MIDDLE CLASS WORKING WOMEN
AND THE CHINESE FAMILY
IN HONG KONG: A
PRELIMINARY STUDY

Submitted by
GAIK HOON NG

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Statement of authorship

I certify that the thesis comprises my original work. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree in any other institution. It does not exceed 14,000 words.

Gaik Hoon Ng

Aknowledgement

I wish to thank the fifteen informants who shared their thoughts with me.
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INTRODUCTION

The persistent image of the uncontextualised 'Chinese woman' in much writing about China and the Chinese diaspora is one of unrelenting misery and subordination. It is an image that is associated with general accounts of institutional familial patterns of 'the traditional family' (see for example, Levy, 1949). These reductive descriptions of what must be a rich, complex tapestry of family interaction and individual motivations are heavily influenced by evidence from the nineteenth and early twentieth century in China (Johnston, 1983:242, note 1) - a period when women are often pictured as suffering the worst excesses of sexual subordination. The lives of women in particular are continually rewritten in a literature which portrays Chinese women as passive objects controlled by 'Confucianist' doctrines.¹

Interest in the dynamics of the 'traditional' family has tended to focus mainly on male kinship, and to a certain extent on the mother-son relationship. Daughters, on the other hand, were represented as peripheral members within a familial ideology that stressed the importance of male power. This thesis is concerned to examine the following themes: first, what are the terms of the discourse used by my informants to speak about themselves as working daughters;² mothers and wives, which would help us refine our understanding of familial ideology within the Hong Kong Chinese family? Under this main question run two subsidiary lines of inquiry: one, can we continue to assume that the contemporary family in Hong Kong is still dictated by the historical, asymmetrical emphasis on the male line in significant kinship relations? And, two, in


² The phrase 'working daughters' here comes from the title of the book WORKING DAUGHTERS OF HONG KONG by Salaff (1991). Her findings will be discussed later in the thesis.
relation to the issue of women's subordination, what are my informants' perceptions of their material contributions to their families?

These questions regarding familial ideology, current kinship practices and women's subordination interrelate in complex ways: my present attempt at representing and interpreting my informants' understanding of their situation is necessarily an "ethnography of the particular" (Abu-Lughod, 1991). The prevalent methodology in studies about women and/or the family in Hong Kong has been influenced by natural science paradigms, a situation Taussig (1980) describes as "the petrification of social life by positivistic doctrines". My face-to-face interaction with informants has been an attempt rather to capture some of the rich complexities and contradictions of human motivations in a familial setting. While that may be, my preliminary study, based on one intense interview with each of the informants, does not claim to be an exhaustive coverage of their views regarding themselves and their families.

My data came from fifteen married, middle class women who had been in full-time paid work. They were born in Hong Kong and their ages ranged from 28 to 42 (the majority were in their mid-30s). All but one of the interviews were taped and transcribed, and they averaged about two hours. Although they were unstructured, the same questions were asked regarding early life, kin relations and working experience in Hong Kong. The majority of the informants' parents were born in China and had working class jobs. The informants however, considered themselves 'middle class' based on their occupation, educational qualification, place of abode and family income. Ten informants were interviewed in Hong Kong, while the remaining five, who were recent Australian migrants, were interviewed in Melbourne. I knew four informants

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Abu-Lughod suggests that one can subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence and timelessness, by focussing closely on particular individuals and their changing relationships. In the same way, one subverts fixed perceptions about 'Chinese women' or 'the Chinese family' when particular individuals confront us with conflicting information, or contradictory behaviour or change their decisions during the course of time.
personally but not intimately, and the rest were contacted by people known to them, through my network of friends and acquaintances. ⁴

In the following two sections I shall briefly outline the main characteristics of the group at the time of the interview.

Informants in Hong Kong

I visited only two informants in their apartments, Eve and Tang. The rest decided that my apartment or their workplace was a more convenient and quieter venue. Eve (28) lived in a relatively spacious apartment (4 bedrooms, including a small room for the maid near the kitchen) in a middle-class residential estate, overlooking the sea. She worked as a secretary in an American firm and her husband was a middle-ranking executive in an American bank. As a bank employee, he was able to borrow at relatively low interest rates and they had recently upgraded to this bigger place. It was a Sunday morning and their two-year old son had not returned yet from Eve's parents place where he usually spent his Saturday nights. Tang (32) saw me in her apartment (owned by her mother) in an affluent hillside area. She lived with her mother and a niece, and was expecting her first child. Her husband was resident in Sydney and was back temporarily for a visit. She managed her own computer consultancy firm while her husband, an engineering graduate, also had a small computer shop in Sydney. Helen planned to visit Sydney shortly to have her baby there and then return to Hong Kong with the child so that she could carry on with her business. (They were thus what is known in Hong Kong as 'astronauts' - people who are setting up alternative bases overseas as a hedge against the uncertainties of 1997).

⁴ See appendix A for further details.
I interviewed Carol (34) in her office at a tertiary institution where she was a lecturer in the Applied Social Studies department. Her husband taught at another institution. They had a three year old son. Kathy (38) was Carol's colleague in the same department. Her husband taught at a secondary school and they had a four year old daughter. Both of these women had relatively senior positions and enjoyed a 'private tenancy allowance' which would help pay part of their monthly rent. Before taking up her present job, Carol and her husband had sold their flat some years ago in order to finance their postgraduate studies in England. Kathy rented their own flat out and moved into the present one in the same area.

Lucy (32), a dentist, suggested that I see her in her surgery after working hours. Her husband who was also a dentist had recently decided to go back to university to take up medicine. Although he worked part-time, Lucy was mainly responsible for the mortgage of their newly-purchased apartment in the 'Mid-levels'- a middle class area on the hills below Victoria Peak on Hong Kong island. They had a two-year old son.

Cristy (37) was interviewed in her office where she worked as a university administrator. Her husband was a technician in a construction company. They had a three year old son who attended a nursery run by a Catholic organization. They owned their house in an up-market residential estate in the New Territories.

Cheung (35) agreed to be interviewed during a long lunch break in her office. It was a slow week (after the Lunar New Year holidays) in the small trading company where she worked as an executive. Her husband was an editor in a Chinese language newspaper. They had a three-year old daughter. They were the only couple who lived in a government flat, inherited from her husband's family, although the couple would be moving out shortly.
Hui (41) came to my apartment to be interviewed, together with her husband and nine month old daughter. She had been resident in the United States for the past five years and had just finished her PhD there. Before she left for the United States, she was a social worker. Her husband had recently taken up a teaching post at a local university and she too would be starting work as a lecturer at a polytechnic. They were looking for a place to rent using the husband's private tenancy allowance.

Christine (34) decided that my apartment was the best venue and saw me in between appointments. She was a social worker before taking the present post as an administrator in the Hong Kong Red Cross. She had recently finished a postgraduate degree in the United States where she and her husband had lived for a few years. Her husband was a solicitor and they had a five-year daughter and a four-year old son.

Leung (34) was interviewed at her office in the university where she taught English. Her husband headed the 'publication' unit in another tertiary institution which was responsible for the house newsletter and other materials. They lived in the 'Mid­levels' (near Lucy's area). They had a five year old son.

Informants In Melbourne

Tsang (39) used to work in a subsidiary branch of the Hong Kong Bank as the Assistant Officer in the loans unit. She had migrated to Melbourne two years before with her husband and two sons (aged 14 and 7). He was an accountant in a firm and a part owner of a printing shop in Hong Kong. They lived in Doncaster.

Lydia (32) had previously worked as a secretary in numerous foreign firms in Hong Kong and her husband was a physiotherapist. After arriving in Melbourne four
years ago she stopped work to look after a daughter (now five) and a son aged two. They had a house in Doncaster.

Wong (42) used to be in charge of the computing unit in the administrative office of a large hotel group. She migrated to Melbourne four years ago on the basis of a sponsorship by a former client and the promise of a full-time job. The business project fell through and she decided to stop work. Her husband although not a qualified accountant, worked in the accounts section of various hotels in Hong Kong and China. He had recently gone back to work in Hong Kong. They had an eighteen-year old daughter and lived in Doncaster.

Susan (34) worked as a physiotherapist in Hong Kong. After arriving in Melbourne four years ago, she stopped work to look after her son (now six) and daughter, aged three. She recently started work as a part-time physiotherapist at a nearby clinic. Her husband was a pharmacist and they lived in Doncaster.

Lin (35) had been a nurse in a private clinic in Hong Kong. Her husband was an engineer and they had a four year old daughter. When she migrated alone to Melbourne more than a year ago, her husband and daughter moved in with her parents in Hong Kong. She was subsequently joined by her sister and brother-in-law at her villa unit in Doncaster.

As can be seen from above, the informants had a wide range of characteristics, and for those in Melbourne, their recall of experiences in Hong Kong was further tempered by geographical distance and their present situation as migrants. Nevertheless, it was observed that these fifteen informants who were Hong Kong born and bred, shared personal histories which took shape primarily in Hong Kong.
Situating the Present Study

My personal interest in the Chinese family in Hong Kong followed from my own experiences as a new bride from Malaysia who had to learn to live among strangers in my husband’s household. As an overseas Chinese, I was considered a partial member of the local community because I did not speak Cantonese fluently at that time. By the time I contacted my first informant in December 1992, I had lived in Hong Kong for about sixteen years, and most informants regarded me as a local ‘Hong Konger’. I speak therefore from a position as a “halfie”. There are advantages and disadvantages writing from my position, but I note the significant points feminists and postmodernists have made in demolishing any pretence of neutrality and objectivity in writing about a social group (for example, see Oakley, 1981).

The context which frames my informants’ accounts is the British colony of Hong Kong near the southeastern coast of Guangdong province in China. At present, after about 150 years of colonial rule, Hong Kong is going through a traumatic, transitional period before it attains the status of a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China on July 1, 1997. During the last decade, the international press has dwelt extensively on the future economic situation in Hong Kong, the emigration of skilled and professional labour overseas, and latterly, the deteriorating relationship between Britain and China. The present controversies surrounding Hong Kong’s future and particularly, the uncertainties surrounding dramatic social change reflect in the main, the continuing history of a territory that has experienced the effects of great upheavals of its largest neighbour.

