tried to translate a Chinese term which had no appropriate colloquial English word to replace it, I sometimes chose to translate the Chinese term word by word into English, which turned out to produce a better effect. For example, many interviewees told me that while they were still in China they had learned that life in Britain would be hard and they had to get ready to *chi ku*. *Chi ku* is used as a verb in Chinese and doesn’t have an equivalent English term to match. I translated it word by word as ‘to taste bitterness’. In this way, I not only maintained the original meaning of the term itself, but also retained its cultural characteristics. Alternatively, I also used footnotes to explain a certain word when it had a complicated meaning.

Reflection and reflexivity in the analysis stage is another important issue that is always mentioned by feminist researchers. To avoid conflicts with my participants during the interviews, following the suggestions of Millen (1997), I always had to ‘forget’ my identity as a feminist researcher when my interviewees talked about

their choices and values regarding the sacrifices they had made for their husbands as a price women needed to pay for the family. As Millen (1997, np) put it, ‘individuals may not have a full awareness of the systems which surround and constrain them, and as researchers, we have a responsibility to illuminate these systems using their experiences, and illuminate their experiences using these systems’. Although I could not confront their ideas during the interview, while doing data analysis, I was able to interpret the data critically. Moreover, as many researchers have found, feminist research involves not only the stories of the researched, but also ‘telling ourselves a story about ourselves’ (Steier, 1991, p.3; also Graham, 1984). Although sometimes it is unavoidable to interpret the data in accordance with the researcher’s own understanding (see Cotterill and Letherby, 1993), I tried to detach my feelings and to do justice to their stories as accurately as I could.

In analysing the data, I was struck by my participants’ ideas about family and their putting the interests of others above their own. In searching for a way to make sense of their choices, I drew on Delphy and Leonard’s theory of marriage as a labour contract and the appropriation of women’s labour by men. While this theory was developed in relation to western societies, it fits well with the Chinese context. I also extended the idea of the marriage contract to a migration contract, which involves the exchange of women’s labour as part of the migration process, not only for their own benefit, but mostly for the social advancement of the whole family.

Summary

My fieldwork lasted longer than I expected, due to the comparatively small number of potential interviewees and their invisibility. However, trying to find interviewees was not the only problem I encountered. Other issues, such as the power balance, creating reciprocity, emotional management and leaving the field also presented challenges for me. However, from this experience, I not only

learned about my role as a researcher and the skills to conduct successful interviews, but also gained a deep understanding of my interviewees. I was touched by their sacrifice towards their families, their courage towards life and their contentment with their lives; at the same time, I came to a full realisation of the deeply embedded patriarchal influences on Chinese women. In the following chapters, I would like to present a picture of my participants' migration experiences via four parts: women's choices around migration, the settling down process, women's support for their husbands and their present lives in Britain.

Chapter Four

My Home Is Where My Husband Is: Chinese Wives' Attitude towards Migration

In Chinese people's eyes, those who migrated to developed countries were people full of mystery; women who could migrate with their husbands were perceived as even luckier: by marrying a right person, they obtained the precious opportunity which other people had to work hard for. While emphasising the bright side of the migration decision, however, people failed to detect these women's vulnerability when the husbands were the main organisers and beneficiaries of going aboard. For the husbands, going aboard meant obtaining social and educational advancement; nevertheless, the wives had to follow cultural and gender traditions to assist their husbands in the pursuit of their personal goals. One of the striking features of my participants was their high education level and social status in China. While the majority of them held a BA or above in China and enjoyed reasonably high income, my participants still talked about traditional labour division in the family. Their difficulties in leaving things behind in China were perceived as personal sentiments and therefore had to give way to the bigger goal in terms of the advancement of the family as a whole. Although most of them successfully transferred their personal sacrifice into a bargaining chip with their husbands in the future, their reaction was triggered by their husbands' decision. In this sense, it is important to look closely at my participants' considerations in order to gain better understanding of these women's choices. I would argue that my participants' attitude to their family roles led them into their decisions; therefore it is very necessary to look at women's familial responsibilities when they were in China.¹ Their wifely roles within the family led to the various reasons women had for becoming trailing wives, including their responsibility for husbands' career development and taking care of the family. Women also talked about their determination to safeguard their marriages and provide children with a better future. They also hoped to derive personal gains from the family migration.

¹ General background information was given in Chapter Two.

Although the wives' duties were the top priority, my participants had struggles when leaving behind their lives in China, which I will discuss at the end of this chapter.

Family Responsibility

My participants informed me that they took primary responsibility for domestic tasks when in China, in addition to their full-time work in their *danwei*. Wei Xiaoping (46), who only had a high school certificate in China and later obtained her college qualification through self-taught education,² talked about her family role when in China,

He [her husband] was a kind of da nan zi zhu yi [‘big man ideology’, meaning ‘patriarchal’] at home and did not even bother to wash his own socks [laugh]. He was always busy with his work and I did everything for him. But I felt content with it really, because that is what our women are supposed to do, isn't it? (Wei Xiaoping, 46)

In her case, there was not much career advancement for her due to her comparatively lower education background. She obtained a job as a librarian in the university, which depended on her husband's influence and personal contacts (her husband was an outstanding lecturer there). In this way, she was tightly bound to her husband's career development. Note that at the end of the quote, she finished by saying ‘our women’ (*wo men nu ren*) as plural, which invoked women's inescapable destiny in a gendered society. This strategy was widely used by women when talking about the choices they made. Wei Xiaoping's attitude about women formed her low self-expectation about her career; hence she happily played the feminine role in the family and would rather support her husband fully by shouldering all the family chores. This, as she told me, was the only thing she could do for him. Wei Xiaoping's view was echoed by most of my participants

² The Self-Taught Higher Education Examination (STE) started in the early 1980s with the aim to provide opportunities for those who cannot study in universities. However, STE certificates are regarded as lower value due to the informal way of learning.

regardless of their education level. One of my participants Xiao Chunhua (42) was an English teacher in one of the best high schools in her city; she also enjoyed high social prestige in China brought by her job. Despite the fact that her work was heavy and tedious, she still did most of the housework at home; her own explanation for this was that her husband started to do a degree soon after their marriage and needed to concentrate more on his studies. She furthermore excused her husband by saying that ‘besides, he did not even know how to cook instant noodles [laugh] (Xiao Chunhua, 42).’ Xiao Chunhua justified doing most of the housework in terms of her husband’s need to study; but the situation remained unchanged after her husband finished studying and went back to work. She then exempted him by claiming his lack of talent for housework chores. As she said that she did ‘most of the housework’ at home, it might be that her husband did not need to learn to do things. Therefore, my participants’ educational background had no effect on their family responsibilities. Some other research also echoed this family pattern. For instance, after interviewing 38 dual-earner couples with higher education backgrounds in Beijing, Zuo and Bian (2001) found that women were still taking the main responsibility for most household work and tended to see it as fair.

As regulated by the marriage labour contract, women do whatever is necessary to cater for the needs of their husbands (see Delphy and Leonard, 1992). In both of the cases above, women provided household labour in addition to their paid work. In the 1970s, the development of western economy brought the change of women’s gender role from ‘housewifisation’ to ‘dehousewifisation’;³ women in the west experienced the transformation from full-time housewives to independent wage earners (see Ochiai, 2008; Maria, 1998). While in China, under the communist social system, women were promoted by the CCP into full-time labourers, this ‘dehousewifisation’ was pressed by the CCP and was not Chinese women’s conscious choice (see also Chapter Two). Hence, as predicted by Sechiyama (as cited in Ochiai, 2008), with China’s process of social modernisation, Chinese women are going back to the stage of ‘housewifisation’

³ This concept of ‘housewifisation’ originally came from Maria Mies and has been taken by Ochiai to explain the current situation of Chinese wives.

while a conscious ‘dehousewifisation’ has not yet occurred. More current studies on Chinese wives also indicate the trend of women focusing more on their household duties where they are supported by their rich husbands (see Chapter Two). Many scholars indicate that China’s low-wage system in actuality is an obstacle to most women becoming full-time housewives as there is need for at least two full-time workers to sustain the family (see Gunkel, et al., 2007; Meindl, et al., 1994; Sheng et al., 1992). Therefore for most Chinese women, the marriage contract is even more exploited, it is not simply about women exchanging domestic labour for maintenance since their paid work contributes to that maintenance. As Delphy and Leonard (1992, pp. 117-18) put it ‘for even when women have well-paid full-time employment [...] are still responsible for most of the domestic work. The domestic work is therefore clearly done for nothing’.

It is widely recognised that in marriage relationship, the party with better social and financial resources usually enjoys greater authority (see Lennon and Rosenfield, 1994). Although my participants were well-educated, their educational levels were in most cases still lower than their husbands’,⁴ a lower income was also informed from this group of women. Interestingly, my participants first made it clear to me that they did share the family decision making, which might suggest an egalitarian relationship in the family. However, these women would further reveal that they would prefer to leave the final decision-making power to their husbands. It was especially true with my three participants who used to earn more than their husbands in China. For instance, Ni Xingzhen (40) worked as a senior accountant in Chinese branch of an international enterprise and earned much more than her husband who was an engineer in a state-owned factory,

Even when my job title was higher than my husband, I always asked for his opinions about my work and life, because it is very sensitive in China if wife earns more than her husband, therefore I always kept alert and made him the priority above everything... In order to give more time to him and my

⁴ 77% of husbands held higher educational qualifications than wives before migration; the rest of 23% were equally qualified.

daughter, I seldom went to the banquets and other social activities organised by my company (Ni Xingzhen, 40).

The economic advantage was such a sensitive topic between her husband and her and it did not bring her the satisfaction of equality in the family; instead, she behaved more humbly in order to make it seem that he was the one who was more valued. Although her avoiding social events in her workplace could help her to set up the image of a submissive wife in front of her husband, it might also be her strategy not to overshadow her husband. As Liu (2007; 2008) notes, the social event is a very important part of Chinese business culture, people obtain their social advancement by attending these events. Although Ni Xingzhen's consciousness of being a good wife and mother stopped her attending these social events, she would be full awareness of the consequences which could seriously affect her career development. It was also interesting when Ni Xingzhen mentioned that she gave all the money she earned at work to her husband; the couple also reached an agreement that they would only rely on her husband's earnings for household expenses and save her earnings for emergencies. With the existence of Chinese traditional idea of 'man is the head of the family', the fact that wife earned more than the husband could impair his feeling of manhood and was seen as his lack of responsibility for family support. By carefully protecting her husband's dignity, Ni Xingzhen managed not to break the traditional practice and meanwhile, let her husband keep his role as the main breadwinner.

Bai Kexin (42) was a senior manager in a big insurance company in China and earned more than her husband. Despite her own success, she expressed her view about women's economic performance in Chinese society and her own understanding about women gender role, 'our women are unlikely to achieve anything in Chinese society and they always need to depend on men, it can make life easier, can't it (Bai Kexin, 42)?' By expressing a sexist view on Chinese women, Bai Kexin actually played down her own achievement in terms of traditional ideas of what women should be. This might be read as her surrender to the patriarchal society: she would rather shift her ambition onto her husband despite her own success. Again using 'our women' as plural, Bai Kexin was

appealing to women in general. Bai Kexin's attitude could be easily understood if put it in the context of Chinese labour market. According to the CCP, in order to emancipate women thoroughly and to realise real equality between men and women, it was necessary to encourage women to participate in production and labour; through employment, women were to acquire their economic independence and stand in the same position with men (see Chapter Two). Conversely, in recent decades, with the change of economic development strategy, the attention of China's government has shifted away from emancipation of the female labour force; instead, the government claims that women would benefit from the economic development as a part of whole society (see Korabik, 1993; Judd, 1990). In actuality, scholars inside and outside China have argued that the gender policies of CCP is to consistently place gender equality second to the economic development, with the fact that CCP view the gender equality to be achieved through the broader task of class revolution (see Wolf, 1985; Andors, 1983; Stacey, 1983). For example, during the initial period of collectivisation in the 1950s, the country experienced temporary labour surplus, the Chinese government thus instituted the Five Goods Campaign to call women to stay home as 'socialist housewives' (Woo, 1994). During the Cultural Revolution, when Chinese government emphasised on the class differences, women were called back into the work force under the slogan that 'anything men can do, women can do also' (Jacka, 1990). In the more recent period when reforms on state-owned enterprises were launched, women were again encouraged to go back to their domestic domain and leave the limited work opportunities to men (Liu, 2007). Although the All-China Women's Federation has been actively worked for Chinese women's interests (see Wang, 1997), however, as a government arm, this organisation accepts the government's decisions (See Edwards, 2008; Woo, 1994). The result of this, as a number of researchers have pointed out, is to create more open gender discrimination and led women continue to be disadvantaged in the Chinese labour market (see Chapter Two). Consequently, women's less competitive position influenced my participants' choices when conflicts arise between their own or their husbands' social advancement.

All except one woman emphasised their willingness to be traditional in the marriage and perceived it as very important. As Pei Xianhong (38) explained, *'If you are in a higher social status than your husband or doing better than him, he will feel shamed and will be looked down upon by people who think that he listens to whatever his wife says and is a quguanyan'*⁵ (Pei Xianhong, 38).

There was a tradition of *'nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei'* (literal translation is men in charge of working outside and women inside of house), hence men's ability to support the family financially was taken as a display of their masculinity (Zhang, 2011). While now in China, women are enjoying seemingly equal rights with men, the persistence of male dominance conditions men's role in the family, and men's economic power is viewed as a display of their manhood and 'feeds into men's masculinised sense of self' (Yeoh and Willis, 2004, p.158; also Zhang, 2011). In China, a man who earns less than his wife would be perceived as 'not being a proper man' and be mocked as *'chi ruan fan'* (literally 'eating soft rice', means 'relying on the wife for a living'). On the other hand, however, a woman who has great career ambition but takes less household responsibility would be labelled as 'selfish' and 'not a proper woman'⁶ (see Zuo and Bian, 2001; Judd, 1990; also Wolf, 1985). Thus the husband's role is bound to work and women's to household duties. As Bai Kexin (42) said, 'I mean women's right place is home, it is undeniable.' Guo Xumei (37) also agreed by saying that 'when you are married, I mean as a wife, you need to look after your family properly.' As she further revealed, 'you have to always remember that you are a woman, and you cannot be radical [...] if you want your husband to respect you, you have to be a good woman (Guo Xumei, 37).' Guo Xumei used 'you' ('ni') in Chinese as the subject, which is another word when talking about generality. The word 'radical' here could be interpreted as not over passing the boundaries, being docile and conforming; hence Guo Xumei seemed to theorize how women should behave to be good wives in men's eyes. Her words would be more understandable in the

⁵ Literally means 'wife controls tight', used of some men who are afraid of and controlled by their wives, which is regarded as great shame for Chinese men.

⁶ According to Confucianism, *'nu zi wu cai bian shi de'* (it is a virtue for women to have no abilities). Thus women were traditionally not encouraged to advance themselves in the society. Even in recent decades, the idea that 'men are more able' still is the social norm and discourages women from pursuing their own success (see Zuo and Bian, 2001; Judd, 1990; also Wolf, 1985).

context of traditional ideas about women being obedient, timid, respectful and selfless (see Chapter Two). Therefore the feudal social norms and practices in China still persist.

Understanding these women's role inside the home is helpful to understand my participants' choices between their husbands' social advancement and their own career, as well as the reasons they gave up their own careers to support that of their husbands. Nevertheless their considerations were derived from the gender-role embedded in Chinese cultural context to be responsible wives. My participants talked about their own considerations on their migration decisions, since they took it as their responsibility to look after the family, to assist their husbands' career development; to build the stability of marriage and to ensure their children's better future. Although not a major drive, my participants also expected some personal gains which could be associated with their husbands' prospects; some also took their sacrifices as a necessity in order to receive rewards in the future.

The Decision to Come to Britain

All participants revealed that the migration plan was initiated by their husbands, for the sake of their husbands' career and educational advancement. It was true that all the women were given opportunities to express their opinions, but how much they were valued in this decision needs to be explored. Some participants felt powerless in migration decision making:

It was after three years of marriage. I had just had my baby girl, and one day he came back from work looking excited and told me there was a brilliant chance for him to study abroad as the university he worked for had two vacancies [to study in Britain]. I remembered I was sitting on my bed with my new-born baby girl in my arms, I still cannot figure out why but I suddenly started crying as I knew he would go for the chance and leave me alone to look after the baby. I asked him: 'so are you deserting us [her and her daughter]?' he

looked rather scared and said, 'no, of course not. If you want to go with me, just come' ... Two years after I also came with my kid (Zhang Fang, 35).

I did not want him to come [to Britain for PhD studies] as he already worked in a foreign investment company in China. I told him that was a good job, but he wouldn't listen to me as his head was full of the ideas of studying in Britain [laugh], so he did not listen to me (Feng Jia, 39).

The women above were asked their opinion only when their husbands had already made up their minds to go abroad, thus the consent they wanted from their wives was more or less formal rather than asking for permission. In some cases, the participants were not even consulted in terms of the migration decision. As Ren Ruiyun (35) stated:

One day, he [her husband] came back home with an offer from a UK university and told me he tried his luck to apply for a PhD position and was accepted. I knew he had not just 'tried his luck', he longed for that opportunity for a long time (Ren Ruiyun, 35).

Ren Ruiyun's husband had planned for a long time to go abroad for a higher degree and only informed her when he was accepted. By doing so, he automatically deprived Ren Ruiyun of her opportunity to actively engage in the decision making process. Ren Ruiyun also told me that she had to support him, as it would make her feel guilty if she failed to act according to the social expectations. Knowing that their husbands had made up their minds, most women took it for granted that it was their husbands' decision to go to the UK, thus it was their responsibility to follow. Some women were even surprised that I should raise such a question 'why did you choose to come with your husband to Britain?' They merely answered that 'well, my husband wanted to come and I just followed' or 'we are a family, we need to be together'. Their own struggles or feelings were ignored even by themselves. Delphy and Leonard (1992) highlight the variation in work done by women to support their husbands' jobs or careers, including organising of family life around the husbands as well as their doing of all kinds of tasks directly related to their husbands' work (see also Finch 1983) to provide

support. For my participants, this involved uprooting themselves to travel to the other side of the world.

All the study participants mentioned the importance of their husband's career development, which was the major reason for them to give up their own careers in China to come to Britain, and which they saw as a way of showing support to their husbands. However there were differences in the ways the participants reacted to the decision and the consequences for their own careers. While some participants expressed their frustration over the loss of their career, most of them just adopted an accepting attitude towards their husbands' migration decision and gave more weight to their husbands' advancement. As Bai Kexin (42) said, 'after all, a husband's career is more important [than a wife's].' Tan Zhihua (45) also expressed a similar attitude that 'men are more attached to their careers, he [her husband] wouldn't be happy if he couldn't achieve what he wanted.' Bai Kexin and Tan Zhihua appeal to generalised assumptions about 'a husband' and 'men'. In this way, they prioritised their husbands' career development over their own in the name of family advancement. On the other hand, the traditional family pattern of men being the main family providers and women family carers in Chinese culture remains. Thus the husband's role should be bound to work and women's to household duties.

There were five women who did initially express doubts about leaving their jobs. Ultimately it was their sense of responsibility towards the family that made them migrate. Pei Xianhong (38), who held a senior position when in China, did not want to come with her husband to Britain because of her own career. But at the same time, the couple decided to send their daughter, who was nine years old then, to Britain with her husband. She recalled how she finally decided to quit her job: 'my daughter begged me to go with them as she said "come on, Papa cannot even cook instant noodles, how can I live with him for two years? I will be starved to death" (Pei Xianhong, 38).' From that moment, she began to realise that it was her responsibility, whether she wanted to or not, she had no other choice.

Ni Xingzhen (40) had a very well paid job in China. At first, she planned to keep her job to save money for her husband's PhD study in Britain. In the meantime, the couple decided that their daughter would come to Britain with the husband for a better education. Only four weeks after her husband and daughter left, she received a call from her husband, who complained that there was too much to do and he could not concentrate on his studies:

It was only one month [after they came], my husband called me. He told me that I must quit the job now and come to help him. As there were so many things he needed to do such as renting a house, sending and picking up my daughter from school, and cooking and shopping, all those things...I handed my resignation letter the next day and came here after ten days [she had a dependant's visa already] (Ni Xingzhen, 40).

Afraid of distracting her husband's attention from his research, she decided to quit her job and came to join the family. Despite her frustration over having to give up her 'beloved' job, she described the satisfaction she felt when she knew that 'my husband cannot have an easy life without me looking after him.' Thus her value to the family is emphasised.

My participants frequently mentioned that as wives, it was their responsibility to look after their husbands and their families, especially when there were children involved. That was why they left behind everything in China to come to the UK. For example, Tan Zhihua (45) said 'I came two months after I gave birth. [Since] my husband was here, I had to come to look after him.' Similarly, Wang Qiong (44) stated that '[I came] for our family reunion. A family has to be together and I need to look after them.' Mao Juan (45) explained it plainly that 'I am a wife and mother and I need to look after them [her husband and son].' These participants all talked about their attitude towards looking after the family and being a responsible care provider. Indeed, the deeply-embedded gender role among all participants made them believe that as wives, they should shoulder the domestic tasks and childcare and keep the family physically intact. In addition, under China's traditional family pattern, women had only two means to stabilise their status: one was to bear a son so that their husband's families could maintain continuity, the

other was to be a carer and good at housework (Min, 1999). Since the introduction of the one-child policy in 1978, the desire to have a son rather than a daughter has been suppressed to some extent, especially in cities; therefore being a good housekeeper seems to be the way for women to demonstrate their value in a marriage. In this regard, by making efforts to fulfil their role as family carers, wives might expect more bargaining power to maximise their life options and security in the family (Kandiyoti, 1988), although this is not the only method my participants adopted to secure their marriage.

Seven of 22 participants mentioned that another reason that they accompanied their husbands to Britain was to safeguard and maintain their marriage, by 'keeping a close eye on him (Yuan Wanfang, 43).' Their worries can be regarded as reasonable because in China today, working or studying in an advanced country is regarded as a reflection of a person's ability, the possibility that the husbands would be admired by other women in China or even in Britain could make wives uneasy.⁷ With China's opening up, the new social environment of market economy created a huge income gap between the rich and the poor, the increasingly popularity of money worship has also affected Chinese women's choices of partners (see Farrer, 2002). With women becoming more pragmatic, they give great emphasis on their potential partners' material conditions while romantic love is viewed as less important when committing to a relationship (see Farrer, 2002; Hoing and Hershatter, 1988). Thus, my participants worried that their husbands' experience of studying abroad could add to their value in the eyes of young women and make them very popular.

