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Doris Cheung
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Changing gender:
Gender role, class and the experience of Chinese female immigrants

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York
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Abstract

The Gender Role Identity Development of Chinese Female Immigrants

by

Doris Cheung

Adviser: Professor Anna Stetsenko

This dissertation analyzes gender role identity development in Chinese female immigrants from diverse work and education backgrounds. This study focuses on Chinese female immigrants, bakery salesladies and social workers, to addresses a gap in the existing literature, which has previously emphasized factory workers and students, on gender role identity development at the interface of social context and activity system dynamics. To understand further the Chinese female immigration experience, this research investigates how gender role identity is manifested across different social contexts and institutions. I administered questionnaires and conducted interviews with Chinese female immigrants residing in New York City. The sample consisted of two groups with different occupations, educational backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, and levels of cultural assimilation: bakery salesladies and social workers. I captured the process of gender role identity development through participants’ own voices and narratives. I analyzed the data and discussed it in light of an activity theory framework. The key finding was that, for both groups, gender role identity was deeply influenced by traditional Chinese ideology including the
traditional gender hierarchy, male supremacy, and the values of modesty, and maintaining interpersonal harmony. Bakery salesladies encountered less conflict at work and were more likely to avoid conflict at home. In contrast, social workers expressed a greater predisposition to voice their opinions without being confrontational at work and were ready to halt conversations when they sensed that their husbands were getting upset. Furthermore, in terms of life goals, the bakery salesladies tended to focus on their family needs and perceive the success of family members as their own success, whereas the social workers often had aspirations that went beyond traditional gender roles and valued and aspired to contributing to society. The findings reveal gender role identity to be an active and non-homogenous process of "doing gender" through which women negotiate various positions across cultural contexts, social locations, histories and ideologies within their unique activity systems.
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It has been a long journey and many people have influenced this work in many ways, large and small. Writing a dissertation requires gathering a collection of advisers, contributors, collaborators, and supporters, a list too long to be included here. For those who remain unnamed, I trust you know you are not unappreciated.

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\(^1\) Almost like “Go, go, go!” in English
Last but not least, I need to thank my Heavenly Father, who provided me with all the love and support I needed and sent many messengers and angels to help me in many ways throughout the process.
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1. Introduction

The goal of this research is to analyze gender role identity development in Chinese female immigrants from diverse work and education backgrounds. This chapter begins with a review of social construction theory in general and activity theory in particular, followed by a discussion of traditional Chinese gender role ideologies and the normative experience of Chinese immigrants in New York City. Next, I present methodological details of this research and an overview of the life narrative approach, which I use to structure the analysis. Finally, I present my own experiences as a Chinese female immigrant in relation to the experiences of the women participating in this research.

1.1 Background of the Study

Stetsenko (2012) asks, “What kind of persons are people living in today’s society?” She states that,

There is little explicit interest in this question in psychology with notable exceptions to be found mostly in classical works that date back many decades (e.g. by Baldwin, James, Mead, Merleau-Ponty, Vygotsky, & Sugarman, 2005). There is even less attention to the question as to what kind of society we are living in and to what extent it accommodates our needs, suits our purposes, and promotes our personhood and agency. The paramount relevance of these interrelated questions is that without finding answers to them we are unlikely to develop deep insights not only into ourselves but also into how society can be transformed and possibly improved. (p. 145)

According to the 2010 U. S. Census, minorities will become the majority in the United
States by 2050. Moreover, Chinese have been among the largest groups of immigrants in recent years. It would be important for researchers to investigate immigrant lives and understand their hardships and experiences to improve the society in which we are living.