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5 “people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage.” (Abu-Lughod, 1991:137)
The majority of the ethnic Chinese population in Hong Kong come from an immigrant or refugee background, mainly from Guangdong province. Since 1947 a steady stream of such people has placed enormous strains on limited land and resources. The colonial government's laissez-faire policy and minimal welfare provisions meant that economic and psychological insecurities have been absorbed by individual families and familial groups. Lau suggests that the effects of migration have fostered what he calls "utilitarianistic familism" among the majority, and especially among the disadvantaged. According to Lau, individuals would put the interests of the family above anything else, with materialistic interests being paramount (1981:201). He argues that this phenomenon is to be understood as "a historical-situational occurrence ... (and) the adaptation of traditional socio-cultural patterns to a society made up largely of immigrants ..." (1981:214).

This perspective informs most sociological thinking about Hong Kong as an 'immigrant society' and the special importance of the family unit, especially in economic life. There is still a propensity however, to speak about the 'Chinese family', like 'the Chinese woman', as a fixed, monolithic object. It needs to be continually stressed that families in Hong Kong, as elsewhere, are simultaneously influenced by and respond to local social, political and economic imperatives of the time. These, at the same time, are also seen to interact with global movements commonly known as 'industrialization', 'modernization', 'westernization' and 'urbanization'.

Before I attempt to describe and interpret the particularities of my informants' accounts within the context of contemporary Hong Kong, I shall deal briefly with the ways Chinese women and the family are presented in various anthropological, sociological and historical texts.
THE 'HISTORICAL' DISCOURSE ABOUT CHINESE WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

Overt male power has dominated the imagination of researchers interested in the Chinese family and kinship. The relations between father and son and between brothers have normally taken central stage. General anthropological and sociological works focus on the alleged low status of women and an extended kin system that is organized around men and male authority. 'Traditional' Chinese family life is seen as revolving around the importance of three concepts in the organization of family relations: 'patriarchy', 'patrilineality' and 'patrilocality'. These concepts are still widely quoted in the material on Chinese women. In these accounts, 'patriarchy' is presented as an overarching system of complete male dominance over women. Women are seen as having no formal authority within the family or clan as property and surname are inherited only by sons. On marriage, women are pictured as required by patrilocal rules of residence to leave their natal home and familiar social networks to begin their lives as strangers in another family, and many customs are seen as discouraging any ties of married women to their natal kin. The language used to speak about 'Chinese women' appears at times to take on a misogynous tenor.

Women in Chinese society have tended to be represented as inferior, and they have, until recently, been marginalised in serious research. To counteract this trend,

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7 Blumberg (1991:202), the editor of GENDER, FAMILY AND ECONOMY, could not resist adding an "Afterword" to Nakano Glenn's description of past and contemporary Chinese immigrants in the U.S. with the following comments: "The Chinese-Americans are the racial ethnic group with the highest traditional level of gender stratification. Glenn (1983) notes that most Chinese-Americans came from Guangdong Province in southern China, an irrigated rice growing area ... (In contrast to the millet growing of the north where peasant women rarely worked in the fields and often had bound feet, these women were viewed as too necessary and valuable a source of labor to be thus crippled in the interests of patriarchy ... In addition, these hardworking women of the south still lived in one of the world's most patriarchal systems: a patrilineal, patrilocal society upholding a Confucian ideology emphasizing female subordination".

8 In Freedman's (1966) chapter on 'The Family', there is a saying from H C W Liu (The Traditional Chinese Clan Rules, Locust Valley, N.Y., 1959) which is an example of the prevalent misogynous attitude towards women who fought for the property rights of their children and husbands: "Women are by nature ignorant, narrow-minded, sly and jealous".
a number of works, notably by female historians, have enabled diverse and more positive descriptions of Chinese women and the family to emerge. For example, Ebrey (1981) criticizes the dominance of Freedman's and Baker's work in the literature on the Chinese kinship system. Instead of their stress on patrilineality, she describes a more flexible system among upper class women in the southern Sung period. Researchers like Ono (1978) and Croll (1978) have subverted the general image of confined domesticity of Chinese women by documenting the women's movement in China. Although Rankin (1975) notes that the urban women's movement was elitist before the 1911 Revolution, it seriously challenged the dominant system of Confucian social relations. Ono and Croll focus on the struggles of many feminists to promote women's rights and equality in government and family affairs during the first half of the century. They present these feminists as 'revolutionaries' who argued for the Chinese revolution to begin with the family. Unlike the discourses among middle class Western feminists, the articulation of women's subordination was not in terms of relations between the sexes, but in terms of the Chinese state. Croll, in particular, dwells on the dilemmas experienced by these feminists.

Recent research has tended to give us competing and contradictory images of Chinese women and the family. Johnston highlights the disjunction between prescribed tenets of behaviour and actual behaviour and comments that "Chinese culture traditionally (sic) reflected dichotomous and even contradictory images of women" (1983:16). Although "Confucian norms" and elite values prescribed that the proper work of women lay in serving the interests of children and family members in or near the home, in reality, among poorer peasants, women went 'out' to work (ibid.:14). Some of these women in the last century were 'uncovered' by researchers.

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10 Sung Dynasty 960-1279 AD
like Topley (1975) and Stockard (1989) who report that they repudiated marriage and led independent economic lives in parts of the Canton Delta (Guangdong province) where sericulture was practised. Topley observes that their existence would not have been written about by "traditional Confucianists" (1975:67).

Writings on contemporary Chinese women reflect the tension between structural constraints in their lives and the perceived 'power' that they wield. In a report on overseas Chinese in the "colonial offshoot" of Singapore, Freedman, in this instance, contradicts the image of the 'passive' Chinese woman by reporting that as wives and daughters-in-law, the Chinese women in his data are "not simply the passive things of their nominal masters ... their roles are subordinate, but they do not allow men to reign as undisputed rulers" (1970a:56). Researching on contemporary factory women in Taiwan, Kung points out that the image of the "helpless and timid" Chinese woman has been refined by careful analyses showing that women "wield not a little power at home, and occasionally, beyond the domestic sphere as well" (1978:7). She cites the work of Margery Wolf who observes that denied overt power, women rely on informal, indirect efforts to influence their lives (Wolf, 1972; also see Johnston, 1983:10). In line with accounts of mainland China, the Taiwanese woman's main source of power is seen to lie in developing personal relationships with her children especially with sons. This perspective no longer sees the family "as a harmonious social unit" (Rawski, 1991:90). Instead, according to Rawski, it appears to have encouraged a renewed appreciation of the mother-son tie as an awesome bond or as a subversive undermining of the father-son relationship. In addition, scholars influenced by anthropological and feminist analyses are seen to assume "a profound societal

11 There is an interesting footnote in Levy (1949:148) where he chides Miss (sic) Pearl Buck, the American missionary (writing in WOMEN'S HOME COMPANION, August 1946) for her "loose talk and writing about the position of Chinese women." Levy is adamant that while the family structure has been a stable unit in Chinese society, women's status within it is insecure. This is in opposition to Buck's observation that the Chinese woman is powerful. The part that irritated Levy reads: "But I found I did not really know Chinese women until I came home and began again to know American women. This gave me perspective and made me realise how powerful the Chinese woman is. Whatever her station, she is secure. She knows just what she is supposed to be and she is just that."
ambivalence concerning women as both essential and destructive to the male-dominated household" (ibid). Although the mother-son relationship has not really departed from the 'traditional' focus on males and male power, it does at least offer a partial explanation for many women's attachment to the family and suggests a line of enquiry that resists an unproblematic acceptance of the institutional and idealised versions of the Chinese family.

In this chapter I have tried to point out that received knowledge about Chinese women and the family has been dominated by research from a male-centred perspective. I note though, an emerging trend, led mainly by female researchers, to create some discursive space to reorient this bias and rectify the situation by focussing on women as the central 'objects' of enquiry. I regard my thesis as a modest contribution to this emerging trend. In the next chapter I shall discuss more specific issues about the contemporary Chinese family and women in Hong Kong.
CHAPTER ONE

FAMILY ISSUES IN HONG KONG: RECENT FINDINGS

The 'Contemporary Family'

Most of the sociological studies of the Chinese family in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s were haunted not only by the spectre of 'the traditional family', but also depended on the administration of questionnaires and manipulation of large scale data. This empirical mode of enquiry and alleged objectivity were supported by a belief in statistical sampling and computerized measurements. The intellectual impetus informing the questions asked centred on descriptions of the 'structure' of the family, its 'processes' and its 'norms'.

The concepts of 'family' and 'household' are confused and conflated in a number, but not all, of the sociological writings on the Hong Kong family\(^1\); thus while it is commonly believed that the prevalent model is the 'nuclear family', what is usually meant is that there is a prevalence of the 'nuclear household' form, consisting of a couple, with unmarried children.\(^2\) The numerical reality of a trend towards nuclear

\(^1\) Note, for instance, how Wong Fai-Ming's (1975) article, 'Industrialization and family structure in Hong Kong', is quoted in later studies by Siu-Kal Lau (1981), and Ming-Kwan Lee (1991) who both speak about the 'nuclear family'.

\(^2\) The 1991 Population Census Report similarly uses 'family' and 'household' interchangeably. The breakdown of the various family categories living in a unit are as follows: 'unextended nuclear family' (61.65%); 'vertically extended nuclear family' (10.7%); 'two or more nuclear families (4.75%); 'horizontally extended family' (1.82%). Other types of households include 'one person' (14.78%); 'related persons' (4.28%); and 'unrelated persons' (1.99%).
households existing together with the 'norms' of attachment and support for parents and kin have different emphases for different researchers, but most have been of the view that the ideology of familism underlies family relations in a society that has minimal welfare provisions for its population.

Sociologists working in the area of family research during this period are seen to be heavily influenced by Parsonian functionalism; this basically sees the inevitable emergence of the "isolated conjugal family ... as a necessary response to the processes of industrialization and urbanization" (Podmore and Chaney, 1974). In order to compare any perceived changes in the family structure in Hong Kong, hypothesized variants of 'the traditional Chinese family' are used as idealized models. Hence assumptions about 'the Chinese family' are recreated in the literature, as for example in Podmore and Chaney's description of the "historical" family. While they acknowledge that it is a "stereotype" (ibid.:401), these assumptions have become constituted as features of the "traditional" Chinese family and fall into four areas: obedience to parental wishes; the extended family ideal, and relationships with close kin; the appropriate basis for marriage; and husband/wife relationship. These "traditional norms and values" were further reworked to include a consideration of the different treatment of daughters and sons in the family (Lee, 1991:43).