Su Linqing (35) worked as a nurse in China and got to know her husband's mother by offering home medical service every day. Her husband worked in a university in Britain and had divorced several years previously. Although he had one failed marriage behind him and was ten years older than her, she married him one month after they met. As she put it, 'I think I am lucky, he has good external

⁷ One of the participants reported that when she was in China, she read a novel about a Chinese businessman in South Africa, in which the hero who had a wife in China was pursued by a Chinese student in South Africa and finally divorced his wife.

conditions, there would be many young girls waiting in the queue to marry him, but he finally chose me (Su Linqing, 35).’ Although she did not know her husband very well, Su still rushed into marriage and thought she was lucky to be chosen. She took him as her salvation and, according to her, it was her luck to meet him because her husband had a good career and social status (he worked as a lecturer in a university in Britain). By emphasising ‘young girls’ (*nian qing nu hai*), she also hinted at the age difference between herself, a woman in her mid-thirties, and those who were much younger. Thus, this could be another reason she felt lucky. As she said, compared with those young women, she was very much disadvantaged but still managed to find a good partner, especially somebody in Britain.

In China, there is a saying that ‘women are bean waste after forty, while men are still flowers’ (*nan ren si shi yi zhi hua, nu ren si shi dou fu zha*), from which one can sense the different social standards towards men and women and the importance of youth for a woman. As most of my participants were in their thirties or forties, the worry that they had become ‘yellow-faced old women’ (*huang lian po*) and that their husbands might receive admiration from young girls could make them especially watchful about their marriages, which, to some extent, also helped them to make up their minds to come with their husbands.

You know for our women, age and beauty are very important. It is true you need to have some nei han [inner quality] to attract your husband but you know men are all visual animals. When you don’t have your beauty anymore, the only thing you can do is to keep a close eye on him, in a word, don’t give him any chances to make mistakes (Yuan Wanfang, 43).

Using the plural ‘our women’ (*wo men nu ren*), Yuan Wanfang appealed to the general situation of the importance of being physically attractive for all women. Thus it was reasonable for Yuan Wanfang to worry about her marriage when she thought her beauty was fading while her husband's status was going upwards. According to her, she could never be too watchful of him, and it seemed the only

option she had. Facing a similar situation, Feng Jia stated bluntly that she decided to go to Britain with her husband to protect her marriage:

[I came here with my husband] to protect my marriage [laugh]. You know in this kind of world, everybody is realistic. If I had not come, then it was very likely that he would find somebody else here and then divorce me. Say if I was still in China now, I am sure he would have already found another one (Feng Jia, 39).

Feng Jia appeared to be very realistic about her marriage. Being at a disadvantaged age, she worried that her husband could get to know younger women given that he was studying in the university. Also, she worried that the openness of Western culture would be a bad influence on her husband. Moreover, since she was only a college graduate, there might be communication difficulties between her and her highly educated husband. The thought that he could find a female soul-mate in university might also be the reason for her to come to Britain. It is as if, facing the insecurity in their marriage brought about by the husband's migration decision, women had two options: either to stay and bind their men tight to them or to be prepared for divorce.

Both of these two participants talked about their fear of divorce. Such struggles to save their marriages are in fact very common in recent years in China when the wife confronts her 'middle-age crisis' when the husband is experiencing career advancement and embracing his '*di er chun*' (second spring) in life (also see Xiao, 2010). While 'getting divorced' was traditionally a forbidden topic in China with the Confucian emphasis on family as an intact union (see Tiwari, et al., 2010; Kang, 2010; Diamant, 2000), it is more and more acceptable in China (Xiao, 2010; Parish and Farrer, 2000). However, people have two different attitudes towards divorced men and women, with the latter often named as '*yuan fu*' (abandoned women) and blamed for not being able to 'find her own self' (Xiao, 2010, p.736). Meanwhile, despite the promulgation of a series Chinese Marriage Laws which have made divorce easier to obtain and which protect women's rights in divorce cases, they could only protect women's rights in relation to property

division (see Kang, 2010); for middle-aged women who are being marginalised in the labour market, to divorce is to lose the financial and social protections that a marriage can offer (See Xiao, 2010; Diamant, 2000). Women's disadvantaged status might make them more tolerant towards their spouses and that could be why my participants became very determined to accompany their husbands in order to 'protect herself with what the marital relationship could provide' (Xiao, 2000, p.738). Moreover, it is very difficult for divorced women to re-marry, this is even worse for those who have children, especially boys. In the Chinese cultural context, a male child is always the inheritance of the father's family. Hence, men in China feel uneasy about helping to bring up somebody else's child (Diamant, 2000). Sensing all the difficulties, married women are likely to manage their relationships carefully and think twice when problems arise.

For the participants who had children before they left China, a better education for their children was also a major reason for them to migrate to Britain. As Xiao Chunhua (42) told me, 'it was also for the future of our son, as the competition in China is greater than here and he could enjoy a better education as well.' Qi Xiaowa (39) also made it clear that she wanted her daughter to 'learn some more English.' Ni Xingzhen (40) similarly said that 'working in a foreign company made me realise the importance of English. Although my daughter also went to English language training classes in China there was no English speaking environment.'⁸Therefore, it was important for the child/children to be educated in Britain as a 'family strategy'.

Chinese parents have a long tradition of emphasising the value of children's academic achievement (see Chao, 1994; Li, 2004; Chen and Uttal, 1988). The famous Chinese saying *mong mu san qian*⁹ (Mencius's mother relocated home

⁸ The last two decades saw the flourish of 'English fever' in P.R.C., which was driven mainly by the economic development and the social modernity (see Wolff, 2010). English is one of the four necessary skills to be a modern Chinese as well as a symbol of status.

⁹ This saying derives from a story of China's famous sage Mencius (C.371-C.289 BC) whose father died in his early age and who was brought up by his mother alone. It is said that his mother first located their home near a graveyard, and since then Mencius started to copy mourners' behaviour and cried all the time. Seeing this, his mother moved the house next to an open market; therefore Mencius began to imitate vendors doing business. Worried about his well-being, his

three times) celebrated a mother's spirit of choosing the right environment for the sake of children's education and well-being. The traditional idea of '*wang zi cheng long, wang nu cheng feng*'¹⁰ still prevails among Chinese people and gives their high expectations for their children's educational outcomes. Moreover, given the age of my interviewees, they all grew up before or during the Cultural Revolution Movement when China was in a disordered state while people suffered from limited material and cultural resources.¹¹ In 1978, two years after the Cultural Revolution ended, the one-child policy was established in China. Despite its shortcomings, this policy allows parents to give all their attention to their precious 'only child in the family'. They adopt a 'highly permissive attitude' towards their only children (Liu 2008, p.416) and do not want their children to suffer what they had suffered in their childhood. Thus children in China are showered with great amounts of attention and resources by their parents. The parents are usually willing to invest a great deal of money in their children's education in order to give them every opportunity. It has become common sense in China that if you do not raise your child up into 'somebody', you are guilty of 'murdering' your own child. In addition, for Chinese people overseas, academic achievement is not only as a mean to acquire personal advancement and higher social status, but is also taken as a means of overcoming discrimination and gaining more opportunities in host countries (see Lum and Char, 1985). Thus it is highly likely that they pass this belief to their children and willing to invest all they can to guarantee their children a better future.

Xin Ya (47) stands out as an exemplary Chinese parent. Her husband was a lecturer in Britain and they had two children. They were saving every penny to

mother finally neighbored the house on a school and since then Mencius started to behave well and gradually became one of the greatest scholars in Chinese history.

¹⁰ This term literally means 'hoping for the son to grow up into a dragon and daughter to grow up into a phoenix'. As dragon and phoenix are the most sacred symbols in Chinese culture, this normally means hoping the child becomes 'somebody' when grown up.

¹¹ The Cultural Revolution Movement (or the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution) in China between 1966 and 1976 brought not only huge damage to China's economic development and traditional culture, but also the Chinese education system. During those ten years, schools were closed and the university entrance examinations were also cancelled; intellectuals were regarded as anti-communist and sent to rural areas for proletarian re-education. The propaganda of 'knowledge is useless' led a whole generation of Chinese youth to be less-educated.

send their children to grammar schools. As she told me, ‘my children are my only future. If it were not for them [their education], I would not come to this country, no way! (Xin Ya, 47).’ Therefore, her leaving of her life in China to ensure a better education for her children could be seen as an extension of Chinese style of parental love. Fortunately, all her hard work had paid off. She told me that her children were top students in their classes and her eldest daughter was even awarded a scholarship to a top five university in Britain. Even her husband thought that it was their children who benefited most from their migration decision. There was only one woman, Feng Jia (39), who did not think that coming to Britain would benefit her son a lot. As her husband only had half sponsorship from the university he was in, the financial pressure on her family made it impossible for them to send their son to training courses; she mentioned her worries about the future of her son as she thought her child had fallen behind his contemporaries in China,

I don't think it is good for my son. If we were in China, we would have enough money to send him to all kinds of training schools; but since we now don't have that much money, we couldn't really afford it. It is true my son can speak really good English now, but compared to other children [in China], he still has more things to learn (Feng Jia, 39).

Feng Jia made it clear that due to the financial constraint the family faced at that time, her son could not attend training classes as most children did in China. On the other hand, her account also reveals the keen competition Chinese youth face in China. Research on Chinese parents suggests that parents are willing to make an investment in the education of their only child to add value on the child's social and economic advancement in the future (see Fong, 2004; Huang and Yeoh, 2005). This, from another perspective, can also justify my participants' choice of coming to Britain.

In some cases, women actively took the migration opportunity as a way to escape from the old environment for a better one, although they were all clear that the opportunity was a by-product of their husbands' decision:

I was fed up with the job I did in China...I did not want him to come here. But once he made up his mind, I also thought it could be a good opportunity for me to leave that environment (Feng Jia, 39).

Guo Xumei (37) also mentioned similar thoughts when her husband had the opportunity to come to Britain. She worked as an English interpreter in a state-owned factory, was bored with her everyday routine and felt there were no opportunities for anything better:

I wanted to work in a place where I could achieve my potential. Since he [her husband] got the chance to come here, I thought it might also be a good chance for me to change (Guo Xumei, 37).

Only these two women were happy to give up their jobs in China. Interestingly, one of them was Feng Jia who initially showed strong resistance to migration. Her reaction could be read as a complete change of her mind and a total surrender to her husband's migration proposal: since it was impossible to change her husband's mind, it would be easier for herself to rationalise his idea. Under such considerations could she talk about taking the migration opportunity as a way to escape from the old environment to a better one, although she clearly knew the opportunity was merely a by-product of her husband's migration decision. Most women tended to see their following their husband as self-sacrifice. They transferred their personal sacrifice into the husband's debt to gain more bargaining power. They also had their own individual ways to put pressure on their husbands, or skilfully remind them of their responsibilities to the family. For example, in order to raise enough money for her husband's fees, Ren Ruiyun (35) decided to sell the flat her parents bought her. This deeply moved her husband and he promised her to 'do his best.' According to Ren Ruiyun (35), it later turned out to be the best way 'to motivate him.' Feng Jia (39) and Xiao Chunhua (42) also mentioned their experience of pushing their husbands by reminding them of the sacrifices they had made and emphasising their husbands' responsibilities for the future. As Xiao Chunhua (42) stated, 'I kept telling my husband that as I had to give up my job and sacrificed so much for him, he would have to work harder on

his studies.’ Although most of the time her husband remained silent, she believed that she had successfully put pressure on him. Ren Ruiyun (35) also expressed a similar thought when talking about her understanding of ‘sacrifice’,

If one day he became successful and realised that I had not done anything when he was struggling here alone, he would also not willingly share his success with me [laugh]. [...] I mean if he gets a good job after his studies, my life will also be changed (Ren Ruiyun, 35).

First, she made it clear that in the typical Chinese family, men expected women to sacrifice. While women obeyed, they also took it as a way to stabilise their family status. Second she mentioned the ‘no pain, no gain’ idea which three other participants also talked about, e.g. sacrificing their interests for their husbands’ in the short term for a better life in the long run. As Zhang Fang (35) told me, ‘I thought it [accompanying her husband to the UK] was a good way to improve our social status and living standard, [...] after all, the husband’s future is also your future.’ In this regard, women tied their fate closely to their husbands’ social advancement.

Delphy and Leonard (1992) described marriage as a labour contract, by entering which, women’s labour was appropriated by their husbands. Being attached to their husbands, Delphy and Leonard argued that women do all kinds of tasks to add the value of their husbands’ achievements (Delphy and Leonard, 1992; see also Jackson, 1996; Finch, 1983). Women’s dependent identity decided the rewards they could receive were based on the husbands’ prosperity and good will. In this sense, the marriage contract is far from a direct exchange. By agreeing to their husbands’ proposal to come aboard, my participants admitted that accompanying their husbands was unavoidable, since that was part of the job they needed to take on as wives. In the meantime, they justified their personal sacrifice as to better assist their husbands. Moreover, these women also expected some personal gains; they regarded their sacrifice for their husbands as an investment for rewards that they, as women, could not achieve independently. In this regard, an unspoken contract seemed to be formulated in the eyes of these women. As

Delphy and Leonard (1992) stated, the unequal nature of marriage contract eventually led to the valuelessness of women's work when it is incorporated in the husbands' achievements; my participants also experienced the same situation in their migration lives. This migration contract, which I derived from Delphy and Leonard's concept of marriage contract, is an important approach I adopt to analyse the migrant lives of my participants, and will be further explored in the following chapters.

Things that were Hard to Leave Behind

Once the migration decision was made, most participants began to realise that there were many things they found hard to leave. Even Qi Xiaowa (39), who had previously imagined that the outside world was glamorous and who had dreamed about going aboard, started to question her decision when confronted with her reality. As she recalled, '[after we made the decision], all things gradually came up [...] It was like waking up from a dream and then all realities came up (Qi Xiaowa, 39).' Most of my interviewees expressed similar concerns which were mainly focused on two areas: the split with their extended families and the reluctance to separate from their jobs.

The majority of participants talked about the sense of guilt they had towards their elderly when unable to perform their filial piety. As Feng Jia (39) told me, 'It was my parents I kept worrying about. They are getting old and need somebody to look after them, [but if I came to Britain], I could not do anything (Feng Jia, 39).'

Bai Kexin (42) also mentioned that 'you know it [coming to Britain] disturbed me so much and I felt I owe so much to my parents...I kept feeling guilty about it [not being able to serve her parents].' Hao Yuxin (43) also expressed her sense of guilty as 'my parents endured untold hardships to bring me up and send me to university; but when it was my turn to earn money and support them, I had to run to here, I am not a filial daughter at all.' The traditional Chinese practice required children to look after their elderly parents in return for being cared for (see

Cheung and Kwan, 2009; Bartlett and Phillips, 1997). Therefore children in the family were likely to carry the responsibilities for the care of elderly parents in China. This traditional practice was reinforced by the CCP, due to the Chinese government's failure to provide a social security system for Chinese elderly¹² (see Sheng and Settles, 2006). However, since the family care work is gendered, it is always female family members who shoulder the duty of care giving while males provide financial support (Ngan and Wong, 1996; Zhan and Montgomery, 2003). Being unable to provide physical care therefore created the sense of guilt in my participants, this was especially the case when the elderly were in poor health. While some of them tried to fulfil their filial piety by postponing their departure date, their feeling of self-blame could haunt them for long. As some women told me:

My mother is not in good health as she has very severe arthritis in her right leg. I got my visa in February last year [2008], but I had to postpone my ticket for two months as I felt I had to stay to look after her. (Su Linqing, 35)

It was my parents [I felt hard to leave behind]. Before I came, my father just had a really big operation on his heart and he needed people to look after him. I stayed in China to keep him company until he nearly recovered. But the time when I was about to go, I felt my heart was torn apart, I am not joking, it was a real pain, like somebody cutting my heart with a blunt knife [sobbing]. (Yuan Wanfang, 43)

Interestingly enough, most women addressed their sense of guilt towards their own parents instead of their parents-in-law.¹³ Despite the traditional saying in China that 'married daughters are like sprinkled water on the ground,'¹⁴ the economic empowerment of women in P.R.C. enabled them to maintain relationships with their natal family after marriage and to provide them with all support needed (see Chapter Two). However, with their taking the role of wives as

¹² Even in these days, people who send their elderly to institutional facilities such as care homes or residential homes are regarded as unfilial. Therefore most people would prefer looking after the elderly themselves or with the help of paid carers.

¹³ While the issue of women and the in-laws is embedded in a rather complicated cultural and social context, I would rather leave it untouched.

¹⁴ Once a daughter is married, she no longer has connections with her family; just like the water on the floor which cannot be collected back to the basin. It is symbolizing that the relationship between the bride and her parents was completely cut off after the wedding day (also see Chapter Two).

priority, this empowerment in actual created the sense of remorse in my participants since they failed to perform their roles as daughters.

Women's caring role can also be extended to providing psychological counselling and balancing the relationships among family members, and there were some participants talked about their concerns of how to maintain the extended family harmony once they were absent. For example, Guo Xumei's (37) father had passed away many years before, since she was the elder of only two children in the family, and she had brought her mother from their village to the city she lived in and looked after her mother for many years. But since she decided to go to Britain with her husband, she had no choice but to send her mother back to live with her younger brother and her sister-in-law. This behaviour, in her view, was a totally betrayal of her beloved mother:

You know in China the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law will never be harmonious and my mother used to complain a lot to me about my sister-in-law. So I thought if I had to come here, who could she talk to if there was anything happened between her and my sister-in-law? But there was nothing I could do at that very moment. Sometimes when I think about my mother's face and her life at my brother's, I just could not sleep. (Guo Xumei, 37).

While women frequently talked about their familial responsibilities, the fact of giving up their own careers was also frustrating to many of them; this is especially the case for those participants who received higher education in China and had potential for their own career advancement. Pei Xianhong, a former dean in a chemistry lab, mentioned her own feeling when she had to quit her job, 'it was a really big and hard decision for me...before quitting my job, I was very low and always lost my temper with my husband. (Pei Xianhong, 38).' Zhang Fang (35) also had the similar feeling when she had to resign as an English teacher in a high school in China:

For me, it was my students I could not really forget, their smiles, their faces, and all their good and bad [...] you know they were just like my own family members. But I knew that

was also my job, I mean as a wife, you have to be responsible for your family and your husband (Zhang Fang, 35).

I love my job. It was true I struggled so much when I gave my leaving notice but it was something you had to do. You don't know how much energy I put into my job but when it was time to give up, you had to give up (Qi Xiaowa, 39).

It is interesting to see that Zhang Fang viewed being a wife as a 'job', with whose duty to look after her family. Her statement revealed sharply women's function in the family as well as their putting family as the top priority (see also Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Finch, 1983), although the fulfilment derived from their career was also necessary. Thus there would be real struggle when they had to choose between their own interests and the interests of husbands in the name of the whole family. For some, the thought of losing their jobs was too bitter to endure and they adopted other strategies to buffer the impact on them. When I asked Wang Qiong (44) if it was a hard decision for her to give up her job as an English teacher in a Chinese university, she rejected strongly the idea of giving up the job, and explained eagerly to me that she did not intend to give up her job when she decided to migrate with her husband; instead, she applied for '*ting xin liu zhi*' (retain the post in *danwei* without receiving salary), even though her husband told her to resign. As she said, 'if I couldn't fit the environment in Britain, I still could go back to China to work (Wang Qiong, 44).' Xiao Chunhua (42) also applied for '*ting xin liu zhi*' before she came to Britain, as she explained, 'when you know you still have a job, you are a professional woman and you feel safe.' As mentioned by Liu (2007), the long existence of the '*danwei*' system in China creates a kind of 'belongingness' for Chinese people who work in state-owned enterprises; people having no '*danwei*' to work for were excluded from mainstream society. Since all my participants had experience of working in the *danwei*, the fear of being abandoned by the society might also make some women hesitate and choose not to completely quit the job at the very first moment.

Therefore, all my participants experienced different degrees of anxiety during this stage. While the husbands were not included in my research and their attitudes and opinions were unavailable, Pei Xianhong was the only one among my 22

participants who mentioned receiving the emotional support and assistance from her husband. As she said, 'he didn't complain at all [when she moaned to her husband], and he even suggested that I stay there in China and he go with my daughter, but I couldn't (Pei Xianhong, 38).' It seems that, instead of relieving her anxiety, her husband's understanding and tolerance made her feel even more guilt for not being considerate for the whole family. Thus, his consideration could impose another pressure for her to give up her job. The silence of other women, from a certain perspective, could reveal women's submissive status in the family: since their husbands had already had so many things to think about, they should not bother them more with their own personal issues. That was what a caring wife was supposed to do.

A few women mentioned the different eating habits in Britain and China, worrying about the different food they would have to eat in Britain. As Cao Shanshan (40) mentioned, 'I heard British people only eat bread, stinky cheese and raw steak, which worried me a lot.' Therefore before departing, these women usually prepared lots of Chinese food in their luggage in case they would not like the local food. As Tan Zhihua (45) said, 'I packed lots of Chinese instant noodles with me, as well as pickled vegetable, Chinese biscuits and deserts, because I was not sure if my kid would like the local food.' When I interviewed Su Linqing in her house, I found a Chinese rice cooker, chopsticks, Chinese brand washing power and even tissues. As she just arrived in Britain three months before, I could sense all the stuff was brought from China. She also told me how nervous she was when she was packing before departing, writing a long list of everything she thought she would need in Britain despite her husband's laughing at her. She even brought the special steamer for cooking Chinese steamed buns and vegetable buns, as she thought she would definitely miss the typical Chinese food when she came to Britain. Their nervousness has a lot to do with the lack of relevant information when they were in China, but also it conveys their worries about their unknown future lives in Britain.

Summary

Despite certain positive changes during the last two decades in China, the patriarchal structure remains ingrained in Chinese society. However, these changes did give women more bargaining power in marriage. My participants appeared to have several arguments to justify their migration to the UK, support of their spouses' career or studies, support and maintenance of the marriage and family unit and improved educational opportunities for their children. In the meantime, by giving up their jobs in China and accompanying their husbands to Britain, the migration behaviour was adopted by these women as a strategy to realise some of the benefits they, as women, might not have aspired to had they remained in China. This, to some degree, was balanced against the costs of giving up their careers and social status in China. In this sense, an unspoken contract seemed to be constituted in the eyes of these wives. The labour contract of marriage had come to include a migration contract. Although my participants knew that the life in Britain would be hard for them, the actual difficulties they faced were still overwhelming. In Chapter Five, I would like to explore my participants' duties during their initial days in Britain, as well as the hardships they encountered while setting up a new home in Britain, their process of acculturation into British society will also be mentioned to enrich their experiences in the settling down stage.