Chinese immigrants have contributed to the United States since the mid-1800s when the first wave of Chinese came for the Californian Gold Rush. In 1852, 20,000 Chinese moved to the United States, but the Chinese Exclusion Act, in effect from May 6, 1882 until 1942, denied them entry. In the past four decades, however, many Chinese people again migrated to the United States. According to the United States Census in 2000, there were 3.4 million Chinese Americans evenly split between men and women, and approximately 30% were 25-44 years old—the peak age for working. The Chinese Exclusion Act restricted the number of Chinese women prior to 1942, but now the Chinese constitute the largest proportion of Asian immigrants in the United States.²

Studies on Chinese immigrants have typically focused on the immigration experience, including aspects such as parent-child relationship and parenting (Lin & Fu, 1990; Qin, 2009; Gorman, 1998; Lim & Lim, 2003), education and schooling (Lum, 2009; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1991; Kaufman, 1985; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Wong 2013), the immigrant economy (Mar, 1991), the resilience of immigrant youth (Amundson, Yeung, Sun, Chan, & Cheng, 2011; Yeh, Kim, 

http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr11-06.pdf
The foreign-born population from Asia increased from 8.2 million in 2000 to 11.6 million in 2011. The data for China include respondents who identified their country of birth as China, Hong Kong, Macau, Paracel Islands, or Taiwan.
Pituc, & Atkin, 2008), acculturation, adjustment, and adaptation (Schnittker, 2002; Yeung & Chang, 2002; Sung, 1985; Chen, 1998; Zou, 2002; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1991; Chung, 2001; Qin, 2012; Lieber, Chin, Nihira, & Mink, 2001), family dynamics (Qin, 2008), heritage language maintenance (Zhang, 2012; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009) and language use (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). The few recent studies that have looked at Chinese female immigrants focus mostly on garment factory workers and students (Bao, 2001; Tsunoda, 1995; Woo, 1999).

As Stearns (2000) notes, “One of the groups subjected to the most intense gender pressure from American culture involved immigrant Chinese women, and through them many men” (p. 121). The mismatch between gender expectations in China and those in the United States is also a factor in many cases of domestic violence and family breakups. Thus, a qualitative study on the development of gender role identity in immigrant women will provide a useful framework for analysis and information for sociologists, psychologists, social workers, counselors and other human service providers seeking effective ways to help the immigrant population.

In other words, despite trends emerging since the 1970s to study women migrants, “the vast majority of immigration studies [were] still conducted as though gender relations [were] largely irrelevant to the way the world is organized” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999, 566) and gender “has encountered resistance and indifference in immigration scholarship” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999, 106).

In previous studies of Chinese immigrant identity, researchers have focused mostly on context-independent notions of identity, with the self being perceived as an individual possession. In this work, I examine gender role identity as embedded in sociocultural contexts of collaborative activities that are intrinsically interwoven with identity. Stetsenko and Arievitch (2004) argue,
…[That] the historical origins of the self and social interactions are located in collective practices of material production does not mean that their phenomenological richness or agency is denied. What is denied is that the self and society appear and develop on their own grounds, from within themselves, as realities completely separate from material life and its production. Instead, the primacy of material practice means that analyses of the richness and agency of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity, to be efficient, need to keep in sight their ultimate origination from and embeddedness in material processes of human practice. It is in this sense that the human “essence” is not something abstractly inherent in an individual but “the totality of all social relations.” (p. 483)

From the perspective of activity theory, the self and identity are not developed within an individual but, rather, constitute the product of an activity process—a process of collective and practical engagement of humans with the world around them. In turn, the purpose and goals of such engagement shape the self and identity. The activity system is an open system in which the flow of transactions occurs between individuals; and the world and the self are profoundly sociocultural and historical. Human activities are collaborative by nature and the self represents “the subject of societal relations” (Leontiev, 1975/1983a, p.195, as quoted in Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004, p.486). The self is not only situated in a sociocultural context at a point in history, it is constructed through human activities and interactions. This dynamic is akin to the notion of “hierarchies of motives” (Leontiev, 1975/1983, as cited in Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004), which are produced by human collaborative practices. Each person prioritizes and juxtaposes their activities according to their motives and goals, which direct their actions and interactions. Therefore, the self and identity are never isolated from the social process but produced within.

Although a person’s behavior is influenced by social position, the position changes in
time and in history. Women may act differently in different institutions, such as home and public institutions (Epstein, 1997). In this way, they may eventually experience a greater sense of gender equality in the Chinatown business environment.

Chinese female immigrants face considerable stress every day from the conflict between traditional and new role expectations (Chung, 2007). This stress is exacerbated by the need to adapt to a new culture and by discrimination and social inequality in general (Zou, 2002). Investigating the narratives of Chinese immigrant women’s development of gender role identity yields a more complete picture of their lives.