Podmore and Chaney produce a picture of the Hong Kong family as "a variant of the conjugal family" and elsewhere in the article, "a variant of the traditional family norm". They report that the "data thus indicated that a variant of the conjugal family was the normative pattern preferred by young people in Hong Kong, a variant displaying some persistent features of the traditional (sic) extended family pattern" (1974:404). The homemaking role was seen to be the wife's first duty among their

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3 The exact wording of his questionnaire statement reads: "Daughters are different from sons because sooner or later they will be married and leave home. Sons remain one's sons."
sample (98% agreed) and there was strong support for the idea that husbands and wives should consult each other before making important decisions. But there was also widespread acceptance of the idea of wives working outside the home, a reflection of the economic facts of life in Hong Kong in particular, and Guangdong economic practice in general. Parents' wishes were not unhesitatingly complied with and young people were prepared to contest their parents' point of view, although a great majority still ultimately deferred to them. A majority of their respondents favoured neolocal residence, and nearly all (99%) accepted that it was the duty of all men and women to support their ageing parents.

Lee’s more recent study is partly motivated by an attempt to tackle the image of the contemporary family as portrayed in the media "as a besieged institution: ... destabilized by mistrust and conflicts" (1991:41). The confusion in his conception of the nuclear ‘household' with that of the ‘family' is partly reflected in his comment that the "nuclear family" contains "a complex mix of values and norms which do not accord with one another" (ibid). A significant minority of his respondents agreed that children were not necessarily obliged to support their parents (26.3%, but 54.2% disagreed), although obligations to one's siblings fared higher with the majority (93.1%) agreeing that married brothers and sisters should give help to one another. Lee concludes that a good majority enjoyed being together as a cohesive unit although a significant minority did not talk much to each other (27.6%), and frequently quarrelled over minor matters (38.3%). There was also very little support for the idea that sons were more important than daughters.


55% of the respondents felt that it was the duty of the wife to comply with the wishes of her husband's parents, even if they were contrary to her own desires.

Wong (1979:100) notes that the "prevalent nuclear families" in his Kwun Tong sample (in a predominantly working class district in the industrial part of Kowloon) practised "the patterns of bilineality and neolocality". By this he meant that "descent and inheritance were passed to both sons and daughters, although sons tended to get a larger share of it (sic) ... (E)ither the father's and mother's relatives were equally
Women and the Family

Most large-scale research studies, as noted above, are more concerned with establishing general trends in popular beliefs about the contemporary family. Interesting details however, have to be gleaned from small-scale case studies which attempt to 'humanize' the complex picture of social change. One such study is Rosen's exploration of the thesis about the proliferation of 'nuclear' households in Hong Kong: she studied twenty, upper middle-class couples, aged 20-40 in Mei Foo Sun Chuen, a comparatively affluent housing complex in Kowloon. Rosen points to "the emerging role of the wife, and hence the family structure" and the "paradoxical effect" this has on the kinship network (1978:623). She dwells especially on the ongoing and "imminent dispersal" (ibid.:627) of family members overseas in light of future political changes which has encouraged couples to reinforce "the traditional norms of shared residence and reciprocal aid" (ibid.:623). She uses the concept of the "life cycle" of the family when individuals break away and later reestablish contact at different stages of life. She points, for example, to the possibility of parents later rejoining the eldest son, when one parent becomes widowed or when both are ageing, and in need of care. This dynamic aspect of the household form is rarely considered in many of the large scale studies.

In addition, Rosen sees the wife as having an "emerging role as co-head of the household, associate breadwinner, and linking relative to her own networks of kin" (ibid.:625). Such observations are not commonly discussed in the social science literature in Hong Kong, although the occurrence of bilineality is noted (Wong, 1975; accepted as kin, but relations with paternal kinsmen were usually stronger and more extensive. Wong (1975:993) was already referring to the "paternalistic, bilineal, and neolocal" family in Hong Kong.

7 Huang (1992:35) similarly emphasizes this need to consider the developmental life of the family when he cautions against "the static view of the family system".

8 See Wong and Lui (1992) who assess the process of class formation in Hong Kong using the male as 'head of household'.

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Rosen concludes that the overall pattern was moving towards "a more Western model in the signs of a gradual weaning from patriline towards a bilaterally-focussed conjugal family ... with a continued adherence to patrilocal residence and to the patrilineal structure" (ibid:627). She also concludes that the unique feature of the family pattern in Hong Kong was the continuing loyalty and attention paid to husbands' families, as well as increased contact with wives' mothers and sisters. She sees this as contrasting with the "Western model" which "tends to isolate and ignore husbands' parents" (ibid). She describes her informants as selectively maintaining contact with kin at different stages in their lives while they appeared to strive for "maximal independence as well as maximal support" (ibid).5

Rosen's observation about the emerging importance of wife's kin in family relations is normally obscured in popular discourse on the family in Hong Kong. Very few researchers appear to differentiate between wife's or husband's kin in extended households. An exception is an earlier study by Hong who chooses to speak of the presence of wife's kin in the household in terms of the "puzzling ... matrilateral tendency" 10 in one of his household categories. This rather telling comment reflects how strong his original assumption was regarding the prevalent belief about Hong Kong as a "patrilocal, patrilineal society" (1971:115).

The emergent family form, according to two female social work educators is not a movement towards increasing conjugalism but a "modified extended family" which show features of "the structure and norms of [the] traditional Chinese family and [the] Western conjugal family" (Wong and Yeung, 1992:2). They also observe that

5 This trend appears to match Vatuk's (1972) finding regarding the tendency towards bilateral emphasis in urban kinship as a result of increasing neolocal residence.

10 Out of a total of 2751 families, Hong categorised 13.6% (376) as (extended) 'stem' - that is, containing paternal grandparents. The 'other extended category' was 14.2% (399), and this figure contained at least 68% (267) with one maternal relative (grandparent, aunt, uncle or married sister). Hong is surprised to note that 18% of the female respondents (compared to 45% males) wanted to live with their parents.
separations and divorces had risen dramatically in recent years.¹¹ Family tasks and responsibilities followed "the traditional segregated sex-role differentiation, but with greater flexibility" (ibid.:3). Husbands were still seen as providers, while women continued to be concerned with child care, child socialization, housekeeping and kinship roles, irrespective of their work and educational status. Studies of working mothers (sic) suggested that mothers were "hard-pressed to fulfil their dual roles".¹² This latter observation contrasts with an earlier study which claims that gainful employment had given rise to a reduction in the performance of overall household tasks among fully employed wives, compared to partially employed wives and housewives in the industrial community of Kwun Tong (Wong, 1981).¹³ There is a further claim that "a mother's employment ... also enables her to enjoy a relatively more equal status with her husband and maintain a collaborative type of relationship with him in place of that of individual autonomy or dominance" (ibid.: 231).

Information about women and the family in recent years has increasingly reflected a growing interest in female participation in paid labour. Noting this phenomenon in his research-in-progress Ng, however, is critical of the prevalent deterministic mode of examining Hong Kong's industrialization experience and its effects on women's employment and their activities in the family. Instead, he explicitly claims to draw from the insights of women's studies to see members of a family unit having "common as well as divergent interests ... and who do not all react in terms of a mythical unity" (1992:45). He focusses instead on the feelings of his interviewees regarding their experiences and actions, using the concept of "household strategy"


¹² Wong and Yeung refer to two studies: Ho and Kang, "Intergenerational comparisons of child-rearing attitudes and practices in Hong Kong, DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY, 20, 1964; and (a project by) the Young Women's Christian Association, 1964.

¹³ What the data shows in fact is that only 57.1% of the fully employed, 43.8% of the partially employed, and 43.5% of the housewives shared household tasks equally with their husbands. The difference in the number of fully employed women and housewives does not appear to be that remarkable.
Ng contends that the oral data from the 22 working-class women was a better gauge of their contribution to their families. His respondents, all over 50 years of age, worked during the 50s and 60s and saw paid work as crucial for survival; when some of these women interrupted full-time work, they reportedly continued with part-time work or outwork, and these phases were partly planned and considered in detail with husband and children. Although conclusive statements about women and employment would be premature at this stage, he saw his data as challenging the long-held assumption about the Chinese woman as 'traditional housewife' and the popular thesis that industrialization, together with education and a liberal social outlook, gave rise to female participation in paid labour in Hong Kong. In addition, parents reportedly denied treating sons and daughters differently. The oldest sons and daughters participated in paid labour at an early age and were treated "as part of the common resource pool aiding the well-being of the whole household" (ibid.:53).

The 'Centripetal' Family

Salaff's (1981) study of 28 single women is noteworthy on two counts: first, she chose to collect her data by being a participant observer and interviewer and second, unlike most researchers on the contemporary family in Hong Kong has emerged as a critic of 'the Chinese family' which she terms an essentially "paternal" unit whose "long-standing family norms" (ibid.:276) exploited daughters' labour to benefit their family of origin. Although she might have been initially preoccupied with the question of the impact of industrialization on family relationships, and the consequent weakening of parental authority, her study in Hong Kong focussed instead on the "centripetal family" which functioned as a "power base" (ibid.:8) and enabled parents "to direct the productive energies of working youths towards the preservation of the family, and in the process, women will be dependent upon it" (ibid.:276). In addition, her conclusion,
widely quoted in feminist articles,\textsuperscript{14} states that despite rising economic contributions among her informants, there was "little evidence ... of long-term improvement of their position or ... enhancement of their value" (ibid.:11-12).

Salaff contends that the Hong Kong family, as a modified form of the 'centripetal' family, continued to "control ... the wages of dutiful daughters" (p.9). Salaff relies very heavily on accounts of the 'traditional' patriarchal Chinese family to argue that the Hong Kong family today is still "peculiarly appropriate for the attainment" of two goals. These are: "economic cooperation and pooling of members' earnings to advance the family economy" (ibid.:258), and the favouring of sons who are seen "to continue the religious-cultural focus on the patriline ... and who are the main recipients of family benefits" (ibid). She sees the unmarried daughter, like other family members, following "these strictures, which demand her loyalty to her family of origin before marriage and devotion to her husband's family thereafter" (ibid).