Chapter Five

Those Grey Days: Settling Down in an Unfamiliar Environment

My participants who migrated with their husbands had given up their own careers in a radical way: they came to Britain in order to further the careers of their husbands at the cost of their own. Although the women expected their own gains in the process of migration, they took it as their obligation to assist their husbands at every stage of migration and closely tied their futures to the success of their husbands. During their very first days in Britain, my participants were expected to provide their husbands with a homely environment. For these women, settling down had multiple layers of meaning: they not only settled down in a house, but also ‘made a house a home’ (Delphy and Leonard, 1992, p.233). They provided for the emotional needs of their husbands, while in the meantime having to deal with their own issues. For my participants, this process was long, difficult and stressful. They encountered many hardships including financial, emotional and social difficulties. Although they endured the hardship willingly, they expected their husbands to appreciate this.

The central purpose of this chapter is to explore these women’s responsibilities for offering a comfortable living environment in Britain and account for the obstacles that might have obstructed their goal. I will start with their efforts to set up a homely home from scratch, then move on to the moral support they gave to their husbands, despite their own sense of helplessness and isolation; later in the chapter I will discuss the language barriers that impeded their daily lives and finally the experience of the cultural differences these women found in the very early stages of being in Britain.

Once the migration decision was made, my participants started to prepare for their future life in Britain. Their anxiety in the preparation stage can be imagined since almost none of them had experience of living overseas. Indeed, Ni Xingzhen (40) was the only woman who had travelled outside China. Hence, prior to their

departure, they tried to gather as much information as they could about life in Britain, mainly through four methods: some resorted to the relevant books in the library; some relied on the mass media such as magazines and TV; some through the descriptions of their husbands who had migrated before them; and some women also used their imaginations, based on English novels they had read in China.¹ Building on all these sources of information, my participants imagined Britain as affluent, clean and safe, therefore a positive place to move to. In fact, all my participants told me that they had very good first impressions of Britain when they had just arrived. As Cao Shanshan (40) expressed it, '[the first impression] was very good. The environment was good for living, there were so many green spaces and small forests, and this country looked just like a picture.' Ke Huifang (49) also recalled her very first impression by saying 'I felt the people were really nice and polite here and the place we lived was so quiet. I fell in love with this country immediately.'

The good first impression of the country, together with the happiness of their family reunion, created a sense of contentment among my participants during the first few weeks. However, this contentment was soon washed away when they began to take on the task of setting up new homes without much help. Some participants talked about their experiences of looking for accommodation with little English language ability, and most women vividly remembered coping with financial constraints.

Renting a House

Family migration usually falls into a pattern with the leading person, usually the husband, pioneering the move to the host country while the rest of the family follows later (Martin, 2007; Guyot, 1978). All my participants recalled that their husbands came to Britain a certain time earlier than them; therefore before their arrival, their husbands had temporarily rented a place, usually in a shared house.

¹ Given the period during which most of my participants were in China, the information available was not very useful without the help of the internet. Some women had nobody at all to ask about what life was like in Britain.

When they arrived, the women either carried on living in that place or moved out to independent accommodation, depending on the family's then financial situations. Generally, most of the women had experiences of enduring limited living space into which they squeezed for months. Guo Xuemei still clearly remembered how she managed to live in a tiny room her husband had initially rented:

[The first time I entered that room], I was too tired to look around because of the long flight. It wasn't until the next day when I woke up that I realised the room was so tiny that we could hardly put a double bed into it. My husband had to sleep on a mattress on the floor for a month before we moved into the main bedroom [in the same house] [laugh] (Guo Xumei, 37).

Despite the inferior living conditions compared to China, Guo Xumei told me that she accepted this environment quickly and started to live with it. She owed her quick adaption to the harsh environment to her preparation work in China, which had helped her to be psychologically ready for a hard life in Britain. However, as she indicated to me that it was the only option due to their limited financial budget at that time, she was actually left with no other choices. The couple lived in that shared house until they moved to independent accommodation a year later when she secured a full-time job.

When living in shared houses, all except one participants shared with other Chinese. Although living with their own ethnic minority group could provide much-needed social connections and cultural recognition for the newly arrived migrants (see Schmittker, 2002; Finch and Vega, 2003), there was a strong tendency for couples to move to independent housing as soon as their financial situation improved. Some of my participants perceived shared houses as just dormitories and living there made them feel insecure and unstable, since 'it was not the way a home should be (Xiao Chunhua, 42).' Some also suspected that their family privacy would be invaded, as Ren Ruiyun (35) mentioned: 'It sometimes caused so many problems when you shared a house with other Chinese [...] since we all knew each other.' Her feeling of unease derived from the small circle of the Chinese community; since people all had connections with each

other, there might be a possibility that other tenants would leak personal information or intrude into the family's privacy, which she valued. For those who brought children with them, living in shared accommodation was not practical, especially when the children were still young. Some participants, such as Xin Ya (47), Hao Yuxin (43) and Tan Zhihua (45), worried that the liveliness of their children might cause annoyance to other people, although in fact a degree of tolerance and mutual support was given from other tenants, who were all Chinese.

Prior to house-hunting, they made it clear that the house location was very important and had to be near the place where their husbands worked or studied. Thus the husbands' needs were the main concern. My participants clearly remembered their first experience of house-hunting in Britain; some believed they played an active role in this process. Knowing little English and being unfamiliar with the surrounding environment, Feng Jia (39) was not even trusted by her husband to go out alone. However, through another Chinese wife, she successfully found an ideal flat, and this made her husband praise her for a long time:

I asked every Chinese I saw about where I could find a nice flat and my friend finally recommended this one we are now living in. I had to beg her to take me there as I did not know the way. I liked that flat very much and got hold of the telephone number of the landlord as well. Then after I went back home, I told my husband about the flat and he contacted the landlord (Feng Jia, 39).

When talking about her experience, Feng Jia gave special emphasis to her husband's praise of her contribution, as well as his recognition of her effort; she might also have taken this as an opportunity to prove herself. However, she regarded her effort as being her responsibility by saying 'that is why I am here', hence her task to create a comfortable living environment for her family was clearly revealed. Other women also talked about their own efforts in looking for housing in order to 'save trouble for my husband (Ke Huifang, 49).' Yuan Wanfang (43) could not read much English, but she copied all the rental advertisements from the window of a local newsagent word for word and took them back for her husband to check. Ren Ruiyun (35) collected for her husband all the information through a website set up by Chinese students. My participants

were actively engaged in the primary stage of information collection, but stepped aside for their husbands to take over the negotiation stage or signing the contract. This was justified by the women's lack of fluency in the English language.

Setting up a New Home

Once the accommodation was found, the next mission for my participants was to set up a new home out of emptiness. While the division of labour in the house-hunting process was less obvious, the women reported a clear division of labour in the process of purchasing household items, with husbands buying big items such as electrical equipment and my participants in charge of purchasing the bits and pieces of daily necessities. Wang Qiong's husband came to Britain six months earlier than her and had rented a house before her arrival. The first impression she had of her new home was emptiness, as there was only a television in the sitting room, a refrigerator in the kitchen and some simple cooking equipment:

I asked him how he survived in this empty house. He just smiled and said he did not know what to buy for the house and since I was coming soon, he would rather leave it to me in case I would not like the stuff he would have bought (Wang Qiong, 44).

While Wang Qiong's husband seemed to have offered her great autonomy for home-making, with the traditional view of different obligations between husband and wife, it was her job to transform the house into their home. Meanwhile, the 'male prerogative' (DeVault, 1991, p.99) could also enable her husband to impose certain responsibilities on her. A similar scenario unfolded with Yuan Wanfang (43) when the family moved into their independent flat. As she recalled, her husband bought a television and refrigerator from a charity furniture shop, as well as some second-hand furniture through the advertisements in a local newspaper. Yuan Wanfang (43) told me, 'he bought all the big items and I was in charge of soft equipment [small items and decoration for the house].' As West and Zimmerman (1987) state, men and women 'do' gender, they conduct their performance, together and collaboratively, to mark themselves and others as

adequate men and women. Other scholars have also observed the existence of gendered housework activities, such as female-dominated household labour and male-dominated household labour² (see Lichter, 1991; Shelton, 1992; Orbuch and Eyster, 1997; Coltrane, 1998). Since setting up a comfortable home was viewed as women's work, the successful fulfilment of this task could therefore enhance their womanhood.

With a very limited budget available, my participants had little choice but to rely on charity shops or on being given items by other families and friends to furnish their new homes, as described by Xin Ya:

I remember going to charity shops hunting for cheap items there. I remember I bought curtains there for only two pounds and duvet covers for very little money [...] although they were used, they looked very new and the quality was good (Xin Ya, 47).

We had car boot sales at the university campus every Saturday and I bought many pieces of furniture cheaply [...] you see this eagle [a decoration on the wall], I actually found it there [...] I also received some unwanted items from other Chinese (Yuan Wanfang, 43).

The majority of women talked proudly about their efforts to set up a proper home from scratch. They took it as the fulfilment of their wifely responsibilities, their capability as qualified wives could also be proved by their household management ability. The expectation that women would take care of the home was revealed when some women were laughed at by their Chinese friends for not performing their tasks properly. Guo Xumei (37) told me what happened when some friends came to visit:

[At the time when we first came], we did not have enough bowls and plates and stuff, so sometimes my husband would use the sauce pan to eat. I did not see anything wrong with it as it was his habit. But then one of our friends came and saw him eating from a sauce pan, he teased him that I was maltreating him (Guo Xumei, 37).

² For example, women are more connected to the household chores such as shopping for groceries, cleaning and cooking while men do household repairs, take care of the car or fix the family equipment.

Although it was her husband's personal preference, Guo Xumei was held responsible for not providing proper dishes. While she complained about the lack of understanding of others, this 'socially organized practice' (DeVault, 1991, p.96) made her feel the loss of face for not being a capable wife.

Providing a homely environment was a big task. However, there were also other challenges for my participants to make the family run properly. One of the main concerns was how to budget with limited financial resources in order to maximise outcomes. Many studies on British low-income families have found that women are largely responsible for daily financial management (see Bennett, 2008; Pitt et al., 1990; Pahl, 1989, 1991; Graham, 1985). With only their husbands' income, the family budget was very tight at this stage;³ hence my participants had to adjust their expenditure carefully and manage the limited money to make ends meet. My participants shared with me all the methods they used to cut down their expenses and to avoid any unnecessary costs. For example, Jia Zonghong's husband first came to Britain as a PhD student with funding of approximately four hundred pounds per month for living expenses. According to Jia Zonghong, this was just enough to cover the basic expenses of three people (the couple also brought their daughter to Britain). In order to save money, she insisted on switching off the heating when she was alone at home:

At the time I first came, it was winter and the house was very cold. But we did not use the heating very often as it was really expensive. I remember wearing a thick coat inside the house when there was only me there [Laugh] (Jia Zonghong, 43).

Making ends meet was a constant struggle for her at that stage, yet, by ending her story laughing, Jia Zonghong indicated a cheerful attitude towards her early experiences in the UK. Although Jia Zonghong used 'we' to refer to the whole family, she also hinted that it was only when she was alone at home that she turned off the heating completely. Some other women also mentioned their coping strategies with limited financial resources, such as avoiding taking public transport or not cooking hot meals when they were alone at home. From their

³ Most husbands were students at this stage.

point of view, these women saw spending on themselves as ‘unnecessary costs’ (Ke Huifang, 49). While the effective management of limited resources is usually women’s responsibility, the ideology of being a care provider made them prioritise the family’s needs over their own; cutting down on their own expenditure and re-allocating resources to somebody else was always the solution (see also Bennett, 2008; Attree, 2005; DeVault, 1991; Graham, 1985).

In order to minimise daily expenditure, the women adopted another important coping strategy by saving money through food shopping. Cao Shanshan (40) told me that she was astonished by the food prices at the supermarket; for quite a long time she would only buy food that was on offer or supermarkets’ own-brand economy food. Ke Huifang (49) mentioned that ‘I remember going food shopping and I could only afford canned food and stuff.’ Feng Jia also revealed a similar experience the first time she went shopping:

I picked up a Chinese cabbage, it was 99p, and I quickly converted it into Chinese money and decided it was too expensive. Then I saw a cucumber, but it was also too expensive for me. I ended up going home with a bag of potatoes and a loaf of bread; they were both on sale [laugh] (Feng Jia, 39).

The ways in which these women tried to cut down expenses included shopping in cheap shops with cheap brands. A few women mentioned their experience of checking supermarket leaflets or TV advertisements for information about food on sale; some also talked about going to different supermarkets looking for bargains, despite the fact that it was time-consuming. Although the participants had all experienced harsh times, it seemed that they all looked back on that time with amusement. Moreover, they appeared to be proud of their efforts to feed the whole family well with limited money. Since feeding the family is always women’s work (see DeVault, 1991), the fulfilment of this duty could bring these women a great sense of self-achievement. While the ingredients were simple, the women tried to make the best out of them, as Ke Huifang (49) expressed it: ‘I felt I was a really good chef and could make nice food out of really simple ingredients.’ Wei Xiaoping (46) also cheerfully recorded that ‘I managed to cook potatoes and give them different flavours [laugh].’ Coming to Britain to look after

their families, it was one of their main tasks to provide the family with tasty and nutritious food. This could be why my participants were so proud of their cooking skills: the ingredients were simple, but through their processing, the dishes were enjoyable. According to Jackson and Moores (1995, p.6), it is important that food is accepted, since its rejection by other family members could be read as an ‘emotional weapon’ against wives. While these women used cooking as a way of demonstrating their affection towards their husbands and family, the acceptance of the food was a way to assure their importance in the family domain.

For my participants, food was also used to meet the standard of good wife and mother through their ‘material sacrifice’ (Attress, 2005, p.230; see also Duncan and Edwards, 1999). For example, Jia Zonghong (43) used to give priority to other family members’ diets:

It was hard as we did not have money with us. What I could afford to buy was tins of baked beans and spaghetti and such basic stuff. But I let my daughter eat meat every day as she was young and needed nutrition. I used to buy a whole chicken and separate the meat into seven portions to cook for her [laugh]. If I bought eggs, I cooked them for my husband and daughter (Jia Zonghong, 43).

According to Delphy (1984, p.51), there is a general principle that ‘the wife and mother should always preserve the privileges of the husband and father, and sacrifice herself.’ The women I interviewed were comparatively generous to their children and husbands and put their own needs last. As many other studies show, although women decide where to go and what to buy, there is a tendency they give priority to the food preferences of other members of the family while going without themselves (see, for example, Attress, 2005; Hanmer and Hearn, 1999; Graham, 1985). For example, Graham (1985) found in her research that mothers of poor British families tend to deny their own needs in order to protect the living standards of other family members (see also Attree, 2005; McIntyre et al., 2003; Dobson, 1994). My participants also practised a similar strategy when their family confronted financial difficulties.

Emotion Work

Caring for the family does not merely mean providing a comfortable living environment or nice food to eat; meeting the emotional needs of their husbands was also frequently mentioned by my participants. This was especially important during this early stage of settling down, when the family was likely to experience considerable upheaval. My participants managed this role in various ways. For instance, some participants reported being good listeners and encouraging their husbands to talk when things went wrong. As Qi Xiaowa (39) told me:

Things were not going smoothly for him at the very beginning. He used to come home depressed and kept moaning about it. I knew he just wanted to have somebody listen to him and I offered my ear to him, although most of the time I did not know anything about what he was talking about [laugh] (Qi Xiaowa, 39).

Much research has shown that emotion work is invisible and gendered, with women usually being the ones who are found offering emotional support due to their role as family carers (see Erickson, 2005; Jones, 2004; Seery and Crowley, 2000; Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Daniels, 1987; Finch, 1983). Instead of interpreting their emotional support as ‘work’, my participants viewed providing emotional comfort as reflecting the trust and reliance their husbands placed in them, as Bai Kexin (42) expressed it: ‘I mean, when he was in trouble, who else could he resort to except me? I was quite happy for him to share his feelings with me as I could sense the trust he put in me [laugh].’ Bai Kexin was reassured of her importance in her husband’s heart, since he was willing to unburden himself in front of her. This could also be seen as proof of her virtuousness, since becoming her husband’s confidant depends greatly on the wife’s goodness (see Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Tavis, 1992).

Mao Juan (45) came to Britain with her husband, who migrated as an investment immigrant and planned to run his own restaurant business in Britain:

My husband’s business did not run properly. So he was really agitated in those days [...]. When he came home, I had to

pretend to be happy, because I did not want to give him any pressure. But he always lost his temper about the slightest things and I just had to put up with it (Mao Juan, 45).

According to Mao Juan, she recognised the tremendous pressure her husband was under and decided to take a tolerant attitude, since her own feelings were less important than the issues that troubled him. However, women take on their husbands' anxieties and discontents through the emotion work that they do (see Delphy and Leonard, 1992). By pretending to be happy, Mao Juan actually tried to manage her own emotions (see Hochschild, 1983) in front of her husband so that he could focus on his own things. Some other women also offered emotional help to their husbands while completely concealing their own personal feelings. As Wang Qiong (44) said, 'after all what I felt was nothing compared with the pressure my husband was under, so I tended not to bother him with my own issues.' Bai Kexin (42) also recalled that 'I could do nothing but try not to bother him with other issues.' The wife's responsibility, as Finch (1983, p.85) stated, is to place 'minimal demands' upon the husband, which includes not only minimal physical, but also emotional demands. My participants took their personal emotions as being an extra burden on their husbands and viewed it as selfishness to make their husbands divert their attention from their work and study. Their migration contract with their husbands could have also justified these thoughts: since their husbands were doing highly valued jobs, it was their obligation to facilitate their husbands' success; distracting them with 'unimportant issues' thus seemed unwise.

Recognising the importance of emotion work in the family, research suggests that the flow should go in both directions; thus, the more emotional support women receive from their husbands, the greater marital satisfaction they feel (see Wright and Aquilino, 1998; Yu, 1996; Erickson, 1993). My participants' consciousness of controlling and concealing their personal emotions sometimes led to emotional frustration, which could culminate in an emotional 'burnout' (see Kessler et al., 1985). Some of my participants did let their feelings show and quarrelled with their husbands.⁴ As Wei Xiaoping (46) expressed it, 'I felt I sometimes could not

⁴ However, quarrelling was used not only as an outlet for their emotions, but also as a way to bargain with their husbands, as I show later.

handle my anger and used to quarrel with him.’ Cao Shanshan (40) also confessed that ‘I did not want to quarrel with him too much, but I just could not control myself sometimes.’ Interestingly enough, these women felt sorry for their husbands afterwards and blamed themselves for being irritable and not understanding, as ‘after all, he was also suffering (Xiao Chunhua, 42).’

While my participants excused their husbands due to their busy schedule and hardships, the different acculturation process of the couple might also create problems. It might be the case that if the couple were both put into an unfamiliar environment together, they could understand each other’s situation better and provide the emotional support required. However, for some participants who joined their husbands after a period of separation, their different stages of adaption might bring problems. Zhang Fang (35) had problems with her husband initially as ‘my husband just could not offer much help, he was already used [to the environment].’ Similarly, Wei Xiaoping (46) said ‘I did not like it here when I first came, I did not like everything, but my husband did not understand.’ For my participants whose husbands came to Britain earlier than them, it was likely that their husbands had passed the cultural shock stage and had become more familiar with the surrounding environment. Hence it was possible that they would not be able to share the emotional upheaval with my participants.

Dealing with Isolation

When they first entered a very different environment, my participants felt lonely and isolated. It was mainly this sense of isolation and aloneness that they tried to hide from their husbands. Actually, this feeling seemed still to be haunting my participants since most of them recalled very moving stories. At that time, Hao Yuxin’s (43) husband could only come home once every two weeks. She spoke about her feelings of loneliness during the days when her husband was away:

The only feeling was loneliness. I remember when I first came, my child was not yet going to nursery, and I stayed with my child at home for three days without going out. On the third night, my child sat in front of the window for hours

and then told me, 'mum, it's getting dark again' [shaking her head] (Hao Yuxin, 43).

Many also reported being confined to their homes and cut off temporarily from the outside world, especially when their husbands were preoccupied with their own issues and failed to be present during this stage. Bai Kexin (42) told me, 'For the first half year, I just stayed at home watching the walls every day.' Mao Juan (45) also said that 'I did not even go out for two months except sending my son to school; it [the house] was like a prison.' Ke Huifang (49) revealed her emotional depression which on one occasion made her attempt to jump into a river near where she lived and commit suicide. Wang Qing (44) also developed depression from the sense of isolation:

My husband lived miles away from us since he was teaching at a university in another city... in those days, I found myself crying all the time when my daughter was asleep (Wang Qiong, 44).

It is very common for new migrants to feel lonely (see Ponizovsky and Ritzner, 2004; Kim, 1999); this could be especially true for my participants, who came from a culture in which the family network and kinship ties are highly emphasised (Yu, 1996). When my participants mentioned their homesickness, it was most likely that they sought the emotional support of family members in China. For a number of women, aloneness and loneliness were eased by phone calls or emails to friends and relatives from their 'other life' (Greenwood and Cheers, 2002), which allowed them still to participate, although in another form:

I used to call my family a lot and talked with them for four or five hours without stopping. I really missed them but since I kept calling them, I still knew what was happening at home (Mao Juan, 45).

When I called my mum, she would tell me every little thing that had happened in the family and so I felt I did not miss too much (Ren Ruiyun, 35).

For some of the women who came to Britain over two decades ago, international calls were rather expensive due to the less developed communications

technologies at that time, but they ‘still called my family [their families] in China very often (Wang Qiong, 44),’ despite their financial constraints. The homesickness was reported to reach a peak during Chinese traditional festivals such as Spring Festival and the Moon Festival, when families are supposed to get together for big celebrations. For example, Xiao Chunhua (42) and Wei Xiaoping (46) reported being sentimental during Chinese traditional festivals, ‘for the first couple of years, I used to miss my family in China so much, especially when it was Spring Festival (Xiao Chunhua, 42).’ ‘My tears just fell when I thought all my family were gathering together [for the Moon Festival] and I was the only one who was absent (Wei Xiaoping, 46).’ Hence, the festivals in fact brought sadness to my participants. With their families being thousands of miles away, the only option for my participants to communicate with their wider families was via international calls. All my participants now knew how to make cheap phone calls back to China, and nearly all of these women reported using ICTs to create a better face-to-face conversation, thanks to the development of technology which makes communication much easier nowadays.

The women’s sense of isolation and loneliness was greatly alleviated when they started to make friends. According to my participants, they were most likely to find the empathy, caring, support and understanding they longed for by getting to know some other Chinese women:

I had a very good friend. We met each other nearly every day. When we were together, we just kept talking and talking for hours. She could really cheer me up when I felt lonely and low (Wei Xiaoping, 46).