The existing literature looks mainly at Chinese factory workers and college and high school students. This study focuses on bakery salesladies and social workers to addresses a gap in the existing literature on gender role identity development among Chinese female immigrants at the interface of social context and activity system dynamics. To further understand the Chinese female immigration experience, this study investigates how gender role identity is manifested across different social contexts and institutions, including school, work, and home. This perspective does not view women as passive subjects of social influences and factors. Instead, it attempts to understand them as actors involved in a complex, continuous process of negotiating and accomplishing the gender dimensions of their identities. This approach builds on perspectives that view gender and gender identities as not something that people “have,” suggesting instead that people are “doing gender” and thus constructing their gender identities in their social interactions within activity systems. Furthermore, this approach builds on the notions of gender and identity as situated at the intersection of social and individual processes (e.g. Stetsenko, 2013) that are “figuratively combining the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5)
For this research, I interviewed and compared two groups of Chinese women—bakery salesladies and social workers—who immigrated to New York City and found work in Chinatown. I investigated the development of gender role identity as a process by which women using different tools within their activity system and their histories “do gender.” The informal institution of patriarchal hierarchy in Chinatown is expected to influence the development of gender role identities, with the two groups potentially adopting different views.

I used questionnaires and interviews to investigate two central questions:

1. How do the participants, who work in bakeries or human service agencies, understand themselves as women given their individual life stories and work experiences?

2. How is knowledge and understanding about themselves manifested when solving conflicts in the contexts of family and work?

1.2 Theoretical Framework:

Various frameworks in traditional psychology, such as cognitive psychology, view psychological processes as purely mental activities by isolated individuals disconnected from their sociocultural contexts and from activity systems in which they participate. In contrast, all psychological processes, as argued by Vygotsky and Leontiev in the framework of activity theory, are object-related actions contingent on participation in the social institutions, activity systems, and processes. Psychological processes also potentially contribute to cultural practices and social life.

This dissertation aims to study gender role identity development in Chinese female immigrants from diverse work and education backgrounds. In studying female gender role identity development, this construct is understood as a socially constructed relational process through
which immigrants develop unique ways of being, acting, and identifying as females, while re-
ciprocally changing the circumstances of their lives in the process of development and learning. Since the meanings of these interactions, activities, and circumstances are socially
co-constructed, with various symbolizing processes used to label and interpret them in the course
of social practices and collective life, immigrants are constructing their gender role identities in
relation to the many layers of ever-changing social contexts, practices, and ideologies.

The development of gender role identity and the self are deeply embedded in the dynam-
ics of these larger contexts instead of being merely “internal processes” of a strictly individual
origin (Stetsenko & Arevitch, 2004). As human beings, we organize our experiences in the world
by categorization. At the same time, the ways in which we categorize our experiences are shaped
by our social institutions and contexts. In particular, social factors such as class, educational lev-
el, race, ethnicity, and gender have been shown to affect self-understanding, with important im-
lications for the development of one’s views and sense of self and identity (Ouelette, 1996).

Among social categories, one of the most salient is gender. Specifically, gender categori-
zation shapes the ways in which people act and interact from a very young age. To understand
fully how people perceive and construct their own identities, it is necessary to study the social
institutions and contexts in which they participate and interact and the social mediators employed
in this process. In Alexander Luria’s pioneering study of Soviet Central Asia soon after the 1917
revolution, he showed that a change in psychological tools, such as the implementation of written
language and logico-mathematical operations, had significant influence on people’s categoriza-
tion of objects in the environment (CHAT, 2013). Furthermore, the modern self, being con-
structed over time, tends to be continuously in flux, multilayered, and even beyond conscious
awareness (Pearson & Van Horn, 2004). Simply studying someone as she/he “is” (or drawing
from his or her current self-perception) is not enough to paint a full portrait of a person. Instead, one needs to probe the context-driven dynamics of self-perception and the context in which development takes place.