Salaff's description of the modified 'centripetal family' appears to be built on a discourse of "patrilineal kinship ... patrilocal residence" (ibid.:272), and "the material structure of the patriarchy in Hong Kong today" (ibid.:273). In contrast, Lau's concept of "utilitarianistic familism" among his immigrant families does not include such descriptions (although his Chinese immigrants, who were predominantly from a rural background were said to have a "traditional orientation"). He asserts that in urban Hong Kong today, "virtually none of the organizational and ecological features of the traditional family exist" (1981:202). These refer to the features of an agrarian community whose familial solidarity rested on sharing common property. Rather, the immigrant community in Hong Kong operated within a market economy that depended solely on the outside world. Both Lau and Salaff agree, however, on the primacy of the family in economic activities, and both cite the colonial government's laissez-faire policy.

\textsuperscript{14} For example, see Wolf (1991), Warren & Bourque (1991), Pearson (1990).
and its outdated social welfare system as contributing to the strong focus on familial interests among the population.

Filial Piety

Most writing on the family in Hong Kong has dealt with 'filial piety' although rather superficially on the whole. This is commonly understood to be a complex aggregate of emotions founded on a sense of moral obligation towards one's parents. In this section, I will focus on how the economic contribution of women to their families of origin is viewed. Kung describes the sense of moral obligation among her Taiwanese factory women in terms such as "debt to parents", and to "repay the cost of being brought up as a 'useless' daughter" (1978:xiii). She argues that her informants did not see themselves "as being used by their parents" (ibid.:188) nor were their interests viewed in opposition to the interests of their families. This is because strong affective relations with family members gave them a sense of identification with their family of origin. According to Kung, such relations "cannot be reduced to economic considerations" (ibid).\textsuperscript{15}

On the other hand, Salaff's conclusion strongly suggests that her working daughters are exploited workers. Her title, WORKING DAUGHTERS OF HONG KONG: FILIAL PIETY OR POWER IN THE FAMILY? reflects the opposition that she sets up between 'filial piety' and 'power'. If they succumb to 'filial piety' they will have no power, and therefore her Chinese women are powerless, (non)agents under the command of "family action" (1981:276), which "molds women's status and circumscribes their

\textsuperscript{15} Kung cites the work of Michael Anderson, FAMILY STRUCTURE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY LANCASHIRE, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971) as one example of earlier research that glosses over the emotional security that a family provides, and to which her informants gave so much importance.
opportunities" (ibid.:259). Salaff acknowledges that her informants enjoyed increased "affections (sic) and prestige within the family of origin" (ibid.:12) but dismisses their significance within her framework where a more generalized consideration of the 'position' of women is more critical. These different ways of interpreting an important aspect of familial ideology within the Chinese family will be discussed more fully in relation to my data in Chapter Three.

The Family and Feminism in Hong Kong

The small amount of recent research published in Hong Kong on contemporary Chinese women by local Chinese women is studiously low-key and heavily reliant on empirical surveys (cf. Cheung et al 1991). There is rarely any engagement with serious current feminist theorizing from the West. Popular understanding of feminism generally is understood as the combative, 'bra burning', anti-men variety, and sexual politics appear to be seen as inimical to stable family relations. Because of their potential divisiveness, feminist challenges to the status quo in the West are normally dismissed as irrelevant to the harmonious functioning of the Chinese family. Fanny Cheung, a prominent Hong Kong researcher in gender studies, opines that the interests of local women would be better served by a "more conciliatory approach" (1991:105). New ideas could be better integrated by "honouring the Chinese value of harmony over conflict" and women's "development becomes more acceptable when seen as the enhancement of resources for the whole family whereby both women and men benefit" (ibid.:104). Hence the quietly subversive approach is believed to be more effective in bringing about changes in the power relations between men and women.

Cheung's views also reflect the common link that most women in Hong Kong make between 'Western feminists' and their 'anti-family' stance. The feminist
movement in Hong Kong is hardly visible to observers, particularly if they are looking for mass demonstrations and the 'cut and thrust' tactics of democratic politics as in the West. Unlike Friedan's description of the women's movement in the '60s and '70s with the "explosion of anger", the "enemy to rage against" (1981:125), the local movement (if one can call it that) can be represented as a comparatively quiet search for new values in family relations, or new meanings in old patterns particularly among middle class women in Hong Kong.\footnote{There are only two women groups in Hong Kong known to the author who are avowedly feminist: The Association for the Advancement of Feminism (consisting mainly of Cantonese-speaking, local born members) and the Hong Kong Council of Women (consisting mainly of English-speaking, expatriate members). Members in these organizations occasionally write letters or features on topical issues in local newspapers. Other women groups appear to be affiliated to religious bodies or function as social 'clubs' with members in the professional or business fields. Some of these bodies may sometimes form loose alliances to lobby for specific demands, like for example, better childcare facilities which are usually processed through normal bureaucratic channels. Recently, one contentious issue which has appeared to generate unusual excitement concerns the difficulties that rural women have encountered in the inheritance of land. Since the early days of British colonial rule, Chinese customary law prohibiting females to inherit (ancestral) land in the New Territories was given legislative effect by the New Territories Ordinance. However, in recent months, with the setting up of a Women's Affairs Committee within the Legislative Council (the local law-making body), the issue has gained momentum with an introduction of an amendment to the New Territories (Exemption) Bill. This caused violent protests from (mostly male) New Territories villagers who demonstrated in front of the Legislative Building against the "overturning of centuries-old rural inheritance rights" (SUNDAY MORNING POST, March 27, 1994).}

OVERVIEW

I have attempted in the literature survey above to delineate relevant issues and to give a selective description of some of the important beliefs and claims about the family and women in Hong Kong. It is apparent that research on such topics has occurred in a piecemeal fashion and has generally been influenced by an empiricist framework. We can conclude, however, that there is an unambiguous predominance of 'nuclear' households and neolocal residence among conjugal couples in contemporary Hong Kong, although the emergent family form is better understood as 'the modified extended family'; assumptions about 'male-centred' kinship in the Chinese family have been shown to be problematic by some research suggesting the
importance of bilateral kin relations among Hong Kong families; and finally the high proportion of females working in an industrial, laissez faire economy has begun to direct critical interest towards the situation of women, wage work, and family ideology. The latter focus on the material contribution of women to the family economy has given rise to Salatt's portrayal of 'the Chinese family' as an obstacle to women's interests, while other researchers continue to view the family as an essentially cohesive unit practising household 'strategies'. The issue of women's material involvement with the family will be explored in the next two chapters.
CHAPTER TWO

WORKING WIVES AND MOTHERS

In this chapter I describe the attitudes of my informants to prevailing arrangements of marriage and family life. I will begin by using the framework offered by Yanagisako's (1987) theoretical delineation of two models of gender and kinship domains as a starting point to explore the meanings ascribed to wage work, conjugal relations and motherhood in my material.

Inside and Outside/Family and Work

Yanagisako claims that the socio-spatial metaphor (domestic/political-jural opposition) and the work-family metaphor (domestic/public opposition based on differentiation of labour) are not simply variations of the universal opposition of the female 'domestic' sphere and the male 'public' sphere. As currently used, the 'domestic/public' split with its attendant subordinate and superordinate implications, is actually a mixed metaphor and is unable to illuminate the "subtle, but socially significant differences in folk metaphors of gender and kinship domains" (ibid.:118). In Yanagisako's immigrant community of first generation Japanese-Americans, the socio-spatial and hierarchical ordering of gender domains appeared to fit the ideological separation of society into gendered private and public spheres, linked to the development of modern European, industrial-capitalist states. In contrast, among members of the second generation (Nisei), the conception of family and work (domestic and public domains) did not assign greater priority to either set of functions or domains.
Instead, Nisei discourse granted each spouse authority over his or her "functionally differentiated, but equal sphere" (my emphasis, ibid.:106). Nevertheless, among the Nisei, the mixing of the two metaphors occurred and was highly problematic for their conception of their conjugal relations.

In the Chinese context, the institutional discourse regarding the hierarchical model of self, family and society associated with the Confucianist social order is reflected vaguely by some informants' reference to notions like "inside the home" in reference to the woman's/wife's domain, and "outside the home" in reference to the man's/husband's domain. These were acknowledged as 'traditional' idealised notions within familial ideology and appeared to have some symbolic force among my informants. Generally, these notions were identified more within the discourse of the older generation. However, a weakened form of the cultural legitimacy of male authority in the family appeared to live on in the notion of a male 'head' of household in familial discourse among my informants. When this was also linked to the belief that males were expected to be the main providers in the family, the domestic and public domains re-established the reconstituted ideology of male power. On numerous occasions, informants described parental expectations regarding sons as main providers, who are therefore sent 'out' to be more knowledgeable about the ways of the 'outside' world, and "to meet people". Women were stereotyped as 'natural' childbearers and childrearers, and therefore required (or presided) 'inside' the home. Ideologically, men as 'providers' were expected to equip themselves to function in the sphere of market relations while women took charge of the daily needs and affective relations of the family.

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1 Heyzer (1986:45) writes that in parts of South-East Asia where Chinese influence had been strong, a woman was ideologically defined as an "inside person". At present, for many women in the region, the household is still the most important sphere. Men, on the other hand, show their care for the family by providing for the family through outside work, and are expected "to define [their] manhood outside the sphere of the household" (ibid).
Male Authority and Power

Among my informants, the authority of the male was observed not to be linked to any developed sense of the political or social order, but to his ability in furthering the social and economic security of his family. The logical extension of this claim was to see the marketplace as a significant source of authority or power for men in the family.

Although many informants acknowledged the symbolic power of the inside/outside metaphor or some perception of a sexual division of labour, real life behaviours blurred the boundaries of analytical categories. For example, in working class homes, the sole income of the father was barely sufficient to provide for the family. Hence all the mothers from such backgrounds in the study supplemented the family income by taking in out-work. The phenomenon of outwork in labour participation in Hong Kong is significant in general, and confirmed in a recent study by Lui (1991). Outwork offered these mothers a chance to combine wage labour with childrearing and housework. In some cases, older children helped their mothers augment the family income by performing low-skilled labour intensive tasks after school. In one sense this phenomenon undermined the 'domestic-public' differentiation of labour metaphor, and yet at the same time supported the ideological continuation of women's presence within the home. There were also cases of women working together with husbands outside the home. Two informants reported that their husbands' parents operated a stall in a market and an eating establishment. One informant's mother "helped" her father run a business. As a result of the existence of such family-led economic activities, Hong Kong sociologists are wont to talk about the 'family work strategy' in order to incorporate an understanding of women's participation as co-providers in the family, and as wage labourers in the market (Ng, 1991; Lui, 1991). Importantly, among the informants there was a continuation of work life from their unmarried days, with no break in wage work for the majority after the arrival of children. These women, in
varying degrees, were definitely co-providers both in their family of origin and family of procreation.