I think since we are all women, we kind of share similar feelings and can understand each other better. Well that was how I felt when I first came here; my [female] friends really offered me great help (Mao Juan, 45).

These women greatly valued their friends, without whom, according to them, the initial stages in Britain would have been worse. However, as they further revealed, they mainly got to know these friends through their husbands’ social links and thus, in some cases, their selection of friends was closely connected with their husbands’ social circles. As Su Linqing (35) reported, ‘gradually I got to

know some Chinese people through my husband.’ Hao Yuxin (43) fitted into a similar pattern as ‘my husband had many friends at the university and I gradually got to know their wives.’ Feng Jia (39) also commented that ‘I had a really good friend when I first came, and she was also here to accompany her PhD husband.’ In these cases, their husbands acted as a bridge for the women to contact the outside world, thus the friendship pattern of their husbands would greatly influence the friends my participants made. Moreover, my participants’ friendship circles could be very unstable, and this was especially true for those whose husbands were students, since the frequent mobility of students could easily break up their newly established friendship networks; as Pei Xianhong (43) recalled, ‘I had a few friends here, but most of them have gone back to China and have lost contact with each other.’ Some other women also agreed, saying: ‘to be honest, I am really sad these days as my best friend is about to go back to China with her husband (Yuan Wanfang, 43),’ and: ‘the thing is, when you just get familiar with a friend, she will have to leave (Wei Xiaoping, 46).’ These women expressed their sense of loss when their friends had to leave. The feeling could be especially enhanced in a foreign country when the desire for emotional support can be very strong. Furthermore, the lack of a stable friendship circle tended to undermine my participants’ process of adjustment to their new environment and increase the intensity of their isolation.

Although there are many Chinese associations in Britain, only a few participants reported getting to know friends through local Chinese organisations and other agencies. Since these agencies were concentrated in big cities, they were not accessible to some women who lived in small towns and villages; it was also not convenient for women who were less mobile. For example, Su Linqing (35) mentioned her desire to join a local Chinese association in the city centre but felt that it was hard to do so as she lived far away and could not drive. ‘I would love to know more [Chinese] friends, but I live too far from the city centre and cannot go (Su Linqing, 35).’ As a result, the geographical distance became an obstacle for her to join local Chinese associations. With the financial constraints many women encountered at that time, it would also be understandable that some of them did not feel able to go to the local Chinese associations because of the cost of transport.

Xiao Chunhua and Wei Xiaoping talked about another reason they did not go to local Chinese associations, as ‘they are full of people from Hong Kong or illegal immigrants (Xiao Chunhua, 42)’ and they felt that they were ‘different’ from those people (Wei Xiaoping, 46). Since people from Hong Kong were the earliest immigrants to settle in Britain (see Chapter One), the existing Chinese associations were by and large established by them; since Cantonese is used for communication, those who do not speak that dialect feel strongly excluded⁵ (see Chan et al., 2007). In addition to this, as Chan et al. (2007) have pointed out, there was a social gap between the Hong Kong immigrants and immigrants from the PRC, since they had different language, history and patterns of migration (see also Chapter One). In this regard, my participants would still feel like a minority in those associations and lack a sense of belonging.

Language Barrier

My participants’ feeling of loneliness was also a result of their lack of language skills. Language skills form one of the biggest barriers for immigrants to function effectively in their new setting; the language barrier is likely to limit migrants’ communication and acculturation and slows down their adjustment to the host country (see Bleakley and Chin, 2004; Yu, 1996; Thomas, 1995; Wright, 1983). All my participants reported communication difficulties. For instance, Mao Juan (45) received her education in China when Russian was the compulsory second language in Chinese schools, therefore she could hardly speak any English when she came to Britain. She told me about her first experience of taking the bus alone:

There was a lady who shared the seat with me and I sat inside next to the window. Before I pressed the bell, somebody else pressed it so I could not let that lady know that I was about to get off [by pressing the buzzer]. I became really nervous and had to push her to get out of my way. I know it was really rude but I did not know what to say to her [laugh] (Mao Juan, 45).

⁵ And it was not until recent years that these associations started to open up to people from mainland China due to the increasing number of the latter.

Laughing apologetically, Mao Juan expressed a feeling of helplessness due to her lack of any English abilities at that time. Some other women also had similar stories due to their poor English performance:

When I finished shopping and went to pay at the till, she asked me something. I did not know what she was talking about. So I just shook my head and waved my hand. Later I asked my husband and he told me it was probably 'do you want any cash back?' Thank God I gave the right reaction [laugh] (Wei Xiaoping, 46).

[When I first came], I could not understand anything people said, so I kept saying 'yes' or 'no' as answers to everything. I really wished I was dumb [laugh] (Ke Huifang, 49).

According to those who had some basic English skills, the situation was no better for them since they were constantly confronting the struggle between English and Chinese and some felt really anxious when desperately trying to find the best expressions:

Every time I wanted to say something, I had to think the sentence structure over and over again in my head in order to pick the right word. So I would rather keep quiet (Yuan Wanfang, 43).

I had great difficulty finding the right word, so I would just stop talking (Wei Xiaoping, 46).

I would express my ideas with some really long and complicated sentences, and people were just confused and still did not get what I meant [...] I did not know there were simple ways to express the same meaning (Ni Xingzhen, 40).

Being their husbands' dependants, my participants were not required to have any English skills in order to get a visa. However, the lack of communication skills was reported to have caused many problems in their lives in the UK; some women felt that not being able to speak English actually undermined their self-esteem and created an over-dependency on their spouses and friends. Feng Jia (39) expressed her frustration by saying that 'I had to rely so much on my friend even for small things; I felt I was useless.' Wei Xiaoping (46) also conveyed that 'I felt I

suddenly became deaf and dumb and needed his [her husband's] help all the time.'

Compared to those who had little English ability, there were five women who were English professionals in China.⁶ They had less difficulty with English reading, and problems with writing were also not very obvious for them. Instead, their concerns were more focused on engaging in casual social conversations and daily interactions. As Xiao Chunhua (42) recounted: 'It was true that I was an English teacher in high school [in China], but I could not speak local English, you see.' Wang Qiong (44) approached the same question by telling me that 'I believe you [the interviewer] also had the same problem when you first came to this country. People have different accents and use dialects, and it is really different from the English we learned.' When Wang Qiong talked about her experience, she suggested that everyone sharing a similar educational background with her, including me, would encounter the same problem of communication during the early stages of migration. Being an English teacher in a Chinese university, it was not easy for her to admit her disadvantages as it cast doubt on her academic ability. However, as previous studies have suggested (see Chen et al., 2005; Magnúsdóttir, 2005; Yu, 1996), language performance greatly affected my participants who had a professional English background. Despite their excellent reading and writing skills, their non-fluent or semi-fluent spoken English hugely restricted their acculturation into the new environment. However, through the process of acculturation, they quickly felt more relaxed with their spoken English and mastered many new phrases.

Coming to Britain as wives and mothers, their language disability might also make my participants feel guilty because their communication difficulties could temporarily stop them, to some degree, from performing their daily tasks properly. Cao Shanshan, who suffered from her poor English ability when she first arrived in the UK, gave a particular account of this:

I remember one morning I found that my kid had a terribly high temperature and it looked like he was about to have a

⁶ Four of them were English teachers and one was an English translator.

fit. I was so scared [since my husband was at work]. I rushed to call my husband but he didn't answer the phone. I carried my son running downstairs and knocked like crazy at the door of one of our housemates, luckily he was there. I was crying like a mad woman and raised my child to him while shouting in Chinese: 'he is having a fit'. He had a look at my son and immediately drove us to hospital... it was horrible (Cao Shanshan, 40).

Cao Shanshan blamed herself for not being able to protect her child, due to her poor English skills. Under these circumstances, the responsibility of being a protective mother turned into the motivation for her to learn English, and she revealed her determination after that incident:

I remember when I came back from hospital, I found that I was only wearing slippers, but thank God my son was all right. Later, my housemate made fun of me by mocking my shouting; but it was since then that I decided to learn English otherwise I couldn't even protect my own child (Cao Shanshan, 40).

Duan Ruirui (41) came to Britain with her daughter to join her husband, who was a PhD student at that time. With her husband busy working every day, she did not want to disturb him with household issues; hence she managed to register her daughter at a primary school, although she could not speak a single English word:

[Two weeks after my daughter and I arrived], I took my daughter to a school nearby to get her registered with a primary school. I could not tell whether it was a primary school or a middle one or a college because it was summer holidays and there were no students there. I met a gentleman on campus and showed him my daughter, and also pointed at the school bag she was carrying to make him understand that I wanted my daughter to be registered. I could not understand what he told me, but he kept gesturing to me [she put her right hand low to show me how tall her daughter was] that my daughter was too young for this school. He was really kind-hearted and led me to his office and helped me contact a primary school in my community. He also wrote the address down for me on a piece of paper. That was how my daughter was registered with a primary school (Duan Ruirui, 41).

As Duan Ruirui told me, she was very proud of her adventurous behaviour and took it as the first step towards regaining her independence. However, she also mentioned her wifely responsibilities and her awareness that she should not ask her husband's help since it was her job to have her daughter registered. Thus, the division of familial responsibility could have encouraged her to fulfil the task independently. Duan Ruirui also revealed that, since the child showed strong resistance to the environment at that time, she also intended to be a role model in front of her daughter and transfer her own courage to her daughter. Being a role model for other family members was also mentioned by some other women, who took learning English as a way to encourage other family members to adapt to the new environment. As Bai Kexin (42) recalled, 'I couldn't let myself down and I wanted to set her [my daughter] a good example [to encourage my daughter with her English learning courses].' Qi Xiaowa (39) also revealed that 'I decided to start to learn English. In this way, I could sort of show my enthusiasm towards our new lives in this country and my husband and child therefore could be encouraged by me as well.'

Despite the strong motivations of my participants, the willpower to carry on with their English lessons and the courage to practice differed from person to person. In fact, most women felt content with their level of English as long as they could master the basic vocabulary for daily use, and only two women carried on with their English lessons without interruption. The family chores they had to shoulder and their age disadvantage were identified as the two biggest obstacles to carrying on with their English study. However, it also could be the low expectations they had of themselves: as their husbands' dependants, their main task was to look after their families. English could be important for them but, as long as it could meet their daily needs, it was not necessary for them to be fully fluent.

Rules and Norms

For my participants, coming to a new country meant entering a different culture. While carving out a new life in Britain, they began to encounter social and cultural differences and practices that they were very unfamiliar with. Some

women mentioned the uneasiness caused by being greeted by people they did not know and their not knowing what to do in these situations, as Cao Shanshan told me amusedly:

I still remember that time I was walking on the street and was greeted by a gentleman passing by. We walked towards each other and suddenly he nodded to me and said 'good morning'. I was flushed and felt so embarrassed [laugh] (Cao Shanshan, 40).

In China, it is not the practice to greet strangers; for women, such a greeting from a man can even hint at a totally negative and offensive meaning. Some participants also mentioned their confusion the first time they were asked 'how are you?' or 'are you ok today?' by others. Instead of taking it as a form of greeting, they felt they were supposed to reply in terms of their real feelings, not just a simple answer 'I am fine', because in a Chinese context, when people ask the same question, 'they express their real concerns (Su Lingqing, 35),' and the British way of answering would be to reject others' goodwill in Chinese culture. Despite their confusion, my participants were very impressed by the politeness of local people and 'even the bus driver says "cheers" to you when you get off the bus (Qi Xiaowa, 39).' From the Chinese point of view, it is always the one who receives service who should thank the service providers, and so the opposite direction of gratitude made my participants feel really flattered. Although there is a huge difference between the Chinese and British cultures of being polite, my participants said they got used to it quickly and started to use the British forms of politeness from time to time.

Some women were impressed by Western romance and the apparent togetherness of British couples as well as the intimate behaviours husbands and wives displayed in public places, which are very rare in China. Su Lingqing remembered well what she saw the first time her husband took her to a pub in their community:

I really liked the way they were with each other. They [husband and wife] would sit in the pub, hand in hand, drinking and chatting. I thought they were lovers, but then my husband told me that they were a married couple. It would be impossible to do this in public in China, people would either

look at you in a strange way or think you were his xiao qing ren [secret mistress] (Su Linqing, 35).

I was much amused the first time I heard my neighbour call her husband 'honey' in front of everybody. I felt my face blush when I heard it and was quite embarrassed. My husband and I never say 'I love you' to each other, but here couples gua zai zui bian [hang it on their mouths; say it all the time] (Wei Xiaoping, 46).

According to the Confucian code, a man and a woman should not touch each other's hands, even accidentally (*nan nu shou shou bu qin*). Although a more relaxed social environment is forming in China, intimate behaviour between couples in public is still seen as inappropriate. For Chinese couples, the revealing of intimate emotions is not necessary as 'people do not value verbal expressions of love and affection' (Ye, 2004; p.140). As Ye (2004, p.140) explains, for Chinese couples, 'love and affection are embodied in care and concern, in doing what we believe are good things for the other party.' Therefore they do not compliment each other much because those sweet words are 'for social purposes' and true love only 'lies in deeds' (Ye, 2004; p.140).

While there seemed to be huge differences in spousal relationships, some women also talked about their hesitation as to whether to use their husbands' surnames in Britain, as Ke Huifang (49) said, 'When I first came, I did not know if I should tell people my own name or introduce myself as Mrs X [her husband's surname].' Most of them expressed their strong resistance towards changing their own surnames, for instance, Ren Ruiyun (35) protested that 'I did not like people calling me Mrs S [her husband's surname], I would rather keep my own name.' Cao Shanshan (40) also made it clear by saying that: 'My name is my own name, why should I have to be titled by his surname?' In fact, the women took it as disrespectful if they were called by their husbands' surnames although it is a common practice in Western culture that women take the last name of their spouses after getting married (see Emens, 2007; Scheuble and College, 1993). In old China, once married, women could no longer use their own family names and were referred to by their husband's surname (for example, if a woman married a

man whose surname was *Wang*, she would be referred as *Wang Shi*)⁷ (see Watson, 1986); thus, changing to the husband's surname hints at the loss of a woman's own identity and her attachment to her husband's family (see Watson, 1986; Stacey, 1983). Born in Communist China, in which these feudal practices were strongly condemned, my participants felt some degree of resistance towards this transfer of identity: migrating as their husbands' dependants would have already been a sensitive topic; the change of their titles just seemed to confirm their dependent identity and made these women feel worse. Regarding this identity transfer, Jia Zonghong (43) mentioned her discomfort when her husband filled in the NHS registration form. On this form, her husband was put as the main applicant because he was the main visa holder, while she and her child were registered as her husband's dependants. Even knowing it was only an official process, she still talked about her unease at the loss of autonomy.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described the hardships my participants experienced during the very early stages of migration as well as their struggle to achieve cultural adaptation. Although my participants experienced many difficulties, they desired to fulfil their wifely role of providing the family with a comfortable living environment. Despite their willingness to shoulder the hardships single-handed, some participants made it clear that this had to be with the acknowledgement of their husbands. Some chose to repeatedly mention their stresses to their husbands, in order to 'let him know about all these (Hao Yuxin, 43).' Other women referred to their sufferings only when the couples were quarrelling; they also found this strategy to be effective in gaining an advantage, as Wang Qiong (44) revealed, 'he just became quiet when I mentioned the hardships I had here.' Although they denied deliberately causing feelings of guilt in their husbands, it quite often worked out in that way as some of them stressed to me their husbands' sorrow towards them. Cao Shanshan (40) recalled that 'I did not want to always remind

⁷ It was only when widowed that women were allowed to add their own surnames after that of their husbands to indicate their marriage status; this was also the case when women were referred to as individuals in terms of contracts or other official documents.

him how much I suffered, but he would have to know this [...] As long as he knew [that I was suffering because of him], I would be content.' Thus, by judging their husbands' reactions towards their bitter experiences, my participants could decide if their information was conveyed successfully. Within their migration contract, women invest their labour in exchange for later rewards from their husbands; therefore it was likely that the women's suffering was used as a bargaining chip with their husbands. This intention grew even clearer when the women talked about their work experience in Britain. In order to provide financial support, my participants worked in low-grade jobs while shouldering the family chores; in this way, they fulfilled their share of responsibility for their husbands' personal success. In the next chapter, I shall explore the women's obligation to support their husbands and their means of investment in their husbands' future.

Chapter Six

To Push Him Through: Women's Work and Economic Support for Their Husbands During the Settling Down Period

Delphy and Leonard (1992) define marriage as a labour contract, in which wives' work contributes to their husbands' careers and achievements – and their husbands' jobs in turn regulate women's labour (see also Finch, 1983; Jackson, 1996). In relation to my participants, they were not just working as unpaid housewives; they were also required to contribute in other ways, such as working in the labour market when their husbands were pursuing career advancement. During the stage of settling down, my participants' husbands were either out of the labour market temporarily because of their studies, or needed financial support from their wives. These women also felt obligated to support their husbands, by carrying the family supporting and caring responsibilities together on their shoulders. Many of them addressed their willingness to do so and took it as their own responsibility; however, they also talked vaguely about what they could get as rewards after their husbands had achieved their goals. They regarded it as their own investment in their husbands' future and perceived it as fair. Therefore they had nothing to complain about. However, by investing in their husbands in this way, women were increasingly tied to their traditional roles in the family. Hence, a more unequal family pattern could be expected in the future (see Chapter Seven). In this chapter, I would like to discuss women's experiences of job hunting during their settling down stage, their subsequent work experience and their concentration in Chinese enclave businesses, as well as their strategy of dealing with conflicts between family and work. Despite other obstacles encountered by migrant women in the host country, it can be argued that the participants' family responsibility strongly affected their job selection and work performance.

Looking for Jobs

Previous studies reported that the primary concern for immigrant women was always survival, which encouraged them to set priorities for family-related economic adaptation instead of their own choices and rights (see Zhou, 2004; Man, 2004; Raghuram and Kofman, 2004; Zhou, 1994). For these women whose husbands could not support the whole family at the beginning, it was their responsibility to meet the family's daily needs by working in a paid job. Some women mentioned that they brought a certain amount of money with them on first arrival; however, they soon found that the money they brought ran out quickly, as everything was more expensive than they expected. As Jia Zonghong (43) recalled, 'I suddenly realised that the money [she brought from China] was so little and it was nothing compared with the high cost of living here.' This is particularly true for those whose husbands initially came to Britain as students. The limited stipends the husbands were granted were budgeted for only one person. Therefore it was impossible for the whole family to survive if wives did not go out to work. Several women made it clear that they were fully aware of the harsh reality they had to face in Britain, and it was their responsibility to support their families:

I was planning from the very beginning that I would have to find a job here. I knew I had to make some money for the family because the bursary my husband was granted was just enough for our daily expenses (Xiao Chunhua, 42).

Even when I was in China, my husband called me and told me that I had to be fully prepared for the hard life in Britain. The only way to survive here was to work (Feng Jia, 39).

As Delphy and Leonard (1992, p.118) state, when husbands have to be absent from the labour market or have insecure employment, wives are required to be in employment in order to ensure a steady family income. Kim and Hurh's (1998) studies on Korean couples in USA also found that under the traditional Confucian culture, wives are obliged to seek employment to assist their husbands in the name of family advancement. There is a close connection between the attitude of their

husbands and my participants' decision to take on the role as the main or co-family supporters. Xiao Chunhua used 'I knew' to show her awareness of her temporary task for family support although it was highly likely that she received relevant information from her husband. Feng Jia made it even clearer that it was her husband who stated she was required to work in the UK. Interestingly, the participants accepted their temporary role as main/co-family providers without any unease. While the previous work experience in China had significant influence on the choices they made, for wives of students, they believed that only after they found jobs and started to make money, could their husbands be free from financial worries and better concentrate on their studies:

Once he [the husband] told me that his university was recruiting cleaners on campus and he wanted to go and try. But I stopped him and told him that if he wanted us to have a better life, he had to work hard on his research. I could support him all right so he shouldn't waste his time on something else (Ni Xingzhen, 40).

I wanted him to concentrate more on his research instead of wasting his time on working; after all, his task was to finish his Ph.D. (Guo Xumei, 37).

I did not want him to think about where to earn money while studying, it would be hard for him... his priority was to study. If I worked and earned money, he could concentrate more on his own things (Hao Yuxin, 43).

In China, it is very common for women to take paid work and contribute to their families' well-being. Yet, it is rare for Chinese women to be the main providers within the household (see Zuo and Bian, 2001). However, as my participants tied the future of the whole family so closely to the husbands' studies in Britain, they provided for their husbands all the support needed for a better performance. By prioritising the husbands' studies above all other concerns the participants' intention to lessen their husbands' burden was clear. Moreover, the role swapping between the husband and wife appears to be based on a mutual recognition, with women taking their double roles as the best option for both themselves and their husbands. With the husbands' primary responsibility was to advance their careers and then the family, the couples' labour contract at this stage is revealed. My

participants expressed their great gratitude when their husbands also contributed to the household income by working part-time while studying. For example, Jia Zonghong's husband worked every weekend in a warehouse for 15 hours. Feng Jia's husband also took a cleaner's job in the university every morning from six to nine. The wives took it as their husbands' consideration towards the family and therefore felt proud of them. Feng Jia (39) even made it clear that it was like a bonus for her as she initially did not expect her husband to work at all. By regarding their husbands' financial contributions as extra and unexpected income, the women's self-definition in this labour contract as the main family provider was revealed. Since his primary responsibility was advancing his own career and then the advancement of the whole family, the husband's attempt to lighten the wife's burden was therefore seen as his goodwill and good nature.

Those whose husbands were comparatively wealthier, especially those whose husbands came to Britain as work permit holders were less likely to be required to start making money immediately. According to these women, they were persuaded not to find a paid job immediately by their husbands. For example, Wei Xiaoping (46) spent the whole first year at home looking after her baby girl as her husband, who worked as a toy designer in Britain, decided that was best for both her and their daughter. Mao Juan (45) agreed to stay at home to look after the family, as 'my husband said that [my staying at home] was the best help I could offer him.' With their husband earning enough to support the family, these women were expected to concentrate more on household tasks. However, being at home strongly deepened these women's sense of isolation. Working outside the house was therefore adopted by these women as a way to socialise and to familiarise themselves with British society:

For the first half year, I just stayed at home watching the walls every day, or spent some time in a community school to learn English. But I found myself getting more and more bored and became so low. So my husband suggested I go out to find a part-time job (Bai Kexin, 42).

As my husband came to Britain with a job offer, I did not suffer too much financially. For the first year, I just stayed at

home to look after my baby daughter. During the second year, my husband had several months' free time. Therefore I pleaded him to look after our child and I went out to work, just to meet more people (Wei Xiaoping, 46).