One area of importance—and the key focus of this research—is gender role identity. Identity development represents the link between self and society, whereas a personal narrative of identity provides access to the process of social reproduction and change (Hammack, 2008). The immigrant population, whose experiences reflect an intersection of geographical, ideological, cultural, and psychological issues, serves as a powerful lens for studying the development of gender role identity in the context of drastically changing social and political circumstances (Qin & Lykes, 2006). The present study investigates the development of gender role identity in immigrant Chinese women as they move to the United States and participate in work contexts with vastly different gender role ideologies. For immigrants, the experience of being a “minority” for the first time can play a significant role in their identity development. Understanding the development of gender role identity is an important tool in studying the female immigrant experience.

Frameworks that focus on the social construction of gender revolve around the idea that people develop and learn various ways of being, knowing, and doing through experiences and activities in social contexts and that learning is built upon prior knowledge and cultural tools that mediate these processes. Social and historical contexts, as well as immigrants’ own perceptions of their gender role identities, are critical considerations in the study of immigration experiences and identity development processes. In line with this approach, activity theory (Vygotsky, 1986) treats each subject of study not as a static unit unchangeable through time but in terms of its history and development or, in other words, in terms of how it “came to be” and how it unfolds and changes through time.
What unifies a wide range of social constructivist perspectives including activity theory is a rejection of the view that the locus of the development of knowledge, identity, and the self is solely in the individual. Instead, development, including that of gender and identity, consists of inherently dynamic processes situated in the realm of sociocultural interactions and activities within ever-changing and intersecting hierarchies of gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, etc. From this perspective, gender is socially constructed and shaped by location within these hierarchies, which numerous factors such as gender-role socialization, interpersonal interactions, cultural tools, and personal experiences as women influence (e.g., Abrams, 2003; Baker, 2005; Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003; Witt, 1997).

In the next section, I present details on three generations of activity theory and use examples to illustrate how one can apply each generation to different gender role identity development situations.

1.2.1 Activity theory. To understand the development of gender role identity in the immigrant population, a theoretical framework is needed that takes into account the ever-changing nature of social contexts that foreground gender role identity development. Activity theory, which has been subsequently modified and elaborated on by a long line of international scholars (e.g., Cole, 1998a; Wertsch, 2003; John-Steiner, 1990), was first outlined by Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s and 1930s, is based on Marxist dialectical materialism. It was developed within a broad socio-cultural perspective with the main goal of overcoming a narrow focus on isolated individuals and the divide between human beings and the sociocultural world. Activity theory overcomes this narrow focus by concentrating on the product—gender role identity—but also by considering the developmental process of how gender role identities come to be. The activity system grows and evolves through time instead of being static. As Bonnie Nardi states,
Activity theory is a powerful and clarifying descriptive tool rather than a strongly predictive theory. The object of activity theory is to understand the unity of consciousness and activity. Activity theory incorporates strong notions of intentionality, history, mediation, collaboration and development in constructing consciousness…Activity theory offers a set of perspectives on human activity and a set of concepts for describing that activity” (1996, p. 7).

This section presents activity theory in terms of its major tenets, development, and application to the research question. Given that each generation of activity theory is derived from the preceding one, the discussion starts with the fundamental first-generation model and concludes with the advanced third-generation model.

Activity theory, which not only focuses on intentionality and human subjectivity but also on the cultural artifacts that mediate everyday existence and relationships with social practices, is congruent with the goals of this study. Also known as a sociocultural theory, activity theory is “one among a number of approaches that move away from the individualist and mentalist notions of human development, toward viewing it as embedded within sociocultural contexts and intrinsically interwoven with them” (Stetsenko, 2005, p.70). The initial framework, to reiterate, was developed by Vygotsky and his colleagues with the explicit focus on individuals participating in social process and practices as the context for understanding human subjectivity, identity, and agency.