In some accounts about their parents' generation among my informants, male leadership was acknowledged in the ideal, but in practice there were instances when it was not accepted without question. One informant said:

"My mother is submissive, my father wants my mother to be submissive ... My mother doesn't like to be submissive, do you understand what I'm saying? ... They quarrelled all the time."

Between unsuccessful efforts by her father to run a small factory using principally the labour of family members, her mother had also started (when her husband was suffering from bouts of ill-health) a successful doll-making business. This made her the main breadwinner of the family for a period, and the principal (if sometimes unwilling) partner of his business schemes at other periods. In addition, her father's interest in cooking brought him into the kitchen, and this activity was probably the only happy, mutually satisfying one for the couple in an otherwise turbulent relationship.

The authority of the Chinese father in Hong Kong and the power supposedly ascribed to him as the principal breadwinner appears to be far from uniform. Many women, especially from working class background during the last 50 years had engaged in productive labour at least for some period in their lives. But once they had married, the prevailing ideology directed women's energy principally towards childrearing duties. Nevertheless, the majority of the informants' mothers were involved in wage work at some point in their lives. Most informants grew up in a strong working culture that involved the labours of men and women. One informant spoke of two
unmarried aunts (from Shun Tak) who were engaged in domestic work in Hong Kong. They were possibly the main supporters of their brother’s family in China, and also important financiers of wedding banquets of younger relatives in their natal village. This was recounted with some pride by the informant who also spoke of the awe she had regarding the dominating personality of the elder aunt.

There are other factors that may undermine the supposed authority that fathers have over mothers and children. Some informants had fathers who were away at sea, and mothers ran households by themselves. On many occasions informants would speak of the loans that they borrowed from their mothers, rather than parents. More women appeared to be in charge of family savings and daily budgeting, and hence were the ones most likely to discuss the size of financial contributions from their children. The strong affective relations that most mothers had forged with their children were important in giving women a stronger voice in family arrangements, especially in working class homes when children were successfully employed. One father-in-law in the study who had not been pulling his weight in contributing to the family income, was observed to have scarcely any say in the family:

"His mother makes the decisions at home ... because his father never had regular work. At first, I thought his father had died because he never mentioned him."

The social class of the mother can be another factor in influencing the 'power' of the father. One informant’s father earned an unstable income as a car salesman, but the wife’s affluent parents helped them own their own flat very early in their marriage. The wife was also a co-provider by working in her own father’s business for

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2 This is a well-known area famous for the export of professional female domestic workers during the early part of the century. These women took vows of chastity, and belonged to a sisterhood. See Stockard (1989) and Topley (1975) for a historical account of the marriage resistance movement in the Canton Delta; and Raymond (1986, chapter 9) for a summary of secondary sources on the topic.
the better part of her married life. The husband was never allowed to forget his wife's contributions to the family's well-being, especially during domestic disputes.

Male Leadership

Most informants saw themselves as 'equal' partners, but a few expected their husbands to lead in the family. With these women, the notion of a male head of household and the concept of 'equality' in regard to the two domains of family and work appeared muddled. While these women saw the division of labour between the spouses as complementary, they appeared to accept a general overarching authority of husbands, expressed in terms of the man's heavier financial responsibilities. This group, compared to the rest in the sample, expected their spouses to lead, and chose them precisely for their leadership qualities: either they were older, or more "intelligent" and skilled and therefore earned higher incomes.

The question of economic contributions and the 'position' of women in the family or power relations between couples is a complex one. My informants' experiences appear to suggest that the capitalist market economy of Hong Kong encourages a belief that more money translates into more power. A logical application of this proposition suggests that women too, through wage work, can undermine the ideological authority of the male or alternatively increase their power in the family by contributing significantly to the conjugal fund. This is one way of looking at women's activities in the marketplace and their connections with women's lives in the family. However, according to di Leonardo (1987:442) "work in the labor market" is only one of three types of work that women are involved in: there is also "housework and childcare" and the "work of kinship. I will attempt in the following section to examine the question of women, work and family through one conceptual notion, the domestic
or kin-centred network that are defined as "women's work" in industrial societies.

Women's Work

The hypothesis that industrialization or capitalism has encouraged the ideological shift of kinship to the private/domestic domain and its increasing definition as women's work has been explored by a number of feminist scholars. How has this supposed shift affected power relations in the Hong Kong family?

Yanagisako contends that this ideological shift "has also undermined the authority of men in the family at the same time as it has reconfigured the relationship between family and society ..." (1987:115). Di Leonardo extrapolating from her (Italian) American data, saw women's domestic or kin-centred networks "as the products of conscious strategy, as crucial to the functioning of kinship systems, as sources of women's autonomous power and possible primary sites of emotional fulfillment, and, at times, as the vehicles for actual survival and/or political resistance (1987:441). The kin-work lens thus reveals the close relations between altruism and self-interest in women's actions" (ibid.:452). Stivens in her study of kinship in a middle-class suburb in Sydney adds another dimension to this perspective by seeing the contradictions in women's central importance in kin circles: "... (T)he solidarity of kin ties helped defend

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women against some of the trials of their existence ... At the same time this involvement with kin can intensify women's subordination by enmeshing them in female roles as carers ... For many, women's involvement with the kin sphere is a constantly acted out affirmation of a 'woman's place' (1985:31). These feminist observations arising from the analyses of particular communities significantly underscore the paradoxical nature of family relationships and point to the complex processes that women are involved in within the families.

In my study, women's concerns to nurture their young and maintain emotional cohesion within their kin group as well as balance the demands of working life show interesting parallels. It was obvious from the interviews that women were very involved with childcare but more often than not, this responsibility appeared to be shared by their husbands and their kin, and domestic helpers. Besides being full-time workers, these women were also partly involved in housework and also acted as the key decision maker and administrator of household and childcare arrangements. They spent considerable amount of nervous energy ensuring that all relevant people did their part. Dividing up tasks to decide who should do what and when was an exercise in home and work management. In spite of these stresses, most of the informants never seriously entertained the idea of leaving their jobs in order to spend more time with children or increase leisure time for themselves.

My data suggested that there was a distinction made between 'motherhood' as "a social identity and relation" and 'mothering' as the "fulfilling of childrearing functions" (Yanagisako, 1987:105). Informants placed emphasis on motherhood, and most did not appear to suffer the kind of guilt about not being constantly available for their children which has been reported as being associated with the discourse on childrearing in the Western world. I suggested in Chapter One that research findings

5 Stivens (1987:105) has made a similar observation regarding Malay mothers in employment.
confirmed a general acceptance of women working outside the home in Hong Kong, and this study is no exception, especially since my informants were also relatively well-educated and skilled. The prevailing work ethic in Hong Kong suggests that the fruits of education and training should be properly used, and suitably rewarded in the workplace. One informant, in fact, reported that her husband encouraged her to begin full-time work some months after the birth of her son because she was overly concerned and anxious about the baby. He thought that her anxiety would be better controlled if she only saw him part of the day. Some husbands actually encouraged their wives to continue working despite problems with childminding arrangements:

"I was in (X workplace) when the child was born. I thought I wouldn't work, but my husband told me that I would regret it one day. So I said OK, I'll see how things go."

Generally in Hong Kong, paid childcare services by non-kin were extensively used, although the general perception was that it was somewhat risky and inferior to that offered by kin. In the study, although informants readily resorted to childcare by Filipino maids, some informants, as we note, took great care to live near their own kin or their husband's so that kin attention was available for general supervision for part of the day. It appeared important that there should be regular contact with kin, especially with grandparents. When reliable childcare was available, the demand for skilled labour in Hong Kong created optimum conditions for women to leave their home for the marketplace without any sense of guilt.
"My family wants one thing, and his family another"

Most informants in varying degrees cultivated relations on both sides of the family. The balancing act involved in spending equal amounts of time with each side occasionally created some tension. This occurred when husbands were equally attached to their own kin so that some compromise had to be effected, especially during festive occasions and reunion dinners during the Lunar New Year celebrations. Informants who lived with or near mothers-in-law who were also childcarers appeared to have formed a working relationship with them. There were differences in opinion and ways of doing things but ultimately there was a sense of shared family goals pertaining to the well-being of offspring, and the smooth functioning of the household. In the study, close relations with one's own kin were a given (this could involve all members in the family of origin or only selected members). The strength of the relations with husband's kin, especially for those couples living on their own depended on his relations with them. There was one clear case where the informant herself encouraged such close relations. She lived in the next block to her affluent parents but made sure that her parents-in-law were not neglected. Her mother-in-law (of whom she was fond) was involved in after school extra-curricular activities of her children. They went to her residential area for music, computer and swimming lessons after school twice a week. In this way she brought her mother-in-law into the sphere of childcare responsibilities and at the same time ensured that her children enjoyed kin attention while she was at work.

"I have to look at the clock all the time"

Despite the involvement by some husbands in housework and childcare during the weekends, the gendered nature of such work was apparent in the way that all the
informants were responsible for paying, training and negotiating with the Filipino maids. Some joint child supervision also involved fathers-in-law who had retired, although it was mothers or mothers-in-law who were more frequently mentioned. While husbands may offer advice on how to deal with the stresses of childcare or unsatisfactory work performance by maids, there was no direct contact with the maids in relation to household management. Women's responsibility for childcare and household matters remained intact within the female sphere. In one case, the division of household expenses reflected this: "I pay for everything concerning my daughter (fee, clothes, milk powder etc) because I take care of her, and he pays the rent and household bills."