As Delphy and Leonard (1992, p.143) put it, women's dependent status is likely to put them under the control of their husbands; sometime their husbands can even have 'the final say on whether he will let his wife work'. Both women showed a lack of free choice regarding whether or not to find a job. They made it clear that their going out to work was made possible with their husbands' permission. Bai Kexin's husband suggested she find a part-time job, while Wei Xiaoping had to wait until she could temporarily remove herself from her family responsibilities. It could be argued that for these women, there was no pressure to take up employment to help with immediate financial relief. However, their responsibilities as wives were emphasised by their respective husbands. One of the participants, whose husband was initially a student, told me how she envied those whose husbands were better off than hers; she took it as a kind of 'luck' not to struggle so much as she and her husband first had. In this regard, whether a wife enters into the labour market was largely dependent on the husband's economic condition. However, for those whose husbands were better off, the loss of an independent income could undermine their bargaining power in the marriage (see Jackson, 1996; Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Kandiyoti, 1988). This might explain why women in this group expressed a certain degree of eagerness to start making money themselves. For example, Wang Qiong (44) laughed off the question about staying at home to live off her husband. She also insisted on achieving a certain degree of economic independence, which she said could help her to gain some more power in the marriage. This could be connected partly to the social background in China. With women in China participating in paid labour significantly more than in most modern societies (Bauer et. al., 1992), Chinese women believe that working outside the family is a way of life and most women take it as an indispensable part of womanhood (Zhou, 1994). Despite accepting the idea of working outside, they still reconcile themselves to other forms of subordination (see Chapter Two). Many of the participants mentioned that

working outside required their husbands' permission, and as long as their husbands did not strongly object to the idea, they would prefer to go out to work.

Many participants recalled stories about job hunting and how difficult it was for them to start working in a totally new environment. This was contrary to what I expected. According to the Chinese idea of 'face' (*mian zi*), people tend to exaggerate or glorify their real situation in order to boost their positive image and gain respect from others (see Matsudaira, 2003; Oetzel and Toomey, 2003). It was assumed that it would be difficult for these women to discuss their first work experience as it was often a move downward compared with their previous work experience in China and therefore they could take it as a loss of face. On the contrary, my participants were very happy to share their experience and were proud of their 'sacrifices' for the family and husband. It might be their intention to boost their good images in front of me as sacrificing wives, or more likely, to justify to me their claim for more bargaining power with their husbands. In this regard, it is necessary to record their work experience at this stage in order to better understand their labour contract with their husbands.

Although all the 22 women interviewed had come to Britain as dependents of their husbands, most were highly educated in China. One had a Master's degree, and 15 had Bachelors' degrees. The majority had worked as professionals prior to emigration in fields such as teaching, management, design and administration. However, due to the limitations female immigrants encounter,¹ the only jobs open to them in Britain were always less skilled part-time or full-time jobs, which were mainly in restaurants, care homes or warehouses. Some women were indifferent towards the jobs they took in Britain, as the financial pressure for the family was so overwhelming. For example, Pei Xianhong (38) told me that she did not think about the job title too much, as 'the only belief I had was as long as I could earn some money I would take anything (Pei Xianhong, 38).' Other women also expressed the same urgency to earn money, such as Ren Ruiyun (35), 'as I just

¹ The existing research on this issue is vast, with a common agreement that migrant women encounter double disadvantages as both ethnic minority and women (see Cooke, 2007; Salaff, 2006; Man, 2004; Raghuram and Kofman, 2004).

wanted to earn money, it did not bother me that much what kind of jobs I would do here.’ Yuan Wanfang (43) made it even clearer that ‘I look at it as a way of living, and actually it is the way of living.’

Although women were willing to take any jobs that were available to them, sometimes the opinions of other family members, especially their husbands and children, would strongly affect their job choices. Hao Yuxin (43) told me about her son’s reaction towards her plan of working as a cleaner in her son’s nursery: ‘there was a chance for me to start my first job as a cleaner in a nursery. But my son told me that he did not like me working as a cleaner and he thought it was a loss of face.’ As the head of the family, the husband’s expectations could greatly influence his wife’s idea about what jobs she would get. As Wang Qiong (44) stated, ‘I was planning to look for a job in Chinese take-away shops but my husband told me not to... that is why I never work in take-away shops.’ Duan Ruirui (41) also faced a similar situation, ‘I would have worked in these low-pay jobs but my husband said no to me. He retained high expectations of me and thought that working in those jobs is a waste of my life.’ It seems that the suggestions from the husband could greatly influence the wife’s choices in the labour market; what they said was much valued and sometimes could be the final word. It shows the authority husbands hold within the family, and the wives’ deference to it. Wang Qiong (44) told me that among all the low-grade jobs available to her in Britain, working in a Chinese enclave business was the last job her husband wanted her to take, as it was very tedious, and more importantly, she could not learn anything from this job. Duan Ruirui was the only woman who ended up working in a higher grade-job as a librarian in a university, which she owed partly to her husband’s high expectation for her, although it actually had a lot to do with her own effort as well as her later much improved English communication skills.

In most cases, however, women said that they were free to choose their job, with their husbands being fully aware of the situation they encountered in the labour market. For example, Ni Xingzhen (40) told me that ‘he [the husband] also did not

like me working in these jobs, but what could he do.’ Being new in Britain, the feeling of powerlessness in the husbands was understandable due to their wives’ downward occupational mobility, which might create a sense of guilt for the husbands and remind them to later compensate their wives. Other participants also recalled that they used to complain to their husbands at the very beginning when they found it difficult to cope with their new jobs. Kandiyoti (1988) mentioned the usage of this strategy of female patriarchal bargaining to maximise their power and options. Bearing in mind that these women’s role of supporting the family was temporary and the husband's career was the primary investment, my participants could see no need to get decent jobs, as long as the labour contract remained.

When asked about the process of job hunting, some participants noted that their search for jobs was impeded by a lack of familiarity with the job market. This was especially true for women in their late thirties or mid-forties who had earned undergraduate degrees in China at a time of shortage of highly skilled workers.² Indeed, their jobs were allocated by the government³ and therefore they had little experience of job hunting. As Hao Yuxin (43) said, ‘I really struggled the first time I had to look for a job. In China, we were people with Bachelor degrees; there were no difficulties for us to get a good job at that time.’ Wang Qiong (44) told me that ‘after I graduated, I was allocated a job as a teacher in a high school [in China]. I had no experience at all how to get myself a job in a capitalist labour market [laugh].’ Qi Xiaowa (39) also had a similar experience as ‘[in China], my job was granted as soon as I left university. I never imagined that one day I had to look for a job by myself and in Britain [laugh].’ The former work experience these

² During China’s Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976, China’s educational system was completely destroyed. Young people had little chance for higher education. Therefore the demand for highly skilled professionals could not be met in the early decades of China’s opening up period. University graduates were therefore much valued at that time and the ones allocated jobs first by the states.

³ Based on a planned economy, the pattern of Chinese labour management was characterised by a system of job allocation. This system guaranteed a job allocation by the Chinese Government and life-long employment for every employee, at least in China’s state-owned enterprises (see Ding and Warner, 2004). This system has declined in recent years with the progress of China’s economic reform, but the few generations who received a higher education in China after the Cultural Revolution benefited greatly from this system due to the shortage of professionals at that time.

women had in China strongly influenced their mindset when they started to search for jobs in Britain. Considering the jobs they were aiming to obtain in Britain, their feelings of unfamiliarity were also mixed with a sense of embarrassment. For some participants, the job-hunting process could be upsetting because they thought they were underrated. Some described job hunting as embarrassing and annoying, as these jobs were regarded as low status and low level in China, as Hao Yuxin (43) informed. 'However, here, I had to walk street after street for Chinese take-away shops and beg them for jobs. I felt a huge loss [laugh].' Qi Xiaowa(39) had very similar experience since 'it was really unforgettable for me, I mean the first time I searched for a job...I felt so embarrassed and it was like I was begging for a job as a cashier in a Chinese restaurant. I never thought about it in China.'

In order to smooth the job hunting process, many women sought help from friends with job information. In fact, a lack of employment and job-hunting experience could lead the participants to be more dependent on their friendship circles. Many women found their first jobs via their social contacts around them, such as Wei Xiaoping (46), 'I found my first job through a friend I knew. She worked in a Chinese supermarket in London. She told me about the vacancy in her store and I went there and got the job.' Another example is Zhang Fang (35), 'my neighbour wanted to leave her job in a Chinese restaurant, and she introduced me to work there.' As Sanders et al. (2002) note, the networks of friends, family and acquaintances can often provide immediate information for new immigrants in connection with job opportunities. Therefore a social connection within a co-ethnic group is vital and is used by new migrants as an information bridge within the new environment. For Chinese people, this connection indeed has more weight, because of the importance of *guanxi* in China (see Yeung and Tung, 1996). According to Yang (1994, pp. 1-2), *guanxi* means:

a relationship between objects, forces, or persons. When it is used to refer to relationships between people, not only can it be applied to husband-wife, kinship and friendship relations, it can also have the sense of 'social connections', dyadic relationships that are based implicitly (rather than explicitly)

on mutual interest and benefit. Once *guanxi* is established between two people, each can ask a favour of the other with the expectation that the debt incurred will be repaid sometime in the future.

Therefore, setting up *guanxi* with other Chinese people has two meanings: first, it ensures social relations available for their better personal interests; second, the possibility of debt caused by practising *guanxi* is obvious. In addition, there are different strengths in *guanxi* relationships: good and ordinary *guanxis*. Usually, those with the higher social /economic status find it easier to cultivate their own *guanxi* network, which displays a social hierarchy in China (see Yan, 1996). In fact, the formulation of a good *guanxi* based on the social status, power and personal abilities of the two parties within this *guanxi* (see Yan, 1996). In China, *guanxi*, as a means for advancing personal interests, is embedded in social interactions in everyday life and governs people's behaviour. Generally, those who have good *guanxi* networks obtain more support and stand a better chance for gaining access to social resources. For my participants who were confined to limited social contacts in Britain, Chinese co-ethnics could be the only ones for them to socialise with (see Chapter Five). The circumstances were relatively easy for the participants to set up their own *guanxi* network. Hence, there was great possibility that they relied on their Chinese friends and relatives for job vacancies. For example, Xin Ya (47) had her first job as a care assistant in a care home via the introduction of her friend, who was already a worker there:

The manager asked me if I had any experience working as a carer. I had never worked in this kind of job before other than looking after my parents. But as my friend worked there very well and they all liked her, they would like to give me a chance. That was how I got my first job (Xin Ya, 47).

Xin Ya's friend played an important role and worked as the channel between her and the employer. She even offered help to Xin Ya by passing tips on how to prepare for the job interview. Although there was no evidence to indicate a job guarantee through this way, interpersonal ties were still an important resource. However, as several researchers have reported, relying on friends could sometimes narrow women's career choices (Neetha, 2004; Sanders et al., 2002;

Pang, 1999; Pang and Lau, 1998). With a high percentage of Chinese people in Britain engaged in the service industry (especially in catering) (Pang, 1999), this over-concentration further narrows the range of the participants' job search. Thus my participants were easily led into Chinese-owned or operated businesses, or local jobs where their friends worked.

Apart from using *guanxi*, many women also looked for jobs on their own through Chinese newspapers or agencies that specialised in providing jobs in labour-intensive fields such as Chinese restaurants and supermarkets. The familiarities of culture and language made it easier in searching for jobs within the Chinese-owned businesses rather than in local large-scale businesses. Sometimes, getting a job in an enclave business was so simple that it only required the participants to be able to read the Chinese advertisements on the window of the shop and ask if the job opportunity was still open. As Mao Juan (45) told me, 'I went to a job agency [based in London's China Town] and asked for a job. They immediately made a few phone calls and offered me a job.' Wei Xiaoping (46) also described how easy it was for her to get her first job, 'It was easy for me to get my first job. I saw an advertisement on the window of a small Chinese supermarket. I walked in and asked them if they still wanted some workers. And I got the job.' Ren Ruiyun (35) obtained her job by reading Chinese newspapers, as she told me, 'just read those Chinese newspapers, there are lots of job opportunities in Chinese restaurants and stores.' Sanders et al. (2002) pointed out that strong cultural ties are always emphasised in the enclave businesses. Indeed, this emphasis can help new migrants find jobs more easily. This is also why Chinese job agencies and local Chinese newspapers became another steady resource of job information which was usually concentrated on restaurants and Chinese supermarkets. It was especially true for women who lived in big cities where a higher concentration of Chinese can be found.

Some women preferred the self-reliance on the job hunting process. They took it to avoid troubling friends who were also busy with their own lives. Some women also worried about owing too much to their friends in this way and becoming

obliged later to provide more in return to those who had helped them before. This is the down side of *guanxi*. For example, Ren Ruiyun (35) made it clear that ‘then I would have to return an offer back to my friend; it would be a debt [*ren qing zhai*] for me’. In a Chinese cultural context, a social debt occurs when support was received from others, to which an equal or sometimes bigger favour must follow as the 'payment' from the debt receiver (see Matsudaira, 2003). Therefore some women would rather rely on themselves to search for the job instead of burdening others to minimise the reciprocal favour required. Ke Huifang (49) trusted her *guanxi* network at the very beginning and asked one of her friends if she could help her to get a job:

She agreed and said she was really willing to help me. She also told me how she understood the situation I faced as a newcomer. But later, another friend of mine told me that she was moaning to her and said I was not good enough and was even unable to find a job. I was so upset and decided to find a job by myself...and I decided never to ask help from her again (Ke Huifang, 49).

Apparently, relying totally on personal connections could sometimes be regarded as a lack of personal abilities and could be looked down upon. Yet, the reaction of Ke Huifang’s friend might also be caused by lack of instant reciprocity from Ke Huifang, who was a newcomer struggling to make a living in Britain. Ke Huifang’s feeling of upset could be due to the loss of esteem she felt from her friend’s reaction. Later on, she tried to earn back her self-respect through her own efforts.

While many women reported that they looked for jobs outside the enclave, only three of them successfully got jobs. According to them, the recruitment process was more formal than the enclave businesses, they were asked to provide application forms, CVs and to go through interviews before they got the position. Compared with the experience of their friends who were hired by Chinese ethnic businesses, they felt that the recruitment process was difficult for them due to their less fluent English, as Ke Huifang (49) indicated, ‘I was determined to work with local people so I could learn some English, but I failed the interview because

I could not even understand their questions.’ Cao Shanshan (40) also informed that ‘I went for a job interview. But at that time I could hardly speak any English, I guess that was why [she did not get that job]. But they never interview people in Chinese-run businesses; it is easier.’ Ni Xingzhen (40) worked in China as a senior accountant and obtained her ACCA certificate, which is a globally recognised accountancy qualification. She had a very good opportunity of working as an assistant accountant when she initially arrived in Britain but failed because of her poor English at that time. Disappointed by this, she then found a job in a warehouse and had been working there since:

I was a very experienced accountant in China and I just took it for granted that I could get a similar job. They wrote to me that I was the ideal person they had been looking for and asked me to come for an interview. Then I failed. I mean I could read English all right but my oral communication was really terrible at that time. (Ni Xingzhen, 40).

Given these women’s communication difficulties at that stage, it was difficult for them to increase their range of job opportunities. Most of them chose to work in Chinese local businesses, which was their most opportune option, as the urgent need to earn money allowed them no time to improve their communication skills. Compared with their previous jobs in China, my participants tended to describe their jobs in Britain as down-grading and harsh, some still remembered vividly their shock when they first started.

Work Experiences

When talking about their first work experiences, most participants expressed the mixed feelings of excitement and embarrassment:

I remember when I started to clean the toilet in that hotel; I didn’t feel sad as I should have done. I just thought ‘oh good, I have a job’. But I took off my cleaning uniform as soon as the shift finished simply because I couldn’t bear the idea that

people would know from my uniform that I was a cleaner (Pei Xianhong, 38).

I was glad that I found my first job, but on the first day at work, I still felt so nervous. As that was my first job in Britain and was also a kind of job I never thought I would do in China (Guo Xumei, 37).

Although the women above felt content with the money they earned, their professional work experience in China still had visible influence, since they felt a certain degree of unease with the job itself. They regarded low-skilled jobs as a downward movement, and described it as ‘loss of face’, especially when other people asked about their previous work experience in China. ‘Face’ (*mianzi*) maintenance is very important in a Chinese cultural context and influences every aspect of Chinese people’s behaviour (see Oetzel and Toomey, 2003; Matsudarira, 2003). According to Matsudarira (2003, p.345), face refers to an individual’s standing in the eyes of others, ‘which confers a superficial prestige or feeling of being respected.’ Compared with their respectable jobs in China, the worry of losing one’s face or being looked down upon really disturbed these participants.

Many women complained about the bad treatment they encountered at work, especially women who worked in Chinese-run businesses. In Britain, the majority of Chinese people are from Hong Kong; this group of Chinese are the most established community with most of them engaged in catering and services businesses (see Chan et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2002; Baxter and Raw, 1988). The working conditions in such business are regarded as demanding, harsh and exploitative (Lee, et al., 2002; Parker, 1995; Baxter and Raw, 1988). Totally unfamiliar with this situation, some participants told me that it was hard for them at the beginning:

Working in Chinese restaurants is a really hard job. I was hired as a cashier, but later I found out that I had to do everything there. Once the boss saw you staying there without doing anything, he would shout at you or allocate you more work to do. I remember the first day at work, when I came back, I was so tired and had to sit on the bed for half an hour to get my breath back (Mao Juan, 45).

The demanding long working hours and high work intensity were very often unbearable for some women. The hardship was not only physical, but also mental. Many women reported a feeling of depression and not being respected at work. Sometimes the work environment became unendurable:

I first worked in a Chinese supermarket owned by a Hong Kong immigrant. He would only speak Cantonese to me, which I did not understand at all. They sometimes made fun of me and gossiped behind my back as well. I was never treated like that in China and decided to leave the job (Xiao Chunhua, 42).

I did not mind how hard the work was, but I hated the insults at work. That man [the restaurant owner] would just shout at me whenever he wanted to, and that really depressed me. I even felt I was scared of him and my heart would twist into a fist when I saw him at work. I was a white collar worker in China, why should I to be treated like this by an illiterate person? (Ren Ruiyun, 35)

As indicated by Chan et al. (2007, p.522), the colonisation of Hong Kong by Britain promoted a different identity for Hong Kong Chinese. They describe themselves as Hong Kong born Chinese to differentiate themselves from Mainland Chinese (Lau and Kuan, 1988). Depending on the more advanced social and economic development, the Hong Kong Chinese feel superior to Mainland Chinese people and thus tend to discriminate against the latter (Lam et al., 1999; Lau and Kuan, 1988). The higher social and economic status my participants enjoyed in China therefore was unlikely to smooth their integration process, with many women complaining about being treated as ‘second class’ even within the Chinese community.

Many studies report that migrant women engage in enclave businesses as a result of the constraints new migrants invariably face in host countries, for example, language barriers, cultural differences and social exclusion (see Salaff and Greve, 2006; Man, 2004). My participant Ke Huifang also indicated that ‘yes, I was paid less [than national minimum wage] and treated badly [in the ethnic business], but as I could not get another job at that time, it was acceptable for me (Ke Huifang,

49).’ Indeed, working in the enclave industry could circumvent certain limitations these women participants may have faced in the local labour market, as Wei Xiaoping (46) recalled, ‘I could not speak any English at that time, so I thought it would be easier to find a job in a Chinese owned businesses.’ Other women also expressed similar views. For instance, Mao Juan (44) said that ‘Well I thought they were all Chinese workers there, and you would not feel too uneasy [...] it was like all your kin were there and you were still in China [laugh] (Mao Juan, 45).’ Pei Xianhong (38) also expressed her point of view by saying that ‘Yeah they spoke Cantonese or Fujian dialect. But still you came from a similar cultural background and you had the same skin colour and facial features, which made me feel better.’

Working in an enclave environment with people from a similar cultural background can offer some kind of comfort needed during the initial period of migration. It might be taken by women as a ‘buffer’ to lessen the impact of transferring to a new country. With many Chinese around, more information and life experience could be shared among them and the process of acculturation would be smoother and less painful. On the other hand, as some women said, working in Chinese-owned businesses can also help them achieve a certain balance compared with the situation observed with other Chinese people, since ‘I felt eased when I looked at other Chinese. After all, there were so many Chinese here doing similar jobs (Xiao Chunhua, 42).’ Pei Xianhong (38) also had the same feeling since ‘sometimes I saw those people without legal status working in the kitchen, and you felt you were much luckier than them because at least you had a legal status in this country. I felt much better [when compared with their situation] [laugh].’

My participants adopted other Chinese as their ‘reference group’ to balance their disadvantages at work. As found by Loscocco and Spitze (1991), women usually judged their own disadvantages according to their gender-group membership. England et al. (1988) made it even clearer that women feel content with their low pay because they use other women as reference. My participants based their

comparisons on other Chinese in similar conditions. By comparing themselves with other Chinese whose circumstances could be worse, they regarded themselves as lucky. In this way, working in an enclave workplace helped these women to react less negatively to their new status in Britain; it facilitated these women's transformation from skilled professionals in China to less skilled workers in Britain. In addition, the enclave industry could better meet the need for daily income in cash.⁴ Being the person in charge of family expenses (see Chapter Five), my participants were fully aware of the importance of income on a daily basis to cover the family's everyday needs. The worry that 'we will run out of money tomorrow' (Qian Ling, 35) made women feel that they would only be safe with cash in hand. As Ren Ruiyun (35), who initially worked in a Chinese shop, told me, 'the owners paid us in cash and it was always lower than the minimum wage, but that was also what I needed at that time. I mean, I just could not wait every month for the wage because I needed money every day.'

Despite the advantages, these participants also revealed that working with their co-ethnics sometimes meant a great deal of personal connections being involved, 'sometimes the boss's wife would ask me to go shopping with her after work. But I was already exhausted or had other things to do...I had to go with her as it was a way to make friends with her' (Mao Juan, 45). Qi Xiaowa (39) also had a similar confusion, 'when I first started that job, the boss would ask me if I could help him with this or that extra work, I did not know how to say no to him. But later my workmates told me if I did not want to do it, just tell him straight away.' In a Chinese cultural context, work also involves setting up good personal connections with others (see Liu, 2008), this is another way to maintain good *guanxi* with colleagues and employers. However, the good will of these women was sometimes exploited by their employers. Some of them reported feeling powerless and frustrated at the beginning.

⁴All women who worked in Chinese enclave businesses talked about getting paid in cash. Due to the limitations of this specific research, it was not possible to state if this is a common practice. Despite the advantages this study's participants could have, e.g. to avoid income tax and N.I. payments, their rights as employees were not well protected.