Vygotsky was the first psychologist to follow in Marx’s footsteps to investigate human subjectivity “by revealing its origination in the process of social exchange among people instead of viewing it as a self-sufficient phenomenon detached from these exchanges and evolving on its own mentalist grounds” (Stetsenko, 2005, 74). Vygtosky’s followers Leont’ev, Luria, Gal’perin,
El’konin, Davydov and Meshcheryakov focused especially on the concept on internalization and associated learning process. Stetsenko (2005) states,

Human subjectivity is not some capacity that exists in individual heads; evolves on its own, purely mentalist grounds; and develops according to some inherent laws of nature. Instead, psychological processes emerge from collective practical involvements of humans with each other and the world around them; they are governed by objective laws and are subordinate to the purposes of these practical involvements. In even broader terms, the development of the human mind is conceptualized as originating from practical transformative involvements of people with the world, and as a process that can be understood only by tracing its origination in these involvements and practices. (p. 74)

Therefore, the person needs to be understood as actually actively involved in the processes of development and learning and capable of changing the conditions and circumstances of the given context and practice in which they participate. According to Vygotsky, human beings develop and learn through participating in historically determined and socially situated cultural interactions. His theory is associated with two key concepts in the study of human development—social-cultural contexts and cultural mediation (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2009). Specifically, a phenomenon should be studied in relation to its surrounding contexts and phenomena, which tend to be dynamic and constantly in flux. Vygotsky (1978) proposed activity theory based on the dialectical method, with process rather than static product as the unit of analysis. Process includes all the mediators and constraints surrounding and affecting the objects or the products of human development. Employing a socio-historical approach, Vygotsky suggested that instead of just looking at "what is," psychologists should also pay attention to "what was" (historically and developmentally) and the process of becoming. He also believed that the phe-
nomenon being studied and the surrounding phenomena and contexts are constantly developing and changing. In other words, a living organism exists only as part of a dynamic system; having a bi-directional relationship with the environment being cannot be studied in isolation. As Ste-senko and Arievitch (2010) state,

…the mind is profoundly sociocultural and historical not simply because it is somehow “situated” (or embedded) in a sociocultural world, but because it is produced from within, out of, for the sake of, and as driven by the logic of evolving activity that connects indi-viduals to the world, other people, and themselves. (p. 257)

Chinese female immigrants experience a transition from Chinese to American construc-tions of gender role identity. Based on the tenets of activity theory, this transition must be studied in relation to surrounding phenomena and contexts, including the social institutions in which the immigrants participate and the cultural artifacts present in these contexts. Furthermore, activity theory is an adequate conceptual instrument for the study of gender role identity because it is a practice theory. Vygotsky (1986) believed that human activities, or practices, operate on two different planes—an interpersonal plane to be internalized by the individual and an intrapersonal plane that is an outgrowth of the process of internalization. Externalization occurs when an activity transitions from being internal into being external. In this way, a reciprocal relationship exists between an individual's practices and his/her social environment.

Human activities are mediated by artifacts, which, in turn, are transformed by activities (see Figure 1). People actively engage with the world through participating in ongoing activity. As artifacts change and develop over time, artifact users (the subjects) are transformed, too. People learn through their experiences based on their prior knowledge and interactions. This line of reasoning is encapsulated by the constructivist view (Cole, 1998b; Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo,
2000; Stetsenko, 2004) that gender role identity (the object) is constructed and learned within and from interactions in the environment. This theoretical orientation is congruent with earlier psychological frameworks, such as by Mead’s (1938):

We are not, in social psychology, building up the behavior of the social group in terms of the behavior of the separate individuals composing it; rather, we are starting out with a given social whole of complex group activity, into which we analyze (as elements) the behavior of each of the separate individuals composing it (p. 7, as quoted in Engeström, 1987, p. 12).

According to Vygotsky, there are two types of mediating artifacts: tools and signs. We use tools to change the outside world and signs to control and change ourselves. In turn, mediation comes from both external and internal sources at two levels of mediating artifacts—material and semiotic. Technology, social organizations, and institutions comprise the material level. Change at the material level may affect the semiotic level and influence the development of cognition and the self. Tools and signs are carried over and internalized from generation to generation, regulating children’s behavior and passed on to the next generation (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004).
Scholars later developed a more complete theory based on the first-generation activity theory of Alexej N. Leont’ev (1977) who explicitly differentiated individual actions from collective activity (see Figure 2). There are two additional aspects. First, “objects are turned into facts of mind (i.e., become presented in subjective images) only through active processes of humans relating to these objects, that is, through activity” (Stetsenko, 2005, p.75). Second, “the processes of activity at the foundation of “reflection” are never merely individual but absorb the collective experiences of people” (Stetsenko, 2005, p.76). According to Leont’ev, the uppermost level (the instrument) refers to collective actions driven by an object-related motive. The middle level refers to individual or group activities driven by a conscious goal. The lower level refers to automatic operations driven by the conditions and tools of the action. Leont’ev also considers the object of an activity as its true motive:
…in the total flow of activity that forms human life, in its higher manifestations mediated by psychic reflection, analysis isolates separate (specific) activities in the first place according to the criterion of motives that elicit them. Then actions are isolated-processes that are subordinated to conscious goals, finally, operations that directly depend on the conditions of attaining concrete goals.