Although many informants spoke of the stresses of full time work and childcare supervision, this was usually accepted as part of the pressures of family life. Women perceived these responsibilities in various ways but generally there was a strong tendency to view increased involvement with childcare as "natural": it was felt that the strong bond between mother and child should involve more female attention. They also perceived themselves as better in interpersonal skills and therefore more equipped to handle the affective aspects of kinship. (One informant gave an example of her superiority in interpersonal affairs by citing her husband's dependence on her to remember the names of the wives of his friends.) These women's involvement in family and work gave them genuine personal satisfaction and a sense of 'equality' vis-a-vis their husbands but this claim to 'equality' is highly personalised and confined within the 'private' domain.
Self and Family

"Sometimes it's frustrating ... one's life is to be someone's mother, someone's daughter, someone's wife, ... and I don't have a self."

The strong web of family ties which defines most Chinese women's perceptions of 'self' is rooted in terms of kin relations, as daughter, wife, mother and so on: from this sense of 'connectedness' women gain their strength but ironically are also mired within it. The undisputed importance of kin help enabled these women to work full-time but the considerable work that went into maintaining kin relations and childcare arrangements also meant that compared to their husbands, some of them never had much time for themselves: "I like to play the piano but I have stopped because I don't have time ... now (time) is for the family." (Her husband was at a tennis game with his brother at the time of the interview).

Although many women in the study created a positive profile of themselves as working wives and mothers, some women continued to support the image of the husband as the main breadwinner in the family. Earlier I discussed the different ways in which domains of men and women were conceptualized and their implications for conceptions of male authority and power in marriage. I saw the potential challenge that these women's earnings held for a more macro articulation of their situation but this was undermined by some women's inclinations to support the status quo by expecting their husband to continue to act as the main breadwinner.

For instance, some women in the study played down their economic contribution by letting their husband continue to shoulder the main expenses while their salaries were mainly used for one-off purchases or payments. There was obvious self-interest in such an arrangement. The savings of some informants were used as regular
contributions to their natal families or for personal indulgences. One informant refused to call herself a 'feminist' because she believed that her husband should look after her financially. She also believed that men and women had different "roles". The responses of this group of women regarding power relations within the family were clearly somewhat contradictory.

This has not been helped by the emergence in recent times of a popular new term, 'strong woman' (literal translation from Cantonese) or the English language equivalent - 'super woman', to identify successful working women. The perception that there may a new power relation in the making resides ambiguously in this linguistic creation. Informants' interpretation of the term ranged from a positive to (mostly) negative responses but more importantly, none of them would identify with the term. The general meaning of veiled disapproval held about the persons of 'strong/super' women as "aggressive", "cold", and "powerful", appear to put them in a dichotomous position. The insidious nature of strength and power suggests that such women who are successful at the workplace cannot surely be successful (wives or mothers) at home. The ideological separation of the domains returns here to prevent women from claiming due recognition for their tremendous effort within the family and workplace. The importance of retaining Hong Kong women's continued dedication to the family unit is tacitly suggested in the claim in Chapter One that because of its potential divisiveness, feminist challenges to the status quo should be viewed as irrelevant to the harmonious functioning of the family in Hong Kong.

\[\text{See section under 'The Family and Feminism In Hong Kong'.}\]
CHAPTER THREE

WORKING DAUGHTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

I suggested in the introductory chapter that interest in the dynamics of the 'traditional' Chinese family had tended to focus mainly on male kinship, and to a certain extent on relations between mothers and sons. Recent feminist research however, has encouraged a reappraisal of the contributions of daughters, for example as young female workers in Third World industrial workforces.¹ In Chapter One, it was seen that in present day Hong Kong, a similar appreciation of the rising level of female participation in the workforce had directed some attention to the 'productive' activities of working women in general, and their financial contributions to their natal or conjugal families in particular.

Although the contributions of single women to their natal families have been documented extensively in the literature, the continuing contribution of women to their natal family after marriage has rarely been noted in Hong Kong. In addition, little attention has been paid to kin interaction beyond the nuclear household, especially among female kin. In this chapter, I shall look at the relationship of 'dutiful' daughters² with their natal and affinal families among my sample households.


² See discussion on the 'centripetal' family and filial piety in Chapter One.
Bonds or Bondage?

Standing has observed that in the Indian context, "the entry of women into employment often sets up a dynamic for change" : in cases where daughters were assuming support of the parents when customarily it was the role of sons, this change must have longer-term effects on marriage and property rights and have "implications for existing forms of female dependency" (1985:254). In Hong Kong, such employment changes are associated with a trend towards later marriage, which presumably allows a daughter's income to be retained in the family. It is perhaps premature to offer any definitive conclusions from my data but certainly most of my informants were in full-time employment for a number of years before they married in their mid-twenties.

Among my informants, the scale of the regular contributions to their families of origin is most striking. These contributions started while the women were single and continued after their marriage. This included two (presently unemployed) informants who were recent migrants in Melbourne. They reportedly continued to give regular amounts from their accumulated savings. Another informant reported that her contribution stopped soon after she arrived in Melbourne, while her unmarried younger sister took over as the main supporter of the family.  

What are we to make of such action? The thorny question that Salaff posed in Chapter One regarding the incompatibility between filial piety and power in the family raises a number of issues. First, it is difficult to enter meaningfully into such a debate when the abstract ideal of the 'independent individual' is not shared by the women who are the 'objects' of her study. Salaff, in another article, admitted as much when she portrayed her Chinese women (single and married) in the following manner: "Since

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3 Shortly after her arrival in Melbourne, this sister in Canada sponsored the migration of their parents and unmarried siblings there and thence became the family's principal supporter.
their households control their labour, these women do not enter the work force as independent individuals. Hence, they do not internalise this wish to be free" (1990:131). This 'ignorance' about freedom among her informants is seen as a liability, and the lack of desire to be free from family obligations is believed to disadvantage women. Is this line of enquiry fruitful when Salaff's imposed Western perspective centres on contentious concepts like 'freedom' and 'independence'? Second, the way Salaff understands and conveys filial piety - the submission of a daughter's labour to the total control of her parents - is simplistic at best. More important, and this is the nub of the matter, the language she employs to describe the constraints suffered by these women, principally, the overriding power of the 'paternal family, effectively creates no space for them to manoeuvre. Salaff appears to accept popular assumptions about the 'traditional' family and in the process locks her informants within it as passive 'victims'. Her definition of filial piety underplays the conflicts and struggles that women experience during the process of fostering affective and economic ties in the family. It also excludes a consideration of mutual benefits that parents and children enjoy as a result of this interdependence.

Dutiful Daughters?

"The eldest child is stronger. I didn't accept what he (father) said, yes we did argue. The older I grew the more we argued. With financial independence, I felt I had the right to voice my views". (Leung)

The relationship between my informants from working class backgrounds and their parents was characterised by contradictions and conflicts. Many ultimately saw

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4 "Parents held control over their daughters' labour and their daughters dutifully went to work in support of the families they would soon leave upon marriage." (Salaff 1990:191)
themselves as 'filial' daughters because of their continuing concern regarding the physical and financial well-being of their parents. But their behaviour cannot merely be explained as the result of parental control. Like Kung's (1978) informants, most did not appear to view their interests as opposed to their parents' interests, although they would speak about the conflicts that they experienced with them. Their financial contributions were seen as acts of responsibility through which working adults returned the care they received from their parents. The importance of pooling resources and helping needy members in the family was a cornerstone in their understanding of familial ideology. Crisly and her husband regarded the loan to her brother in this light: “We don't want him to repay us, he could use the money for other people who need it, when anyone in the family needs help ... one day we may be in difficulties, and he can help us in return, you never know.”

Despite the memories of past conflicts, the family was still seen as a cooperative unit and a source of emotional support. One explanation for this behaviour, as suggested by the data, can be traced to the early experiences of working class daughters. They constantly told me about the hard lives of these parents and the financial problems that these parents had gone through to provide for their children. In the process, the informants’ parents repeatedly reminded them of the sacrifices that they had made. However, this did not mean that informants were not critical of parents, as for instance, when the topic of education was raised. Obtaining a good education was a crucial theme in their lives and a source of family conflict. This was particularly so among those who suffered economic hardship during their formative years in the

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6 Unlike Kung's informants (see discussion in chapter 1), my informants never referred to themselves as "useless" daughters. Their financial contributions were a source of pride and self-esteem. It was not acceptable to them that parents should be in want, when as middle class income earners, they were in a position to raise their standard of living.
1960s and 1970s. Three informants from working class homes resisted family actions undermining their aspirations for higher education.

Leung’s father, for instance, thought that the completion of primary school education was adequate for daughters. She explained:

"My family was poor. My father’s sister helped us as she was in a better position. She lent money to us, and when father asked me to stop studying, she said no, I mustn’t, she would help support me. If one couldn’t get into a subsidized school (after the primary 6 exam), it was not possible to continue. So he kept telling the neighbours that if I couldn’t get a place, he would let me work in a factory... I was so unhappy."

Leung made sure that she did well academically. This threat, she observed, was never made to a younger brother who instead had private tuition when he could not cope with some subjects at secondary school.

Another informant, Cheung, who was also the eldest daughter, was under considerable pressure from her mother to seek employment after finishing her secondary schooling:

"The family reacted badly to my study plans. They wanted me to start work and earn money. I was the eldest. I have a younger sister who was at the same level. She too was admitted to X University... They

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6 The 1960s and 1970s in Hong Kong were the early days of industrialization when the manufacturing industries were affected by the ‘boom’ and ‘bust’ waves in the international market. An idea of educational access at that time is revealed by Lee and Cheung (1992) who comment that during those two decades only one-third of those finishing Primary 6 were able to obtain places in secondary schools. Presently, nearly all Primary 6 pupils can gain access to secondary education [figures cited from ANNUAL SUMMARY, (Hong Kong 1964-86), Education Department].
thought it was better that two daughters worked in a factory ... I had frequent quarrels with them, ferocious ones with my mother ... She said ... if we were filial, we should go and work and earn money. Then the money could also be used for my brother's overseas education ... We had terrible arguments, I never went home. "

She and her younger sister enrolled at the university, and supported themselves with the help of government loans, and earnings from factory work during vacations. She 'squatted' illegally with friends at the university dormitory during the first two years.