Contrary to those who worked within enclave businesses, those who found jobs in their local labour market described their working atmosphere as simple and less depressing, and the pay was usually equal or slightly higher than the national minimum wage. However, they often felt some degree of isolation and segregation while working outside the Chinese community:

It was always at break time; I mean when my workmates were having a break together, they would start talking about a certain TV programme which was popular, or a superstar and his or her affairs with whomever, or shopping and their personal issues. It felt really hard to get involved in their conversations as I was so unfamiliar with everything they talked about (Feng Jia, 39).

I first worked in a warehouse where many Eastern European people worked. They were very friendly to me, but still deeply in their heart, they regarded me as an outsider. I just kept quiet at work to avoid causing any trouble...because I was all alone (Ni Xingzhen, 40).

Being excluded from the core circle was a big issue, but many participants reported that it did not trouble them very much as they tended to forget about it after work. According to them, it was just something they had to endure at work; when they were not working, this exclusion did not exist. Moreover, as they suggested, being excluded could be an advantage, a way of avoiding too much involvement with other workmates. Although many participants adopted an indifferent attitude towards this exclusion at work, they still employed many strategies to ‘get involved’ (*rong jin qu*) (Qi Xiaowa, 39). Some women tried to be nice to their workmates, as recalled by Ni Xingzhen (40), ‘I always put on smile and tried to be friendly to others.’ Qi Xiaowa (39) also mentioned working harder than others or helping workmates with their tasks to win friendship.

When facing an unsatisfying environment, these women sometimes took their financial pressure as their motivation to conquer difficulties they faced in everyday work:

I had to get up at five in order to catch the first bus in the morning. It was really hard especially in winter when other people were still asleep. I don't know how I survived [laugh] (Ni Xingzhen, 40).

I used to go to work by bike to save on bus fare, you know. And I lived quite far from my workplace. I had to cycle about thirty minutes to be at work, then I worked for seven or eight hours and then cycled back home (Xin Ya, 47).

I worked in a warehouse to do packing. I had to stand for about 6 hours every shift. Every time after work my legs had swollen (Ke Huifang, 49).

All participants experienced a series of problems at work. However, they felt proud of themselves that they were contributing to their husbands' future. They felt happy when thinking about their husbands' prospects and that was also a motivation to keep them going. Many participants regarded their jobs as less important and temporary, hoping that after their husbands started working their own personal stress would be lessened - which was another provision of their contract. Therefore these women evaluated their role as both family carers and providers as necessary to gain expected future rewards.

Wives' Duties and Work Choices

During the stage of settling down, women were both family carers and emergency workers as regulated by the marital labour contract. In order to avoid conflicts between these two roles, these women were very careful picking their work hours. Some would only work fixed shifts within certain periods of time, even when extra working hours were available. It was confusing at the beginning when this issue was raised with the participants by only focusing on the women's role as financial supporters in the family, because their avoidance of working at certain times was contrary to their desire to earn money. In fact, as many previous studies highlighted, being in paid employment does not exempt women from their housework duties (Kim and Hurh, 1998; Jackson, 1996; Delphy and Leonard,

1992). The majority of my participants were wives with small children when they arrived in Britain. In China, they could rely on their extended families or public nursery facilities for child care. Once cut off from these connections and facilities, they were left to deal with everything on their own. Therefore child care was the main concern at this time. Some women with young children felt trapped by their child-care responsibilities:

I could only work in jobs that started in the morning and ended before three o'clock in the afternoon. That is the time my son is in school (Feng Jia, 39).

I am now working part-time in the evening in a Chinese restaurant when my husband comes back from his lab. Because of the baby issue, I cannot work full time as she [the daughter] is too young to be sent to a nursery (Zhang Fang, 35).

The reason I worked there [restaurant] was because it offered very flexible hours so I could pick up my son from school on time. And that was also why I quit working for an agency without getting a fixed work rota (Xiao Chunhua, 42).

Women faced difficulties in balancing their employment responsibilities with their duties as caring mothers. In this regard, the flexible working hours their jobs provided, especially in Chinese enclave businesses, offered good opportunities to integrate their family supporting and caring roles. Some women who worked in Chinese supermarkets reported they were allowed to take their small children to their work places after school, or they were permitted to use their break time to pick up their children, then come back to work. As Ke Huifang (49) recalled, while waiting for her to finish work, her son was allowed to stay in her workplace to finish his homework or to play around in the back store room. This situation lasted for one and half years. Hao Yuxin (43) also talked about the mutual help she received from other Chinese women who worked at the same place. They tried to run a small kindergarten of which every woman took charge for a day. The appointed person would be responsible for picking up all children from school and looking after them while other mothers were at work. This system worked so well that every woman in that Chinese shop could work full-time without worrying

about leaving children alone at home. Therefore by working with others who had similar experiences, women could expect mutual understanding and support from either employers or fellow employees.

During this stage, many participants shouldered a disproportionately heavy workload both inside and outside the family. They were expected to perform as family supporters without causing any conflicts with their roles as good wives and mothers. Xin Ya (47) came to Britain when she was 31 and her daughter was only three years old. She rented a small flat that was near to her husband's university and worked in a warehouse that was far away from where she lived. According to her, 'everyday was like fighting a battle (Xin Ya, 47).' She worked split shifts; so for one week she had to work from 7am to 2 pm and the next week 2pm to 11pm. During the weeks she worked in the morning, she got up at five, plaited her daughter's hair, put rice and water in the rice cooker to prepare breakfast, and then rushed to catch the earliest bus in the morning, with or without having her own breakfast. Her husband was in charge of sending their daughter to school. As soon as she was off from work at two, she ran out of the factory to pick up her daughter. On her way back home, she would go to the supermarket to pick up some groceries for dinner. The following week when she switched to the late shift, she still had to get up early, prepare breakfast for the family, send her daughter to school, then came back home to do grocery shopping, cooking and household chores. However it was the issue of picking up her daughter from school that really annoyed her as sometimes her husband was too busy with his work and forgot the time to pick up her daughter. Once her husband was nearly an hour late and it really upset her. Also after her daughter came back from school, her husband had to stay at home to look after her, which his busy research schedule did not allow him to do. Xin Ya finally swapped shifts with her workmate to stick to morning only shifts so that she had enough time for her daughter, although working late shift was much easier for her than morning ones.

As Delphy and Leonard (1992) state, women's off-work time belongs to her husband and family, their time at home is not supposed to be affected by paid

work. In addition, compared with the husband, a wife's work is more likely to be contaminated by her family role rather than vice-versa (see Delphy and Leonard, 1992). As suggested by my participants, there were fewer conflicts between work and family issues caused by low-grade jobs as they did not require too much skill and input, and less commitment to work compared with the jobs many participants had in China. Indeed it allowed women to allocate more attention to their families. According to Xin Ya (47), who first started as a carer in a residential home and then switched to a Chinese supermarket, these jobs were easy to get on with and no further studies were required for a job upgrade. Other women also mentioned the minimal requirement of skills to start these jobs. Free from potential work pressure, many participants therefore could focus more on their domestic responsibilities and act in the best interest of their families:

I actually quite liked working on assembly lines because I could daydream while working. I used to set up plans for after work when my hands were busy working, I planned well what was the first thing to do after work, to pick up my child from school, then go to the supermarket for shopping, or what to have for dinner [...] I enjoyed that (Ni Xingzhen, 40).

As a person who was new to the environment, the pressure of making a living could have been overwhelming for Ni Xingzhen. Thus, Ni Xingzhen perceived her job as not requiring much energy or creating new stresses; besides, the job allowed her to give more attention to her family duties and responsibilities. Some other women also expressed a similar opinion and made it clear that from the position of their family, it would be impossible for them to input too much into their jobs, at least during that period:

At the time I came to Britain, my daughter was just two years old. My mother helped me to bring up my daughter in China. But here, I had to do everything myself. It would be impossible for me to take jobs which required too much commitment (Hao Yuxin, 43).

I liked working there [in a warehouse] partly because the job was so easy. When the shift was finished, it was finished. I mean I did not need to do any extra homework at home [...] all

those house duties were enough for me to do (Ke Huifang, 49).

As Westwood (1984) notes, women's choices are always affected by their domestic lives. The necessity of setting up new homes in a foreign land, as well as the pressures resulting from losing the help from their extended families, therefore, greatly influenced their work choices and aspirations. In addition, given the nature of migration contracts, women viewed their supporting of the family as an investment in their husbands; they regarded their role as the main family provider as temporary and transitional, knowing that one day they would pass back this responsibility to their husbands. Their expectation of achieving economic and social advancement by reliance upon somebody else could also reduce their aspirations. They thought that their husbands' career and studies were, at that time, at a crucial stage and whole-hearted support was needed from them. Since their contribution to their husbands' career was taken a way of being good wives; it offered them not only the sense of satisfaction by fulfilling their wife's role, but also the expectation of more bargaining power in the family.

Women's View of Their Double Roles

Many studies point out, within the household, women's value is often judged by the work they do for their husbands (Jackson, 1996; Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Finch, 1983). At the same time, women's role as family carers was internalised by them and was taken as the standard of womanhood (see Westwood, 1984; Jackson and Moores, 1995). My participants were very proud of themselves being capable of taking good care of their family while simultaneously undertaking employment. A compliment from their husbands could make all stress they felt from these double roles seem worthwhile; moreover, women took it as a demonstration to their husbands of their status as good wives and mothers. Many participants claimed that what they did for their husbands was what a proper wife would do when the husband and family needed her, and which they did out of love. As Qi Xiaowa (39) said, 'he is my husband; I willingly to do things for him.' Since it

was the only support they thought they could offer to their husbands, women could feel fulfilled by their contribution and involvement in their husbands' career process. The 'labour of love' binds women to an unfair domestic burden and is used to demonstrate their affection to their husbands. However, it 'hides the oppression it entails and helps to perpetuate (the division of labour)' (Jackson, 1996, p.39). As Westwood (1984, p.158) puts it, the notion of love 'carries a heavy load of ideology and provides a set of meanings, motivations and illusions which ensure that women perform necessary domestic tasks, and that they do so without experiencing them as oppressive and exploitative.' Indeed, instead of recounting their stresses of carrying two roles, some participants praised their husbands for sharing family tasks with them. Every little help they received from their husbands, such as doing the laundry, cooking or washing dishes were remembered by the participants and described as caring behaviour by their husbands. These women's accounts are reminiscent of Westwood's (1984, p.169) description of her interviewees on the issue of housework allocation in the family, that 'any faint suggestion that I was critical of what they did sent them springing to the defence of husbands and children.' With these women's internalisation of caring for others, men were entitled to be free from household duties; also, their men are the best because they showed goodwill and also attempted to relieve women's burdens.

With the Chinese tradition of being good wives, women regarded it as their personal obligation to assist their husbands through hard times. Some women thought that their husbands' work was very important and advanced, and engaging in this kind of job had already made them exhausted, therefore wives needed to be supportive:

I didn't know anything about his research, but it sounded very difficult and it was very advanced in his area. Well that was what he told me [laugh]. How can you trouble a scientist with the odd everyday things? (Xiao Chunhua, 42).

He had just started his new job and it was tedious and required all his attention. I remember he used to stay up until midnight to read and got up very early in the morning to

learn English. I just did not want to divert his attention. Let's say, I used to start working at seven in the morning, but I never asked him for a lift. I mean his time was more precious and I shouldn't waste it (Wang Qiong, 44).

As the heads of the family, men's jobs are always viewed as more important as they carry the responsibility of 'bread winning' for the whole family (Delphy and Leonard, 1992, p.243). Xiao Chunhua distinguished her husband as a 'scientist' and Wang Qiong showed respect for her husband's work. By prioritising their husbands' study and work, these women put their husbands' career development before their own needs. Both of them would not disturb their husbands with other issues which they thought were much less important. Besides, these two women also described examples of how to be a supportive wife; they exempted their husbands from sharing their household burdens as they were doing the more important tasks. Some participants' supportive behaviour might also come from their status of 'dropping down' and their husbands' 'going up'. The concept that the husbands were more capable outside the family and were engaging in higher level activities might also be adopted by women to justify their double roles in the family.

Some women who brought their children to Britain viewed their struggle as for the sake of their children as well as their husbands. As Xiao Chunhua (42) described, 'with the scholarship he had, he was fine to look after himself. My money went to my son and myself.' Feng Jia (39) also revealed that 'I made an agreement with my husband. During the time he was studying, he used his own money, as long as he could look after himself all right, I need not worry about him and could concentrate on my son. I earned for myself and my son while he [her husband] looked after himself.' These two women removed their husbands from child-rearing responsibilities, which they took as a strategy to deal with their hardship at that time. They regarded themselves and children as a burden on their husbands, because the husbands had both the 'money' and 'ability' to look after themselves. However, they forgot that one of the reasons they came to Britain was to assist their husbands and the support he needed in a foreign country. In this regard, they were not only not burdens but one of the most important factors to

decide their husbands' future success. Secondly, women took earning their own money and taking care of their family as compensation for the 'unnecessary' financial trouble they had brought on their husbands. In fact, the real situation was diametrically opposed to this. As Kandiyoti (1988) addressed, women's incomes are usually used for her own and the children's upkeep. Moreover, women were also responsible for their husbands' upkeep by contributing to the day-to-day expenses in the household. With the participants in charge of cooking, shopping and household expenses on a daily basis, it is very likely that their money was put into day-to-day matters and 'was transformed into meals' (Delphy and Leonard, 1992, p.175) and shared by their husbands.

Summary

During the settling down stage, my participants were not only the family carers, but were also responsible for family support due to their husband's career/research needs. Women carefully combined the two roles with the hope to better facilitate their husbands' career advancement. However, by investing solely in their husbands, my participants were increasingly confined to their traditional roles. This was especially true after their husbands became more established in Britain. The subsequent income gap between the couples made the husbands the financial supporter of the family; women were reduced to the subordinate position in the family. In the following chapter, I will explore women's dependent position in the family after their husbands' careers had become established, as well as their reflection on their life changes brought by their husbands' migration decision and their plans about future.

Chapter Seven

‘You See, My Life Is Quite Comfortable’: Women’s Lives as Economic Dependants

From the moment my participants decided to come to Britain, their future became closely connected to that of their husbands. By sacrificing their own careers in order to empower their husbands’, my participants expected their social and economic advancement to follow from their husbands’ career success in Britain. Among my 22 participants, 16 women’s husbands had established their professional careers in Britain after a number of years’ hard work or study. In this regard, it could be said that these women did achieve their expected goals. However, the contract between the two parties was by nature unequal. With the women focusing on domestic duties while their husbands pursued career advancement, the family hierarchy was reinforced, with men taking over the responsibility for family support because of their occupational success. Although this group of women seemed to be leading a comfortable lifestyle compared to their earlier lives in Britain, their dependence on their husbands further limited their power and reinforced their vulnerability in the marriage. In fact, this income difference not only reinforced the attitude of women as sacrificial wives, but also confined them to their domestic domain. Many women hoped that their sacrifice in Britain could be used as a bargaining chip in exchange for going back to China one day when they are older; however, the final decision-making power was still beyond their control. In this chapter, I will continue exploring these women’s family duties as homemakers at this specific stage, while focusing on the wide income gap between the husband and wife and its consequences.

the Choice to Stand Behind¹

My participants had very similar family patterns to each other: their husbands had professional careers, many were even experts in their fields and thus had comparatively high incomes and significant social status associated with their elite jobs. On the other hand, my participants were mostly found working in low-status jobs, either full-time or part-time, while devoting most of their energy to household responsibilities. This division of family responsibilities was made possible because of the income level of their husbands. Most women appeared to be very content with their present lives and were eager to show me their satisfaction and happiness. I still remember vividly that one sunny afternoon when I went to Xin Ya's (47) house for the interview. We sat in her conservatory drinking Chinese tea and eating some cream cakes she had just baked. The harmonious environment convinced me that these women's hard work had paid off and they had earned their right to enjoy their present lives. Other women's words also confirmed my then impression:

You see, my life is quite comfortable. My husband has a nice job and earns a steady income [...] I don't need to struggle any more. What I do now is to enjoy life and take good care of my family (Bai Kexin, 42).

Now I have a car, I can go anywhere I want. I don't need to worry every day about how to make ends meet [...] it is time for me to relax (Ke Huifang, 49).

However, after a deeper analysis of the interviews, I found from these women that the romanticised picture of being the one staying behind was not as glorious as it at first appeared. While their husbands shouldered the main responsibility for family support, my participants devoted their attention to the family. It seemed that, as the husband's higher wage could compensate for the wife's low earnings, my participants had lost the incentive to struggle in the outside world, as Wei Xiaoping (46) told me, 'I don't have that ambition to get promoted [at work] as I am now not

¹ I choose to use the term 'stand behind' to describe my participants' actual status in the family. Their husbands were the leaders of the family and better represented the family's social status because of their career advancement. Although the women had not withdrawn from the labour market, due to the low-skilled jobs they held they were positioned behind their husbands and were invisible in the shadow of their husbands.

the breadwinner at home.’ Bai Kexin (42) also recalled that ‘I gave up the job and became a full-time housewife [...] I think it was mainly because I did not have that financial pressure on me.’ The relief from financial stress did calm these women’s anxieties about making ends meet, but it could not fully explain their choice to prioritise their family and household duties. As shown in Chapter Four, although the husbands’ careers were highly valued, these women had still managed to develop their own careers in China while undertaking most family chores. In this regard, the reasons behind their change of perspective need to be further explored.

Due to the low-salary system practiced in China, Chinese women’s full-time employment made a necessary contribution to family income; and in addition, despite the help women could receive from their extended families with their domestic chores, they were still the main family carers at home (see Xue, 1999; Thakur, 1997; Weeks, 1989). With the rise of China’s ‘new rich class’ in recent decades, the wives of wealthy men are likely to turn into full-time housewives when the burden of family support has been removed. This is also a solution adopted by women to escape from their dual burden (Xiao, 2010). Ochiai (2008) also warns the possibility of Chinese women to experience a transformation into housewives, willingly or unwillingly, with the development of China’s economy (see also Wallis, 2006). In Britain, with their husbands busy working to support the whole family, it sounded just right for my participants to take care of the family and support their husbands. Thus my participants and their husbands could be led to reach a common consensus that, as wives, they should be the ones to perform family tasks,² while their husbands assumed the main responsibility for family support. Therefore, many women justified their choices in terms of their husband’s needs. In some cases, the husbands were the ones to impose gender division onto women, as Su Linqing (35) told me, ‘I wanted to get a full-time job and earn some more money. But my husband thought there was no need for it as the family also needed me to look after them. He would rather work harder to compensate for me.’ In some other cases, women seemed to self-impose this idea of being in charge of the family, although it was likely to be with their husbands’ agreement. As Mao Juan (45) revealed, ‘my

² One reason for this arrangement might be that in China, women often receive help from other family members with domestic chores; state or work unit run kindergartens could also lessen women’s burden from their family chores (see Liu, 2007; Weeks, 1989). In Britain, the absence of both could lead my participants to allocate more time and energy to their domestic duties.

husband is always busy with his work and it is impossible for both of us to go out to work.’

This arrangement sounded even more practical when it was connected with these women’s disadvantage in the British labour market. In fact, the issue of age was a drawback that was often mentioned by my participants. Chinese women hold a negative attitude towards ageing; this was especially true for my participants, who gave up their own professional careers for the benefit of their husbands, mainly providing for the family while their husbands were unable to share these responsibilities. However, after many years’ struggle, they had reached a certain age when it seemed a bit too late for them to pursue career advancement. And the chance of finding a proper job at their age was slim. Besides, considering their work environment and the group of people they had contact with at work (see Chapter Six), the occupational downgrading these women experienced could make them lose their ambition for career development and feel content with their situation. Moreover, women’s attitudes towards family migration could also influence their choices. Having given up their own jobs for the sake of their husbands, they valued their husbands’ careers over their own; thus from their point of view, being a housewife could sometimes better serve their husbands’ career development (see Becker and Moen, 1999; Delphy and Leonard, 1992). Furthermore, their husbands’ economic conditions also created the possibility for them to devote most of their energy to the family. Therefore, most women were superficially content with their family role in Britain— as I discuss later in the chapter, some sources of discontent persisted.

In addition to the external pressure, women’s fantasies about being housewives could also play an important part in their adjustment to their situation. The transformation of Chinese society since the economic reform has broken down the propaganda image of ‘iron girls’ that prevailed during the Cultural Revolution Movement. The introduction of western values and practices encouraged a re-emphasis on femininity, while the bourgeois lifestyle was becoming more desired by Chinese people (Thakur, 1997; see also Hopkins, 2007; Farrer, 2002). This fashion meshed well with the needs of China’s labour reform, since there has been a strong tendency for China’s public media to glorify the image of the housewife with the intention of

encouraging women to return home to be modern housewives (see Wallis, 2006; Evans, 2002; Jacka, 1990). Instead of regarding the new type of femininity as reinforcing women's subordination, many women are keen to go back to their traditional domestic roles of happy housewives (see Xue, 1999), which requires a woman to derive her identity 'exclusively from her attachment to a man and a family' (Hopkins, 2007, p.291). A similar phenomenon also appeared in post-communist Eastern European countries, where a process of 'housewifisation' emerged after 1989 to call women back to their traditional family values and to be supported by their husbands (see Ferge, 1997; Lobodzinska, 1996; Watson, 1993). Thus, the preference to be housewives might be especially true for my participants, who were offered the chance to play a new role they had never taken on before.

My participants all shared the view that, since their husbands had achieved professional status, their career was prioritised in the family. Hence, instead of contributing directly to the family income, one of the most important tasks for them was to 'maximize the family's well-being through the management of the housekeeping' (Allan, 1985, p.25). In fact, women took their family duties as means of showing their own value in the family. There was a tendency for my participants to think that, without them, their family would collapse and that only they could manage the family properly. For example, Hao Yuxin (43) excused her husband from doing household shopping by saying: 'if he goes to the supermarket, he will buy lots of microwave or canned food, which is expensive and not nutritious'. Bai Kexin also told me how messy her house became when she was away from home for several days. Given their identities as housewives, these women might use their performance as homemakers as a way of indicating their importance in the family. The satisfaction they derived from performing their family-oriented tasks might also be used by some women as compensation for the loss of their previous career. However, glorifying their performance within the family domain also prevented my participants from seeing themselves as being oppressed and exploited (see Rapp, 1982; Westwood, 1984; Delphy and Leonard, 1992).

Although most participants expressed the satisfaction they derived from their wifely roles, they also mentioned their discontent with their rather repetitive everyday routine:

I get up at around seven o'clock during weekdays, make my husband breakfast, and then get him ready for work. After he leaves, I do housework, washing-up, laundry and tidy up the house. In the afternoon, I go to English classes or watch TV. As my husband usually comes back home at around half past five, I start preparing dinner at five so he can eat a really hot meal every day after a busy day's work (Su Linqing, 35).