(Leont’ev 1978, pp. 66-67, as quoted in Engeström, 1987, p. 23)

Furthermore, Engeström (1987) distinguishes between two levels of mediation:

…the primary level of mediation by tools and gestures dissociated from one another (where gestures are not yet real psychological tools), and the secondary level of mediation by tools combined with corresponding signs or other psychological tools. The acquisition and application of new tools broadens their sphere of influence. The acquisition and application of new tools elevates the level of influence (potentially; the result is actually achieved only when the tool and the psychological tool meet each other. (p. 19)

In second-generation activity theory, individual relations with the world of human objects are seen as mediated by relations with other people. Each sub-triangle is potentially an activity of its own and there are a multitude of relatively independent activities in a more complex and differentiated society. “The uppermost level of collective activity is driven by an object-related motive; the middle-level of individual (or group) action is driven by a conscious goal; and the bottom level of automatic operations is driven by the conditions and tools of the action at hand (CHAT, 2013).” In addition, second-generation activity theory takes cultural diversity more centrally into account.
Third-generation activity theory is exemplified by the work of Michael Cole and Yrjo Engeström (Cole, 1998a; Engeström, 1987; Engeström, 1996) who emphasize cultural diversity (see Figure 3) and develop conceptual tools to understand dialogue, multiple perspectives and voices, and networks of interacting activity systems (CHAT, 2013).

Researchers distinguish the individual actions, the collective activity, and the “potentially shared objects” between individual actions and collective activity (Engeström, 1999). Stetsenko also stated that potentially shared objects relate reciprocally to both individual actions and collective activity and serve as a bridge between the two. The cultural tools produced in the collaboration process are passed on from generation to generation. Neo-Vygotskian developmental approaches suggest that individuals (or subjects) recurrently interact in different social contexts. Through this process, individuals internalize cultural resources (e.g., language, power hierarchies, and other symbols) to organize their experiences, thoughts, and emotions.

As expressed by Stetsenko (2012),
These practices continuously and cumulatively evolve through time, constituting the realm of social history and culture while being enacted and carried out by human collectivities through unique contributions by individual participants who always act as social subjects…In this dialectical process, there is always an enduring nexus of relations with past and future generations because activities in the present inevitably build on previous conditions and accomplishments; they also contribute to unfolding collective practices thus incurring changes for the future and, moreover, are contingent on the future because they are goal-directed and purposeful. (p.149)

Humans are active and engaged agents who participate in the construction of culture and society at a given historical time. They also join society never from scratch but always as participants with history—their individual histories and their historically specific cultural backgrounds. People perceive the world and the artifacts in it through various prisms, including those that focus on life goals and purposes as they pertain to the meaning of activities. Goals and purposes act like a compass in activity systems and individual actions. At the same time, individual actions also affect other’s actions reciprocally. Every human being will leave her trace in the world and is responsible for human race’s future (Stetsenko, 2012).

In its current form, activity theory is unique in the following ways (Engeström, 1999):

1. The unit of analysis is not the object but instead the collective and artifact-mediated system that, in turn, is affected by other activity systems.

2. The activity system is inherently multi-layered, involving multiple points of view, customs, and diverse histories.

3. An activity system changes over time and can only be understood in the context of history or the process of becoming.
4. Each activity system interacts with other activity systems and is transformed over time.