While Salaff's informants appeared to bow to parental pressure, there were instances of spirited resistance to parental wishes among the informants of my study. In addition, there was resentment about perceived differences in treatment of informants and their brothers. Two other women, Kathy and Susan both reported that they had full encouragement to complete their secondary school education but they also observed that their parents offered to pay for their brothers' overseas tertiary education, while the young women only entered local institutions. Kathy, in particular, pointed to the extra expenses her brother had incurred and his apparently unspoken understanding with her that he should contribute more to their parents' support. In families which appeared to favour sons in this way, daughters seemed to have comparatively lighter responsibilities towards their parents. Sons were normally expected to provide the greater share of financial help. The five informants who were affected in this way were aware that their brothers were contributing more to their parents.
Exploitative Parents?

Ng (1992) reports that sons and daughters were absorbed into the labour force at an early age and that parents claimed there was no explicit differential treatment. My data suggests rather, that when a family had some funds but only a limited amount, the son was more likely to be favoured with monetary help from parents. In the middle class families, daughters were encouraged to finish at least secondary school and upper middle class daughters were encouraged to go as far as their abilities could take them.

My material challenges the idea that 'the Chinese family' is a fixed monolithic system with "long-standing family norms". I cite two cases to illustrate how easily attitudes and ideas can change. Coming from a working class background where education beyond secondary school was uncommon, Cheung recounted her mother's behaviour after two years at university:

"She kept scolding me that I was not filial ... but that was in the first and second year, after that she didn't scold us... It could be that she was admired by neighbours and relatives that she had daughters at university. She started to feel that she was really great ... she had 'face'... In our (residential) block, over 40 units, no one had ever been to university."

7 See discussion by Ng (1992) in chapter 1.
8 Mak (1992:171) reports that local female university students (compared to male students) generally came from a higher socioeconomic background. She also points out that there were proportionally more females from the lower classes in the 1970s' cohort compared to the 1960s' cohort. This appeared to be attributed to the grant-and-loan scheme introduced in 1969 which acted to change the social class composition, rather than sex composition in the university body. I note that working and middle class informants or their husbands who attended the two local universities mentioned that they had applied to this assistance scheme.
9 See discussion in Chapter One under the 'centripetal' family.
Another informant, Hui, spoke of her mother's surprising volte-face. After years of telling Hui to settle down and devote herself to raising a family, her recent advice was very different:

"Her dream was that she would always have a family ... and they will still need her, that sort of thing ... But now this is not true, my brothers' wives don't get on with her ... and so my brothers are not living with her ... she wanted to live together. Now she feels she shouldn't just look after the family, just looking after her children. Now she tells me not to put all my energy on my child and husband, I have to think about myself."

In addition, the idea that sons should be privileged can also be subverted by the achievements of daughters. One informant, Carol, pointed out that her father did not have a good opinion of his eldest son: "He didn't do very well in his studies, and he didn't really care very much about the family ... I was more responsible, and I and my sister did well in our studies, so my father was proud of us." Very often, poor parents appeared to be rather torn in their thinking. Leung said: "For my father [my entry to university] raised conflicting thoughts. I guess in his heart, he wanted me to go, but economically speaking he wanted me to work and help him." This was also the case with Carol. In short, 'norms' may exist but they are continually unsettled by the daily material realities of specific conditions.

There were five informants who did not make regular financial contributions to
parents because they were apparently not in need of such help. Instead, the informants themselves either received direct economic aid or indirect aid. Two of these affluent daughters, Christine and Lin, were given considerable assets on marriage. Christine received an apartment and Lin was given a sum of money which she used as a deposit for an apartment and its refurbishment. When Lin owed the bank considerable sums after the 1987 stock market crash, her parents responded quietly to her predicament with a sizeable loan, ("They transferred money to our account without us asking" she acknowledged gratefully). Lin was thus able to retain her home (which was used as collateral) and after a few years repaid her parents. Similar value in assets and cash were also given to Christine’s and Lin’s siblings at marriage. Lucy received a loan from her father, who also acted as her guarantor before she was successfully granted capital from a bank to start her own dental clinic. Tang, who lived with her widowed mother, and continued to do so after marriage, enjoyed free lodging and the services of a maid. She was able to use her savings to start a small computer consultancy firm. The fifth, Hui, devoted her savings to the pursuit of higher degree studies overseas, the latest one in the United States.

Although this affluent group did not make regular contributions to parents, they occasionally bought gifts in the form of household items for their parents, or gave sums of ‘pocket money’ to those who had retired. They also appeared to me to be more explicit about expressing their relations in terms of love and intimacy during the interviews. Those daughters who had received substantial monetary gifts or loans were clearly appreciative of parental generosity.

Familial ideology also created expectations that parents should help out with

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10 This may be speculative but I find the figures quoted by Podmore and Chaney (1974) and M K Lee (1991) regarding support of parents quite intriguing. For those who agreed that it was their duty, it was 99% in 1974, compared to 64.2% in 1991. I wonder if the 26.3% who felt that ‘children are not necessarily obliged to support parents’ and the 19.5% who answered that ‘the norm is relative to situations’ came from more affluent backgrounds or more likely, were younger siblings in the family.
their grandchildren's childcare when they were needed. Although many informants felt obliged to contribute to their parents' financial welfare, the web of mutual aid and reciprocity must make it hard for parents to turn down requests from their children to provide supervisory care of grandchildren for part of the day. One sees here the ideological pressure of mutual aid and reciprocity constraining the options of parents after a lifetime of employment and responsibilities towards their children. In one case when parents-in-law enjoyed financial help and refused to have anything to do with childcare, this attitude was seen as "selfish" by an informant.

Interdependence: Siblings and Parents

My informants' accounts of their natal and affinal families suggested that younger siblings benefited from the paid employment of older siblings. They enjoyed a better standard of living, and could depend on older siblings for loans. There was a remarkable pattern of older siblings (males and females) taking turns helping the next younger sibling in a number of cases. Some older siblings waited until the younger ones had graduated and then instructed them to take over the financial responsibility of looking after their parents. They then withdrew as main contributors and concentrated on their own (postponed) business or educational plans. The sense of 'turn-taking' which may not even be explicitly articulated in some families, is striking.

In one case, this expectation of 'turn-taking' did not work out and gave rise to some conflict. Lin reported that she had had a serious altercation with the youngest sister of her husband:

"I was trying to reason with her. When she was studying she
promised her oldest brother that she would come back (from England) and support the family ... She came back, she never worked and never gave a cent ... She said she is married, 'I can't be the boss, my husband is the boss' ... It is not fair."

Contributions by an elder sibling can be reciprocated later, by a younger sibling. Cristy, for example paid the deposit on her elder brother's flat. She explained that it was he, after the death of their father, who had to terminate schooling to support the family. Since she was the only one who was earning a comparatively higher income she wanted to help him and his family attain a better standard of living. This she did by asking her brother's wife to look after her son. The money which would otherwise go to a maid or childcare centre was channelled back to kin, and her son would be near people who loved him.

Residential and Childcare Pattern

The legacy of the 'extended family' ideal in familial ideology in Hong Kong is constantly used by the media, by social agencies and church bodies to create fear about the rise of 'fragmented' families through the process of family 'nuclearization'. This appears to work on the assumption that only those kin who are living together (in a household) have significant kinship ties. This can lead to a gross misreading of the Hong Kong situation. My material on the contrary, shows that the nuclear household is not a bounded unit, and that kin relations extend across several related households in significant ways.  

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11 Stivens (1981:113) asserts similar points about the "ideological confusions" regarding the isolated nuclear family. Also see Firth et al (1969).
My data confirmed the documented predominance of neolocal residence among conjugal couples (13 out of 15 moved into their own flats on marriage). One informant however, continued to live with her mother (in the latter's apartment, while her husband was resident in Sydney) and the remaining couple lived with her husband's mother (who was a widow). They decided very soon after the marriage, for a variety of reasons, to move to the wife's parents' suburb. In one case, there was a number of residential shifts: the couple moved to a flat near the woman's mother when she was pregnant so that she could enjoy a specially nutritious diet for expectant mothers, and then after the birth of her child, moved again to the man's mother's flat where the couple's daughter was being looked after.

Kin relations were marked by both the residential clustering with parents and/or sibling, or parents-in-law, and contact with both sides of the couples' families. Because all the women I interviewed were in paid work, child care, especially during the early years, had been significant in binding kin relations from different households. One striking childcare arrangement involved an informant's mother coming to the apartment twice a week and her parents-in-law three days a week to supervise their grandchildren, even though there was a Filipino worker at home. Nine informants lived near their own kin and there were childcare arrangements with their brother's wife or sister. There was also a variety of living arrangements; two informants lived in the same apartment block as their siblings (one floor away), as well as walking distance from their parents'. One sister who was a housewife came down from a floor above to supervise an informant's daughter, with the day helper around, or sometimes took the child up to her flat. In one case, an informant's son was placed with her brother's family for at least a year while she and her husband pursued a higher degree in England. We saw above that Cristy's son lived with her brother's family for about two and a half years. She visited during the weekdays and took him back during the weekends. When she subsequently moved to a suburb near her husband's family, she
moved her brother's family near them too. Kin help from both families was used.

Bilateral Kin Relations

What is clear from the data is that the present phenomenon of women working outside the home appears in fact to support close kin interaction on a daily basis for a substantial number of informants. Also, because the informants were in full-time work at least five days of the week, great significance was attached to family gatherings and outings during the weekends or on public holidays. Although most of the events centred around eating together, one informant told of regular organized trips to recreational spots around Hong Kong, sometimes attended by her parents and her husband's brothers' families as well. Visits to parents on Saturdays were balanced by visits to in-laws on Sundays (or vice versa). Those informants who were less regular about visits would still be meeting close kin on festive occasions.

"She wouldn't come ..."

Although most informants spoke positively of their great sense of family, for a few informants, it is clear that the maintenance of kin relationships or the organization of their labour and leisure time did not come without some amount of conflict. Because great store was put on frequent contacts between kin as a sign of family solidarity, independence from family members can cause embarrassment and stress. For example, although Cristy had close contacts with her brother and her husband's parents, she was not as successful with her widowed mother who was living on her own:
"We don't like the present situation, but she wouldn't listen to us ... I ask mother (to come for a visit), but sometimes it's so frustrating, she wouldn't come ... sometimes I ask her to go to my brother’s place for a 'festival' meal and she wouldn't too."