I took my daughter to school every morning. After that, I did cleaning. I made sure the floor was scrubbed every day; I used a clean cloth to wipe the floor on my hands and knees. And I scrubbed the kitchen until everything was shining. Picked up my daughter from school at three and then prepared dinner for the whole family (Bai Kexin, 42).

Su Linqing was a full-time housewife at the time I met her and the other participant, Bai Kexin, was recalling her past experience as a housewife. These two women both described their everyday routine as rather repetitive and boring. As Allan (1985) points out, performing domestic work poses the danger of isolating oneself from the outside world (see also Pink, 2003). This seemed especially true for my participants, who already had limited social contacts. Some participants talked about the fear of being left alone at home if they chose to be full-time housewives. Bai Kexin (42) felt this strongly during her years at home, 'I just felt so isolated. Sometimes I thought, well if I die like this in the house, nobody would know [laugh]'. Bai Kexin finally chose to go back to work in the Chinese restaurant which she used to resent so much, because the job could keep her busy and she would have somebody to talk to. Working in a private care home, Hao Yuxin also held the view that keeping a job, no matter how little money it could offer her, helped make her life more active:

I go to work every day if I have any shifts. As I work only morning shifts, my husband sends my son to school. I am off duty at 3pm, go to pick up my son from school, then food shopping, and then go home to cook and tidy up. You know, in this way you keep yourself busy and time just goes quicker (Hao Yuxin, 43).

Therefore, compared to the settling-down stage, the meaning of work had shifted to a way of escaping isolation and boredom. When I asked these women why they did not engage in some other activities to enrich their lives, Jia Zonghong (43) laughed and told me that she took her job as a kind of entertainment because 'if you just go

out to play, you spend money; when you go to work, you not only kill time, but also earn some money'. Thus, the two aims of work for these women were revealed: to have contact with the outside world and to receive some financial benefit from it.

the Desire to Maintain Some Autonomy

Ochiai (2008) attributes Chinese women's transformation into housewives to China's economic development. My participants also underwent the process of 'housewifization' from full-time workers in China to focusing mainly on their family responsibilities in Britain. However, I would argue that Chinese women's previous engagement in paid work, even though state-dictated, still had a profound influence on their attitudes to becoming housewives. First, my participants reiterated the importance of economic independence. Without denying the appropriateness of their housewifely roles, most of my participants considered it unacceptable to be totally reliant on their husbands. In actuality, the majority of the women continued working even though their husbands had the ability to support the family alone. While fully conscious of their husbands' role as family providers, my participants saw it as very important that they did not let themselves rely totally on their husbands, as it was not that easy to 'look at other people's faces to live [*kan bie ren de lian se guo ri zi*]³ (Xin Ya, 47). An extreme case was Su Linqing (35), who had just got married to a senior lecturer in a British university:

Yeah he is very considerate. He gives me pocket money every month to let me spend. And every time I spend some, he will soon find out and top it up without me asking. He makes sure I have one hundred pounds in my pocket all the time. But one day, he was joking with me and said, 'if you're not good, I will beat your bum'. And I replied: 'if you beat me once, I will just buy a ticket to go back to China and leave you forever'. He just laughed and said: 'ha-ha, with one hundred pounds, I don't think you can go anywhere, xi fu (a colloquial way to say 'wife')'. Although it was a joke, it made me sad for a long time. All in all, it is his trick to keep me within his reach. Yes one hundred pounds is enough for me to do

³ 'Face' here is used to describe the change in people's facial expressions caused by the changes in their inner mood. Thus the whole term implies a hierarchy in the relationship, where people with lower status suppress their own needs and desires to cater for or please those who are superior.

shopping in the high street, but it cannot take me back to China (Su Linqing, 35).

When women are financially dependent, the chances are high that their husbands exert more control over them (see Pahl, 1991). Su Linqing's husband appeared to be very considerate in giving her regular pocket money; however, the amount was carefully calculated to confine her in her dependent position. In this respect, his power was obvious: the one hundred pounds pocket money was a tool to exercise control over her. This was the situation that most of my participants wanted to avoid. Despite the fact that they had inferior earning capacity compared to their husbands, most seemed aware of the importance of maintaining a degree of financial independence; some of them admitted that it was actually one of their motivations for paid work, although the work most of them were engaged in was very low-paid and dead-end. For some of them, economic autonomy could also enhance their value in their husbands' eyes. Cao Shanshan and her husband had their first child after the family settled down in Britain, therefore Cao stayed at home for three years to look after their son:

During those three years, I became more and more bad tempered, kept worrying if my husband still loved me or if he was having an affair with somebody, I just gave all my attention to him. Then one day we had a fierce quarrel and he told me I was beyond reasonable and went out of the house. I looked at myself in the mirror and found that the woman in the mirror was unrecognisable: I was fat, my skin was so dry and my hair was messy. I was shocked by that and told myself: no I cannot carry on like this. I started to join local Chinese societies and learned some useful skills. I learned English, computing and also beauty treatment. I sent my son to the nursery then as I am now running a small beauty salon to service local people. I feel ever so good as I know I am not good for nothing now (Cao Shanshan, 40).

In addition to this, as she revealed later, after her business began to run smoothly, her husband agreed to look after their second baby two days a week, which she attributes to her improved earning ability.⁴ She also mentioned regaining the respect of her

⁴ Although she did not tell me the exact amount of money she earns each month, she implied to me that her business was profitable. This could be why her husband was willing to partly liberate her from her household duties and share some of her family chores.

husband. In this regard, her economic independence awarded her more bargaining power in the family (see also Kandiyoti, 1988).

Secondly, Chinese women's responsibility for family support could also be a profound influence on my participants' reconstruction of their lives in Britain. The Chinese practice of couples sharing the responsibility for family support seemed to still exist in some women's minds, which rendered their transformation into housewives incomplete. Although my participants were fully aware of their role as family carers, many women talked about their financial independence as a means to lessen their husband's financial burdens.

I also work and earn my own money. Although it is not as much as my husband earns, it is enough for me to buy myself clothes, cosmetic products and things women love. You see if I can afford it myself, we can save some of his money and use it somewhere else (Qi Xiaowa, 39).

You see, now I work, even though I don't earn a lot, and my earnings are enough for the family's everyday expenditure. So we don't need to spend his earnings and we use his money to pay the mortgage (Xiao Chunhua, 42).

These women saw work as an opportunity to help the family, rather than as an opportunity for self-actualisation. My participants saw financially providing for themselves as a way to contribute to the family and thus to lessen their husbands' financial burdens. Meanwhile, they talked about avoiding the use of their husbands' money as a way to indicate their independence. It might be expected that, in being fully aware of their roles in the family, my participants would also be conscious of their economic dependence and their subordinate position in the family. However, they appeared very sensitive about the word 'dependent', and this became more obvious when they were talking about family expenditure. They tended to choose the words 'we/our' instead of 'he/his' money to indicate an egalitarian relationship between themselves and their husbands. However, since women do not have the same rights to financial control as their husbands (see Delphy and Leonard, 1992), this account of 'our money' only happened when these women talked about the family as a whole. As we see from their accounts, 'our money' suddenly shifted to 'his money', which should not be spent on them (wives) as individuals. Another

reason my participants disliked the word 'dependence' was that the majority of them still held small jobs and had their own regular income. Actually, some of my participants tended to stress the fact of their independent income. In this sense, it is likely that they saw 'being dependent' as an absolute dependence on their husbands for financial resources. However, as defined by Brines (1994, p.657), the dependency was of 'one spouse's reliance upon the other for his/her current income standard'. These women's earning ability determined the fact that they were not earning incomes equivalent to those of their husbands. Thus they relied on their husbands for their current standard of living and social status (Kalmuss and Straus, 1982, p. 279) and pinned down their subordinate status in the family. As Kalmuss and Straus (1982) warn, women's economic inferiority determines their status in the family and enables husbands to retain their dominant positions (see also DeVault, 1991; Pahl, 1989; 1991); the switch from 'our money' to 'his money' hints at the family power dynamic of control and dependency.

Despite the women's internalisation of their present responsibilities in the family, it seems that they were also encouraged by their spouses to remain where they were. However, for some women who have greater career ambitions, it can be bitter to remain in low-paid jobs indefinitely. Thus, I presumed that once their finances allowed, the women would be eager to take up the opportunity of higher education. Surprisingly, only two women told me of their efforts to pursue higher education after they had successfully furthered their husbands' education and careers. Xiao Chunhua (42) was one of the two women who had managed to pursue further education after her husband finished his PhD in Computing Science and afterwards obtained a teaching job at a university. Since she had worked really hard to assist him financially and emotionally during the years of his study, she insisted that it was her turn to do a master's degree in order to get a better job. However her husband, who in her eyes was good, supportive and liberal-minded, was strongly against her idea:

During these years, as my elder son grew up and my husband's career became more stable, I felt it should be my turn to continue with my education so I could also have a career of my own. However my husband was strongly against this idea, which really shocked me. And I told him that he

was not playing fair as I had supported him whole-heartedly during his study and he should also do the same to support me. But he would not listen to me at all. He thought it was a waste of money for me to do a degree as we could save the money for my son's education. We quarrelled several times on this issue. You know he was a very nice man in my mind and I never expected him to behave like this. He insisted I stay where I was and should feel happy with what I had. We really quarrelled a lot but I finally won [laugh] (Xiao Chunhua, 42).

However, Xiao Chunhua later told me that the condition on which her husband allowed her to do a degree was that she had to pay the fees by herself because, according to him, 'it is your own choice and nobody is forcing you'. I could sense her difficult situation as, during my interview, her husband came back home and started to laugh at her, in front of me, about her MA degree because it had not enabled her to make any breakthrough in her career, so it would have been wiser to have saved the money for their children's education.

The other case was Wang Qiong (44), who had embarked on a PhD degree and ended up with an MPhil. The precious chance came, she told me, when her husband had to give in to her reiteration about her sacrifice for him and agreed to let her have a try, with the prerequisite of paying her own tuition fees during her studies. With her demanding studies, she felt that she could not cope with her student identity because of the guilt she felt about not performing her wife's role:

As I always say, I had three mountains on me at that time; the first one was the pressure of my studies. In the eyes of my supervisor, I was a student; they wanted you to put all your energy into your work. But I am a wife, and no matter how busy I was, I had to at least cook for the family. I was always the last one to pick up my kid from the nursery, or sometimes I had to beg my husband to pick up the child, but he was not happy about it. In the meantime, I was working a part-time job; I had to perform at my best for my customers. So I really did not have that much time for study. I had already finished 50,000 words of my PhD thesis, but I had to cut it down to 20,000 words to fit the MPhil degree requirements. I just couldn't carry on any more as every night I came back home, there was nothing for him to eat, my daughter was also hungry, I just felt so guilty about that. I did not want to spend his money any more, as long as I know he would love to help me, I am satisfied (Wang Qiong, 44).

Although Wang Qiong's husband supported her ambition at the very beginning, she also told me in her account that 'my husband was not happy about it', which might be an intimation of the change in his later attitude. Wang Qiong's feelings of guilt could also derive from her internalisation of her role as a wife, who should focus more on her wifely duties. In this regard, she might view the pursuit of her own career as unreasonable and thus unnecessary. Her sense of guilt could have become even stronger when her husband was mainly supporting the family while she contributed little. There was one interesting point when Wang Qiong mentioned that she did not want to spend *his* (her husband's) money while she was actually working a part-time job. Her account might hint at her loss of control of her own income. As many researchers point out, women's incomes tend to go into the household expenses and thus become invisible (Delphy, 1995; Westwood, 1995; Pahl, 1989). This could be why Wang Qiong sees the money as her husband's.

The only two participants who tried to pursue higher education indicated that they had to pay the tuition fee themselves, which was one of the most important pre-conditions their husbands set for letting them study. On the other hand, many women reported having taken free training courses organised by their local communities or Chinese associations to learn practical skills such as computing, English and sewing at a low level. According to them, their husbands encouraged them to do so. One reason for this was that these training courses were either held in the daytime when their husbands were at work or in the evenings after mealtime. Therefore these courses were unlikely to cause conflicts with my participants' household duties. Another very important reason could be that these courses were all free of charge or cost very little to attend. However, despite the fact that such training courses could improve women's employability in the local labour market, they were unlikely to enhance their opportunities greatly, in other words, the women's work opportunities and income levels were not likely to be greatly improved.

Despite all the depressing stories, there was one woman who did manage to obtain a higher level job compared to the others.⁵ Duan Ruirui worked as an editor in China

⁵ Another participant, Cao Shanshan, also achieved career success in Britain. However because she was running a beauty parlour by herself, hers was a different case compared to those who were employed by others.

prior to her migration to Britain. Her employment experience was unique in that she 'never worked in low-paid jobs since the first day I came to Britain' (Duan Ruirui, 41). She got her first job as a fashion designer in a big designer company 'by chance', as her original intention was just to try her luck and get a taste of how big companies interview people. As she described it, on the interview day she was given some material to make an item of clothing within one working day. She had never seen such expensive material and was afraid of ruining it, but she finally managed to create an overcoat, which greatly impressed the interviewers. Although she had to leave this job eighteen months later due to her husband moving to a new job, some of her designs remained best-sellers for a long time. Her second job was as a part-time administrator in the university department where her husband worked, to assist the administrator with daily tasks. She worked in that job for quite a long time until the family finally settled down in another city. By the time I interviewed her, she was a medium-level librarian in a university. She defined herself as a very lucky person as 'there are always opportunities around me (Duan Ruirui, 41).' As she told me, once she and her daughter were taking the underground and her daughter was explaining a certain English word to her in the form of story-telling. Their conversation was overheard by a publisher who came right over to her and asked for her permission to publish a story collection based on her daughter's stories. She used this case to illustrate to me how lucky she was as 'there are millions of people who take the underground every day but the chances of meeting a publisher who is interested in a kid's stories are so slim (Duan Ruirui, 41).' Secondly, she owed a great deal of her career success to the encouragement of her husband, as he never 'allowed' her to work in low-paid, low-skilled jobs. As she quoted her husband's words to me, 'people should never put themselves on a low level and should always start from a high point'. According to her, this guided her all the way through in Britain. Interestingly, she never mentioned her own efforts in her career advancement. It might be true that she had many good opportunities, however, without her own efforts, these opportunities would have meant little. During her interview, she kept reiterating her willingness to serve her husband's career development and the satisfaction she received from fulfilling her role as a wife, which really shocked me as I presumed that her husband would have offered her much support to assist her in achieving her career goals. In fact, she did not hide the

fact that her husband could not help her at all with her double burdens due to his work.

the Change of Lives

The family arrangements required these women to organise family life in a way that was suitable for their husbands. To achieve this, some women reported ignoring their own needs because they were not the important ones in the family:

I used to love being fashionable and to dress properly when I was in China, but here, since I have no need for this, I would rather spend more money to buy clothes for my husband, you know he is a lecturer and has to be presentable (Xin Ya, 47).

Let's say if we go shopping together and he spots a nice shirt, I will definitely tell him to buy it. If there is something that he thinks suits me, he will also willingly buy it for me but it is me who always stops him. [Why?] I don't think I need it anyway because I don't have many chances to wear those clothes. But he is doing a proper job and has to be smart (Ke Huifang, 49).

As Delphy (1984) suggests, the family consumption reflects the individual's status. In these cases, clothes were used as a means for my participants to reflect their family status. For these two women, their husbands were more entitled to decent clothes while they denied their own needs due to their less prestigious jobs as well as their household-oriented status. In his research on the family clothing economy, Corrigan (1995) also found that the purchase of clothes by husbands and wives reflected their different domestic and non-domestic roles in the family. Confined by their work environment, my participants thought there was no need to dress smartly. Since their husbands were the ones who brought most money into the family, it could also have been in my participants' minds that he deserved special treatment. In this regard, women's self-denial might also be a way to show their caring and love towards their husbands; satisfaction and pride could also be derived from being a caring wife.

Some of my participants faced the problems of moving from place to place with their husbands' job changes. For example, Duan Ruirui (41) was required to quit jobs twice to follow her husband. Although she told me that she did not regret leaving these jobs, the excitement she conveyed when talking about them disclosed how much she liked them. However, she kept repeating that she did not regret leaving since her primary job was to look after the family and to provide a comfortable environment for the family members. In fact, it was women's wifely duty that required them to follow their husbands' job relocation; this can be true even for those with prestigious careers (see Cook, 2007; Man, 2004; Delphy and Leonard, 1992). Not only did my participants have to sacrifice their careers, but sometimes they could not perform their *xiao dao* (filial piety) to their parents because they were needed at home:

Last year, my elder sister was diagnosed with breast cancer and had to have a big operation. I was so worried about her, you know she and I are the only two children in the family and my parents are both old...at last, I went back to China but only stayed for two weeks because my husband was really busy and had no time to look after my child (Hao Yuxin, 43).

You know my father passed away at the beginning of this year...but I did not even look after him for a single day at his bedside [sobbing]. I had a family to look after here, there was no way I could leave my son to my husband because his work was so busy and important...I remember the moment I received my brother's phone call from China to tell me that my father had passed away, I was like dead. The only thought that popped up was, 'I have to go back, now, but what shall I do with my younger son?' [he was only half and two years old] Then I had to take him with me to China. [why?] Well, my husband did not have the time or energy to look after him (Xiao Chunhua, 42).

I went back to China this summer because my mother passed away. Although she had been suffering from illness for a long time, it was still a big shock for me. When my family told me that she might not last very long, I did not wait for a moment to fly back to China; thank god my daughter was on summer vacation, otherwise I just would not have known how to make it [she took her daughter with her]. I stayed with my mother for a whole month, we slept in the same bed and I looked after her day and night [crying]. I just felt in this way, I could at least compensate a little bit for not being with her for so

many years [stopped] but what could I do? My mother also told me that, as a married daughter, I should not worry about my own family but should look after my husband properly, so I know she did not blame me (Duan Ruirui, 41).

These three women talked about their grief about not being able to provide care for their family members due to their physical location and the tyranny of distance. The sense of leaving their extended family or leaving their parents alone, caused profound sadness as they were not able to fulfil their filial duties and obligations (*jin xiao*). In addition, the feeling of ‘powerlessness’ resulting from their responsibilities towards their own families could make them feel more guilty towards their own parents. Duan Ruirui tried to reassure herself by adopting the Chinese tradition that, once married, women are no longer expected to contribute to their parents’ household; instead, they are more obligated to their husbands and their husbands’ families. Some other women reported compensating for their emotional debt by sending money regularly to their parents, although they made it clear that they knew their parents did not really need it. Rather, money was taken by these women to compensate for their absence from caring that was caused by the physical separation. There is also an interesting phenomenon that, when women talked about their guilt towards parents, they explicitly meant their own parents (*wo ba ma*) rather than their husbands’ parents (*ta ba ma*). Feng Jia (39) even appeared thankful for not being able to be present when her father-in-law was seriously ill, because she had already given her caring to his (her father-in-law’s) son.⁶ In addition to this, it might be true that under these circumstances women use their sacrifice for the sake of their husbands as a bargaining chip to excuse them from their daughter-in-law’s duties, although this has to be built on the common view of parents-in-law towards the daughter-in-law’s self-sacrifice.⁷ Meantime, their practice of sending money to their own parents might receive less resistance from their husbands, if the husband was also aware that their physical absence was caused by his personal interests.

⁶ I would suggest that the ‘caring’ Feng Jia meant was mainly the physical care she would have had to provide to her father-in-law if she was in China. Therefore the geographical distance could be made into an excuse for women to be exempted from their daughter-in-law’s duties. However, financial support would still be likely in this situation, although it depended greatly on individual cases.

⁷ For example, Ni Xingzhen (40) told me in a casual conversation about her parents-in-law’s appreciation of her leaving her prestigious job to accompany their son to Britain. In this regard, her absence from care providing was made to seem reasonable and rightful. However, those who were more traditional still took their daughter-in-law’s personal sacrifice for granted and showed less sympathy and understanding.

These women were committed their present status in Britain. It was really interesting to observe that only when they occasionally go back to China do they sometimes start to re-evaluate themselves and become less peaceful in their minds. Some of them, especially those who had good careers in China, expressed their sense of loss towards their own careers:

You know, my colleagues and classmates in China have all had good careers. A couple of years ago I went back to China to visit, and I found that my colleagues who were less good than me were all promoted. They now live in spacious houses and have their own cars; life for them seemed more satisfying... If I were in China, my advancement would be much better than theirs (Wang Qiong, 44).

You know, working in insurance was a really profitable job in China. If I had not quit that job [Gao Meizhen worked as a manager in one of the biggest insurance companies in China], I would have already become a millionaire. My life would be much better than now and our family would be living in a much better house... (Gao Meizhen, 43).

On the other hand, women who were less competitive in the Chinese labour market had no specific feelings towards their own careers, as ‘it makes no difference to me’ (Su Linqing, 35). Wei Xiaoping (46) even seemed thankful because ‘in China, women of my age have already been laid off’; Therefore, it seems that those who were more ambitious in fact expressed a more acute sense of loss, and some of them even mentioned their reluctance to meet their previous colleagues and friends due to their failure in their own careers. However, for others, the satisfaction they could derive from people’s respect for their husbands made them feel fulfilled.

Last summer I went back to China together with my husband to attend a conference. People paid so much respect to him as he was somebody from a top-class British university...when we went to visit the work unit I previously worked for, all my colleagues invited me for a meal and called me ‘wife of professor’⁸for fun (Xiao Chunhua, 42).

⁸ In fact, Xiao Chunhua’s husband was a lecturer at the time I conducted the interview. There is a practice on Chinese social occasions for people to exaggerate each other’s job titles in order to glorify and offer ‘face’ to each other. For instance, a deputy director is more likely to be called director on such an occasion if the director is not present.

Xiao Chunhua gained her own sense of value through her husband; she also used her husband's status as a way of compensating for her feelings of inferiority compared to her erstwhile colleagues. It could be that she also felt proud of her husband's being respected by others. However, the title of 'wife of professor' hints at the loss of her own identity, and reflects her status as her husband's dependant, even in other people's eyes. In fact, many participants reported adopting this strategy of using their husbands' or children's achievements to boost their own image.

I like to talk about my children in front of other people, and sometimes my husband as well; they are the biggest source of pride in my life as they have all achieved so much in Britain. I feel my own sacrifice is worthwhile every time I think about them and think that I also contributed towards their success. They make me feel so proud (Xin Ya, 47).

Well I should not be so sentimental towards my own sacrifice. Now my husband is happy with his work and my daughter did so well in her studies. If we were in China, at least my daughter wouldn't have benefited. I mean, my husband and my daughter helped me to achieve my own ambition, although in an indirect way (Jia Zonghong, 43).