Crisly reported that she was not very close to her mother, but she was apparently more upset about the fact that her mother (aged 60) wished to continue working in a restaurant:

“She refuses to acknowledge her age. I ask her why she has to work, she says because of the money. I said, is it because we can't support you, or what?"

Crisly's mother was unusual for her generation because she refused to follow the prevailing ideology which required that she live with her (eldest and only) son. Not only that, she turned down Cristy's suggestion some years ago to retire and live with her. She continued to work and at times accidentally hurt herself at the restaurant. This became a “dilemma” for the family and was explained in these terms: “But we are really very filial, perhaps we lead busy lives, and we can't be like other people and see her that often, be with her all the time. But let me tell you ...I asked her to come and live with me and she wouldn't."

Concluding remarks

I have tried to show above that the Chinese women in my study from both working and middle class backgrounds were involved in a complex pattern of exchange with parents and siblings. Their deep material involvement went beyond my original
expectation. Many 'filial' daughters certainly were obliged to earn enough income to be responsible for parents and sometimes, siblings, but these women working full-time after marriage were also able to enjoy the benefits of mutual aid and kin help. The ability to give financial aid was considered an achievement, and informants were proud to describe the contributions they made to the family income. Because most of the informants were reasonably successful in their careers and had a good basic education, they were able to develop their skills and perceive their opportunities in a better light than the factory workers in Kung’s (1978) or Salaff’s (1981) study.
"I think daughters are more passionate about their families." (Lydia)

My study is an attempt to describe an important aspect of family life, the often neglected views of women about themselves, their place in and contribution to their "families" - elementary, natal and affinal. This perceived gap in the available literature on Chinese women and the family in Hong Kong is not helped by natural scientific paradigms which depend on statistical sampling and computerized measurements. I did not deliberately begin the project with a specific hypothesis. I knew that women in Hong Kong were deeply involved with their families, but I was unprepared for the extensive financial involvement that actually existed. The 'passion' that many daughters in the study shared flowed beyond their strong affective and economic ties among kin and was manifested by a complex web of mutual obligations. Overall, the thesis appears to have a strong economistic tenor which can be partly traced to the interview situation which regarded material contributions of the informants as an important line of inquiry. It is also partly due to the nature of the Hong Kong family which regarded financial well-being as an important aspect of the general health of the family.

I began the thesis with three broad interrelated questions in relation to current assumptions: what was my informants' understanding of familial ideology; what was the situation regarding male-dominated kin relations; and in the context of female subordination, what were my informants' perceptions of their material contributions.

The thesis began with a concern to demonstrate that it is problematic to regard terms like 'Chinese women' or the 'Chinese family' as coherent and homogeneous. In
the Introduction, it was pointed out that works which focussed on male power and kinship ignored the activities of women and encouraged a discourse which constructed Chinese women as 'victims'. Some recent efforts by some female scholars to represent the situation of women in historical and anthropological texts have given rise to competing images of Chinese women and the family. Nevertheless, the prevalent acceptance of the 'victimized' woman continues to live on within the concept of the 'traditional' family and in a number of recent writings on 'Chinese women'. One instance is Salaff's representation of 'the Chinese family' in present day Hong Kong as an oppressive monolithic system that exploited the labours of 'dutiful' daughters. This view appeared to be partly influenced by her acceptance of this particular type of discourse. In addition, by giving singularity and coherence to 'the Chinese family', Salaff confused material realities with the general 'discursive representation' of the Chinese family in her work.¹

My material suggested, on the other hand, that there were no easy generalizations about Hong Kong families and women. Families and family members did not share similar values or goals. One example was in regard to educational achievements for daughters and sons. Some working class daughters were pressured to make sacrifices and contribute to the family income, but they fought and overcame perceived inequities. In addition, daughters from affluent backgrounds, far from being 'exploited', enjoyed and shared the material wealth of their parents, which sometimes indirectly benefited their affinal families.

Informants saw their marital union as one between 'equal' partners and based on love. Nevertheless, a few tolerated or expected male leadership and created a

¹ This point came to me when I was reading Mohanty (1991:69) where she comments on the construction of "monolithic images of 'third world women' in some feminist work which ignores "complex and mobile relationships between historical materiality on the level of specific oppressions ... , on the one hand, and their general discursive representations, on the other."
contradictory picture. Among this group, male leadership continued to be associated with beliefs about husbands as main providers and there was a discursive acknowledgement of a rough division of labour that supposedly matched the female/domestic and male/public domains. Many informants continued to take part in wage labour after their marriage and their husbands supported and encouraged this involvement. There appeared to be a distinction made between 'motherhood' as a social identity and 'mothering' as the day-to-day duties of childrearing and most did not appear to suffer the kind of guilt that they were not constantly available for their children. This was partly linked to the acceptance of wives working outside the home especially if they were educated and skilled, and if they had reliable childminding services.

There was no strong articulation of 'subordination' in the discourse of the majority of informants regarding their family life. There was instead a 'submergence' of self. Informants had strong images of themselves within a familial framework - as daughters, wives and mothers. Besides being full-time workers, they were submerged in 'women's work' - the maintenance of emotional ties and regular contact with bilateral kin, and the daily servicing of needs in the elementary family. Informants had a positive image of themselves as workers, and a strong commitment in fostering strong ties with kin.²

The material contributions of the women in the sample were not only confined to members of their natal family before marriage; they began complex material exchanges after marriage. They continued to be involved with the financial support of parents, and in some cases with siblings. The study suggested that with rising

² In his review of women in industry, Levin suggests that in Hong Kong, women did not perceive inequalities along gender lines (1991:212) or to attribute it to 'male patriarchy' (ibid.:213). These working class women tended to view their weak bargaining power as a condition of their level of education, and more frequently to the pressure to serve the needs of the 'family economy' or their own lack of ability (ibid).
affluence in Hong Kong, especially among the middle class, there was a preference for neolocal residence. Far from developing into 'independent' households, there was interdependence among related households. Financial aid from daughters was reciprocated with childcare services from parents. The gendered nature of childcare meant that women were mainly responsible for its organization. Informants who shared childrearing responsibilities with husbands' mothers formed working relationships with them. They tended to live near their own kin, contrary to prevailing beliefs about 'patrilocal' residence and male-dominated kin relations. There was evidence of the importance of bilateral kin relations. Close relations with wife's kin were a given, but relations with husband's kin depended far more on the strength of his attachment to them. The maintenance of kin relations also brought considerable stress and conflict.
APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The data for the study was collected during the period between December 1992 and August 1993. Ten informants were selected and interviewed during December and January 1993 when I returned to Hong Kong and the other five, who were recent migrants were contacted in Melbourne after I had returned in February. Because my study concerned the private feelings of women and their relations with their family members, I had to rely on friends and acquaintances to introduce me and to assure suitable informants that my interest was a serious project forming part of the postgraduate course in Women's Studies at the University of Melbourne. I felt that it was important that the informants were initially approached by a person known to them so that when I contacted them later by phone, I was not a complete stranger.

I was careful to specify that the informants had to satisfy the following requirements: they had (1) to be born in Hong Kong; (2) to spend the greater part of their life in Hong Kong; (3) to be married with at least one child; (4) to be in full-time employment or to have had experiences being in full-time employment in Hong Kong (5) preferably to be between 25 and 40 years of age; and (6) to be in professional or managerial positions. An exception was made for one informant who was pregnant with her first child. An additional requirement for informants in Melbourne was that they should be recent migrants (preferably less than five years residence), so that their experiences in Hong Kong covered at least up to the 1980s.

Although I was prepared to visit informants in their homes, only two agreed to
see me there in Hong Kong, and only two were interviewed in their homes in Melbourne. The most common suggestion for a venue among Hong Kong informants was their place of work, and the reasons frequently given for the unsuitability of their homes was that we would be disturbed by the children. In my interviews with the two Melbourne informants at home, this actually happened and we were occasionally distracted by requests for drinks and food. Most Hong Kong informants also said that by the time they were ready to see me during the weekdays, it would be too late in the evening, and the weekends were ‘family days’, and apparently not available for interviews. In the main, I had to accept graciously and gratefully whatever suggestions were offered that would be the convenient for the informants.

Fourteen interviews were taped and later transcribed; at the fifteenth interview the tape recorder became faulty and did not work. All the informants could speak English at various levels of proficiency, but I requested that they speak in Cantonese as I felt that they would be more comfortable in their first language. I usually formed my questions in English to make sure that I would not be misinterpreted and then repeated and explained my intentions in Cantonese. This linguistic mix of English and Cantonese is common among educated Hong Kongers. When I transcribed the interviews, I translated their Cantonese responses into English. A session lasting about two hours normally took about twenty odd hours to transcribe.

I did not follow a strict format for each interview although I usually began with their early experiences in their families of origin, their educational background and their relations with parents and siblings. I was principally guided by the easy and natural flow of conversation although I had to be alert that the same topics were covered for each informant in that they also involved responses towards their husbands’ families, and their own family of procreation. Generally, except for one informant who preferred to talk about her work life, and refused to be drawn too deeply into details about her
family of origin, all the informants appeared open and communicative about their feelings towards their kin and their material contributions to their families.

Below is a list of some of the questions that were asked of each informant:

- Could you tell me something about your family background?
- What did your father/mother do?
- Tell me about your educational background?
- During your formative years, what were your feelings about your achievements and identity?
- Were there any memorable events in your life that made you what you are today?
- What social class do you belong to?
- Did you contribute financially to your family of origin?
- How long did you help your parents/siblings?
- Did you feel obliged to help?
- Why do you have a sense of filial obligation?
- Did you resent your parents?
- What about your husband? Did he have financial commitments in his own family?
- What did his parents do?
- What is your relationship with your mother-in-law's domestic helper?
- If there were an emergency, where are your sources of support?
- How often do you see your family members/husband's family?
- How is your husband's relations with his family?
- Why did you marry? What attracted you to him?
- Who was responsible for cooking/shopping/childcare?
- Were there any conflicts?
- Some people say that Chinese women are trained into submission. Do you have such
Would getting married and having a family be a hindrance to one’s development?

Do you get any satisfaction from your work life?

Where are your sources of strength?

What do you understand by the term ‘superwoman’?

Would you consider yourself a ‘superwoman’?

What are your perceptions about yourself within your family of procreation/family of origin/husband’s family?
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