I am glad to see that my daughter is happy. My life will be just like this, but my daughter will obviously have a brighter future than me, and I feel really happy about this. My daughter now has more chances. I think that what I paid is worthwhile and she also achieved my dream (Bai Kexin, 42).

The unequal nature of their migration contract is displayed here, with women more likely to suffer the side effects of this contract, and although the requirement of being sacrificial mothers and wives was so internalised, it leaves no doubt about this sacrifice being gendered. Women's feelings of involvement in their family members' achievements may offer them a balance against their own loss. In the meantime, they felt comforted by their self-sacrifice, which they thought not only resulted in a better future for other family members, but also boosted the rightfulness of their migration decisions. Women's attitudes towards doing things for others is actually a cover-up for these inequities, and meanwhile they hide these inequities from their own awareness and avoid the truth that it is the head of the family who benefits from the migration decision. While Delphy and Leonard (1992) analyse women's exploitation as being a result of husbands' appropriation of the labour of their wives, for my

participants, the family expression provides them with a justification which they adopted to rationalise their migration choices: as long as the migration benefited other family members, their own sacrifice was made worthwhile.

Future Plans

Most participants felt that Britain was not their home, despite many years' residence; instead, they took it as a place of transit. All my participants indicated that they still kept in very close contact with their friends and families in China, thanks to the development of communication skills. Most women only surfed websites in Chinese on the internet. Chinese candies and decorations could be found in all the houses to which I had access.⁹ 'I still think of myself as Chinese and take this country as just a place where I am living now' (Cao Shanshan, 40). 'I just don't feel I belong here, you know. Although we can stay here forever, people still think you are Chinese and you also know you are Chinese' (Bai Kexin, 42). The majority of women expressed their preference to go back to China when they reached old age. China's tradition of *luo ye gui gen*¹⁰ could still have a great influence on women's choices. In China, people hold the view that no matter how far one goes, one's homeland is always one's roots; when people get old, they should always go back to their original place to find peace of mind (see also Ong, 1996, pp.72-4). Meanwhile, the Confucian emphasis on the extended family and strong family ties could in certain respects enhance the influence of this tradition, given these women's closeness to their family members in China. As many participants admitted, they still kept in close contact with their extended families in China; by making regular telephone calls, exchanging emails and sending presents, these women still felt their involvement in the family ties.

⁹ The contrast between home and belongingness is always a big topic in migrant studies and is confronted by most migrants. Here, I would rather concentrate on some unique views that my participants confront in their own situations.

¹⁰ 'When the leaves grow yellow in autumn, they fall back down to the root from whence they came.' This saying is always used to express the rightness of the view of Chinese people that they should go back to their homeland when they are old.

Equally important, some participants talked about the worry of being left alone in residential homes in Britain. According to China's tradition of filial piety, children should take care of their parents when they are old. Since these women's children have all grown up in a western cultural background, the practice of filial piety was less likely to be respected. Most participants recognised that, as they could not expect their children to look after them in the Chinese way, the fear of spending the rest of their lives in care homes might enhance their desire to go back to China where they could feel more at home. As Mao Juan (44) announced, 'I would rather commit suicide than stay in a care home'. In fact, a couple of women told me during casual conversation of their plans to save enough money so they could afford a comfortable life in China when they retired. Cao Shanshan showed an eagerness to go back to China in the future:

Sometimes when I am on the internet, I check the market prices for real estate in China and calculate what kind of flat we could afford, a two bedroom one or a three bedroom one? I also hold serious discussions with my husband about this. Then we decided to buy a three bedroom flat so that when our children come to China to see us they can have their own rooms to sleep in [laugh]. Oh I cannot wait for that day. (Cao Shanshan, 40)

Despite Cao Shanshan's longing to go back to China, her plan was also supported by her husband. Some women held the view that, since they had sacrificed their whole lives for the family's benefit, their one desire to go back to China in their old age could not be denied by others, as Hao Yuxin recounted:

Sometimes I think that when my son grows up, I will just go back to China, I don't care what my husband will think, I will have to go as there are too many things I cannot part with in China. Sometimes I feel pity for myself as I feel my entire life is for others...but most women are the same, maybe I am being too sensitive, I don't know (Hao Yuxin, 43).

Although Hao Yuxin talked about her craving to go back to China in a resolute way as she did not 'care what... [her] husband will think', she also expressed hesitation about her true feelings of grievance against sacrificing her life for her family. This kind of sacrifice, in her view, should be regarded as common among women and was nothing to make a fuss about. In the meantime, the sacrifice she had made led her to

think that she also needed to make some decisions on her own. In other words, the price she had paid was enough to exchange for her right to go back to China, despite the precondition that she would have finished her tasks as a family carer by that time. Jia Zonghong also expressed similar thoughts on this issue:

I have already reached a decision with my husband that, since I came here with him, he can also go back with me to China for my sake. Of course it has to be the right time, I mean when he has opportunities in China or when he is retired. But I know he also would like to do that, he also wants to go back to China when he is old (Jia Zonghong, 43).

First, she expressed her preferential right in the decision to go back to China, this right was achieved through the way in which she once gave up so much for her husband's future, and now it should be his turn to follow her. Second, although she thought she had the right, it should be conditioned by her husband's work and her husband's own willingness to go back to China. In fact, most women expressed a kind of uncertainty about their future, as they all made it clear that the final decision was beyond their control, including those I mentioned above who seemed rather resolute. As they expressed it, if they are needed, they will still have to choose to stay and carry on with their responsibilities to their family.

Summary

With the whole family settling down in Britain, the lives of my participants also changed accordingly. Their traditional role as family carers was reinforced due to their inferior earning power compared to their husbands and their family status was further reduced. Their partial housewifisation was made possible by their husbands' success; conversely, their work also made their husbands' success possible. Influenced by their previous work experience in China, most of these women continued with paid work while at the same time providing free domestic labour to their husbands. Their desire to earn their own maintenance means that their continued responsibility for domestic work 'can no longer be justified by the economic exchange to which the servitude of the housewife is often attributed'

(Delphy and Leonard, 1992, p.117) and therefore made them more exploited. In addition to this, the income gap also prevented many women from pursuing their own self-advancement and instead, some of them transferred their own life goals onto their husbands and children in order to achieve vicariously what they could not reach themselves. Meanwhile, several women hoped to use their sacrifice as a bargaining chip in exchange for the right to go back to China in their old age, although they were fully aware that the possibility would depend on their family's need for them, as well as their consideration for other family members.

Conclusion

My study on Chinese wives who migrated to Britain as their husbands' dependants was initially inspired by the experiences of a friend of mine, who had come to Britain as a trailing wife and finally stayed because of her husband's career needs. With migration as a long-term strategy for benefiting the family, she, as part of a close-knit family unit, was left with little choice but to follow. After a careful analysis of Chinese wives' stories in relation to the whole process of migration, I was struck by the power of traditional Chinese patriarchal practices and the requirements that these placed on women. Moreover, by agreeing to accompany their husbands to Britain, these women put themselves in a vulnerable position; isolated from their extended families and friends as well as from the wider British community, they were profoundly trapped in their traditional wifely roles, due to their desire to achieve self-realisation through their husbands' achievements.

The history of Chinese people in Britain can be traced back to the late 19th century (see Chau and Yu, 2001). However, with the majority of Chinese migration studies adopting a traditional, male-centred perspective, women were rendered invisible within this population mobility. Because they were assumed to be acting as rather passive followers, the role they played in the migration was disguised by particular ideas about gender. The recent ways in which Chinese women have migrated have not yet been thoroughly researched, and even less is known about women from the People's Republic of China. Whether they came to Britain legally or illegally, they have largely remained unnoticed (see Chapter One). Since my participants did not come to Britain independently, they were more tightly bound to their traditional roles than other women, even women in Mainland China. In China, the cultural and historical impact of Confucianism has influenced Chinese society for centuries. By setting up a society with a strict social hierarchy, Confucianism strongly emphasised knowledge and acceptance of

one's place in society; by proclaiming 'women and inferior men are hard to govern' (*wei xiao ren yu nu zi nan yang ye*), it confined women to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Chinese women have a long history of being valued for their good nature as wives and mothers; they were taught to be obedient and to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others. While this situation began to change during the Republican era, women's position improved dramatically after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Although they became liberated through education and participation in the work force, women's traditional role remained unchanged, despite the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda of gender equality. This is an important element in understanding the choices made by the women in my study (see Chapter Two).

In China, the family is regarded as a collective group in which the male head takes the leading position; this deeply-rooted idea leads to the patriarchal relationships observed within migrant households, with men given special attention while wives 'are willing to play a secondary and supporting role in order to enhance the long-term advancement of the whole family' (Ngo, 1994, p.406). Being family members, women are supposed to have similar motivations to their husbands, thus their voices are largely ignored. This study sought to explore the migration stories of Chinese wives; in order to let their voices be heard, I applied qualitative research methods, based on interviews with 22 Chinese wives. When conducting interviews, I had not expected the emotional impact on me as a researcher. Although my research was not highly sensitive, the bitter experiences my participants had undergone still made them emotional; with many never having spoken about their stories to others, I served as an outlet for their emotions. I was surprised by the long-term effect these stories had on me, and had to distance myself in order to analyse the data. Moreover, although the power of control held by interviewers has been widely recognised, in my case, I was limited by my junior age and life experience and sometimes I found it difficult to control the direction of interviews, especially due to the Chinese perception that juniors are low in the hierarchy and are expected to defer to their seniors. This required care in conducting the interviews. I also experienced other unexpected problems, such

as the caution of my participants towards the consent letter and tape-recorder, as well as my inner conflicts between maintaining friendliness with my participants and leaving the research field 'professionally'.

My findings support the view that family is central to Chinese women, at least to those I interviewed. Autonomy and self-realisation are more and more expressed and demanded by women in Western countries (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and individualisation has also developed in China since the Economic Reform (Yan, 2009). However, the majority of my participants left China during the early stages of the Economic Reform, and these women in many respects still conform to the very traditional ideas of being virtuous mothers and good wives. They made their choices, not for themselves as individuals, but in the interests of their whole family. For these Chinese wives, the internalised constructions deepened their thoughts and choices in their daily lives, their attitudes furthermore reinforced the patriarchal family structure and confined them closely to their traditional roles. It was striking to see how my participants, most of whom had received higher education in China and had once had good careers, still focused on their responsibilities within the family domain and on achieving their own self-realisation through their contribution to their husbands' personal success.

All of the 22 Chinese wives I interviewed gave up their own careers in order to accompany their husbands to Britain. Because they were focusing on the benefits this migration could bring to their husbands and furthermore their families, these women's choices were limited. They could either come to Britain to fulfil their wifely responsibilities, or face the danger of a family split, for which they could be blamed if they stayed in China. However, my participants seemed to play down their personal losses and see them as justified because the whole family had benefited. They thus fulfil their responsibilities in terms of their contract as wives; they had given a better future to their children and maintained their marriages intact (see Chapter Five). It was their wifely responsibility to create a homely environment for their husbands in a strange land; since setting up a comfortable home was always women's work, the successful fulfilment of this task was

therefore the fulfilment of their wifely responsibilities. When facing financial difficulties, my participants consciously prioritised the family's needs over their own by cutting down their own expenditure. In addition to their material sacrifices, my participants also offered emotional comfort to their husbands while making minimal emotional demands on them, taking this as a way of being a considerate wife and to facilitate the success of their husbands (see Chapter Six).

During the early stages of migration, most of my participants worked in poorly-paid, low-grade jobs to financially support the family. During the whole process of my research, I kept wondering what paid work means to these women in Britain. Paid work played an important role in liberating Western women from their family domain, but for my participants work seemed to be another method of glorifying their image as Chinese wives. During the very first stage of migration, wives acted as emergency labourers (see Delphy and Leonard, 1992, p.131), they went to work in low-grade jobs which did not match their former experience, in order to support the family when their husbands could not do so. Women's unpaid labour at home was designed to free their husbands from domestic chores and their paid work thus provided their husbands with a more secure environment to facilitate their personal success, which could contribute to the advancement of the family in the long run (see Chapter Six).

Once their husbands were well established in Britain, the women's paid work was no longer necessary, therefore their orientation to work also altered. They earned money for themselves so that they would not have to rely entirely on their husbands; meanwhile, paid work was also used as a tool to remain in contact with the outside world and to conform to the ideal image of modern women. However, with all but two women still trapped in low-paid jobs, the income differentiation between husband and wife had widened to the point where their husbands earned much more than my participants. The wage differential therefore reinforced the family hierarchy with women becoming financial dependants (see Chapter Seven).

Feminists see families as sites of power struggles and inequalities, and this was certainly evidenced in my findings. This dialectic of power was first revealed when my participants' husbands raised the issue of migration; although my participants were given the opportunity to discuss this issue, the final decision-making lay with their husbands. By sacrificing their own careers in order to empower their husbands', my participants expected their own social and economic advancement to follow from their husbands' career success in Britain (see Chapter Five). Later, when the income gap widened, the earning inequality between husband and wife reinforced the family hierarchy, and the women became more committed to their subordinate positions and to organising their family life in accordance with their husbands' needs. Taking their 'sacrifice' in Britain as a bargaining chip in exchange for going back to China when they are older; however, the final decision-making power was still beyond their control. Their hard work was appropriated was generally devalued under the name of wife (see Chapter Seven).

Despite these women's sacrifices, they viewed their accompanying of their husbands as a migration contract; by providing support to their husbands, they in actuality invested in them in exchange for rewards in the future for the family as a whole. The existence of this migration contract was first mentioned when my participants talked about their agreeing to follow their husbands to Britain and the 'no pain, no gain' idea of sacrificing their own interests for their husbands' in order to gain bargaining power in the long run (see Chapter Four). This contract continued to guide the women during their lives in Britain, when they encountered many hardships including financial, emotional and social difficulties. Although they endured the hardship willingly, they expected their husbands' acknowledgement and appreciation of their suffering (see Chapter Five). The majority of my participants had to financially support the family when their husbands were either temporarily out of the labour market because of their studies, or needed financial support from their wives. They perceived this arrangement as fair, since their husbands were achieving certain goals that they could not achieve independently as women; their financial support of their

husbands was thus a means to realise their own (family oriented) goals (see Chapter Six). Although the idea of a better life had been motivating my participants all the way through their migration, the women received the least benefit from their husbands' success. On the one hand, these wives were expected to focus on household duties and were often confronted with the problems of financial dependency; on the other hand, the value of their unpaid domestic labour was not recognised and was appropriated by their husbands. In this regard, the contract between the two parties was by nature unequal and the women became increasingly confined to their traditional role as sacrificing wives. In the end, the rewards for their sacrifice seemed small (see Chapter Seven).

Of course, this is only a small exploratory study. It did not include Chinese wives who have chosen to stay in China, nor did I interview husbands, which could have presented a more rounded description of gender and relations in the family and migration studies. On the other hand, this study did reveal certain concerns, in particular these wives' difficulties in providing care for their elderly relatives back in China. Finding solutions to long distance elder care could become more important in the near future given China's inadequate social welfare system and the demographic effects of the 'one child policy', whereby the singleton is solely responsible for ageing parents. The lack of help to assist in parental care in the future is likely to produce great stress on adult children who live abroad, especially for women, who are usually the ones to provide physical care work. Moreover, there could be potential bicultural conflicts between generations. The children of my participants were exposed to Western culture, and some of them could not even speak or read Chinese. This cultural conflict between generations could present communication difficulties, for example, between the parents' emphasis on obedience and conformity and the children's recognition of individual autonomy and self-assertion. Furthermore, the narratives of these Chinese wives also lend insight into their severe social exclusion in Britain. Given their busy schedules as wives and mothers, they were unable to join any social activities; many were still not confident in using English, which further cut them off from the dominant society. Meanwhile, their exclusion from the majority

Chinese community caused by the mistrust between Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese further limited their social circles. This severely isolated lifestyle could thus impair their general psychological well-being.

The heart of the issues raised in my study is the continuing importance of family relations and women's subordination within them, in particular when we consider the population mobility caused by the development of globalisation. The problems of my participants are the result of family power inequalities, but were also due to the social changes in China and the rest of the world as well as the consequences brought by these changes. This research raises issues for feminists in the future; in particular, the relationship between local patterns of gender inequality and global patterns of migration requires further investigation.

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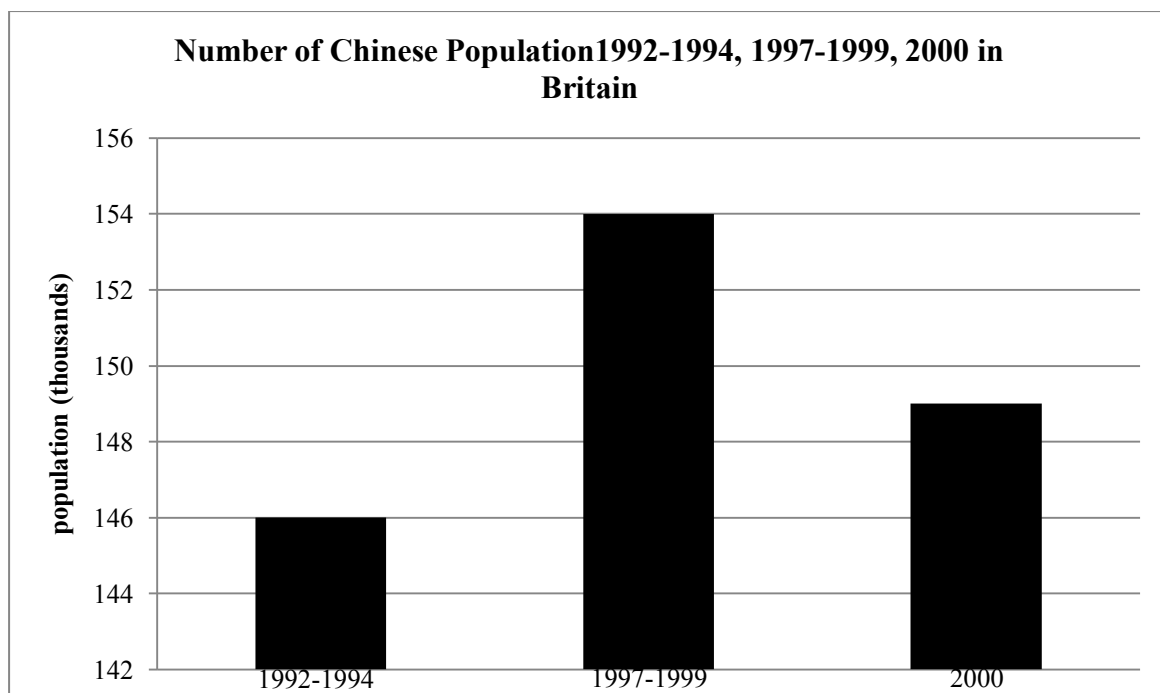
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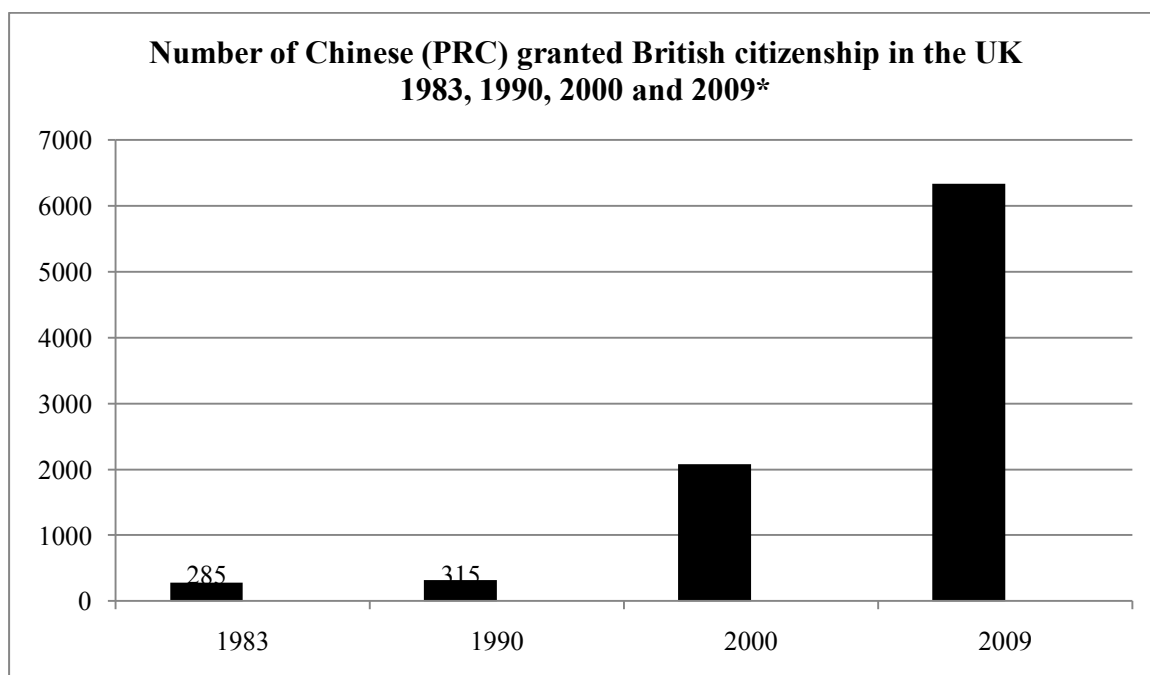
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Appendix A



Source: Population Trends <Available at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/population_trends/minethnicpop_pt105.pdf> [Access 13/07/2011]



Including Macau, Taiwan and Tibet.

Source: Home Office <Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/immigration-asylum-research/hosb0910/>> [Accessed 13/07/2011]

Chronology of Brief Chinese Modern History

1839-1842: the First Opium War

January 1, 1912: the overthrow of Qing Dynasty and the found of the Republic of China

August 25, 1912: the establishment of Kuomintang (KMT)

1916 to 1928 the Chinese Warlord Era

May 4, 1919, the May Fourth Movement

July 1, 1921: the Establishment of Communist Party of China (CPC)/ Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

1937-1945: Sino-Japanese War

1945-1949: the War between the KMT and the CPC

October 1, 1949: the Found of People's Republic of China

1958 to 1961: the Great Leap Forward

1966-1976: the Cultural Revolution

1878: the Launch of China's Economic Reform

1979: the Practice of 'one child policy' in urban areas

1981: the Establishment of 'Household-Responsibility System' in rural areas

1992 to present: the reform on State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) has been intensified and the number of laid-off workers keeps climbing

Glossary of Key Chinese Terms

PRC: People's Republic of China 中华人民共和国

CCP: Chinese Communist Party 中国共产党

KMT: Kuomintang (the Nationalist party) 国民党

SOE: State-Owned Enterprises 国有企业