![Diagram of activity systems](image)

Figure 3: Third generation activity system (Cole & Engeström, 1993, p.40)

Together, the above features make activity theory especially effective for the study of identity development. In particular, activity theory enables us to conceptualize the self (a) in its practical relevance, as a lawful and necessary moment in collective human practices, (b) as endowed with the capacity to generate new cycles of practice, and (c) as imminent in activities and in a position to contribute to meaningful changes in the world (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). Stetsenko (2005) further argues that activity theory should include the idea that “material production, intersubjective exchanges, and human subjectivity form a unified three-fold dialectical system” (p. 70).

In this work, I investigate the development of gender role identity among Chinese female immigrants. First-, second-, and third-generation activity theory are applied in the process of analyzing how gender role identity develops in Chinese female immigrants in different social institutions. In terms of first-generation activity theory, the subjects (the agents) are Chinese women who have immigrated to the United States, with the object being gender role identity and mediating artifacts consisting of the socio-cultural norms in both China and the United States, various social institutions, and so on. The relationship between Chinese female immigrants and their
gender role identities is mediated by cultural means. Women internalize culturally rooted ideology, which becomes their mode of thinking. First, Chinese women acquire practices/norms on the interpersonal plane (with parents, family members, teachers, and others socializing them about how to behave as a female). Next, these practices and norms are internalized to become the way in which women believe that they should behave. Internalized norms, in turn, shape women’s interactions with others and are, thus, externalized. A reciprocal relationship is observed between cultural ideals and actual practices, which may or may not match the initial ideals depending on situational constraints. Activities are always mediated by artifacts, which are shaped by social institutions to which they belong. Typically, social institutions refer to the family (core and extended), school, work environment, and community. The two levels of mediating artifacts—material and semiotic—also influence one another.

Activity theory can be applied to explain changes in gender role identities at several junctures in history. Specifically, the historical and economic shift from hunting to agriculture has been perceived as having a profound impact on male-female gender role relations. As a result of this shift, women from the Middle East came to be seen as the property of their fathers/husbands. In China, foot binding emerged as a symbol of patriarchy stemming from the Confucian emphasis on hierarchy and order. In India, women were regarded as inferior despite considerable attention to their intelligence and beauty (Stearns, 2000). In the above examples, the societies have positioned females as being less important than men. Women, in turn, have learned to perceive themselves as inferior to men and to behave accordingly (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004; Stearns, 2000). These examples demonstrate the bi-directional process of how historical contexts (together with the tools and signs operating in them) shape the way in which women (the subject) construct their gender role identity (the object) and vice versa. I will explain
how gender role identity can be studied with the three generations of activity systems.

In ancient times, China was a matriarchal society. In primitive conditions with low productivity and poor living conditions, women had the same capacity for subsistence production as men and a monopolistic reproductive advantage. It was a time when women enjoyed not only freedom but also respect (Chen & Bo, 2011). When society entered the agricultural age, men, who were physically stronger, became more valuable than women. Women came to be seen as reproductive machines that were easily replaced. Gradually, women became inferior to men as China turned into a patriarchal society. In patriarchal China, men were more valued because the mode of production was serving as the artifact, which regulated both individual and collective behavior in the society. The motives of surviving in the community with the gender role expectations of them served as the object and gender role identity and the transformation of the gender role identity functioned as the outcome. Eventually, the object (their motives) and, in turn, the outcome, were shaped such that women were increasingly perceived and self-identified as “property” of men (Chen & Bo, 2011). There is a saying in Yizhuan, a piece of traditional Chinese literature, that “to visualize is Qian, to follow is Kun”. Qian refers to the sky or the Yang—the male in the Chinese system. Kun refers to the earth or the Yin—the female in the Chinese system. In other words, “Qian is the principal part of visualizing and ruling while Kun is the passive and following part” (Chen & Bo, 2011, p.145). Therefore, Yang governs Yin and the harmony between Yin and Yang depends on sacrificing the interests of Yin.

In ancient China, foot binding was a social control mechanism practiced mostly by the upper classes and based on Confucian ideals of hierarchy and order (the semiotic level of artifact), according to which women were inferior (Lee et al., 2000). The material and semiotic levels of the artifact on the upper level of the activity system reciprocated with and reinforced each
another. Traditional gender role practices were enacted and performed in everyday actions and passed on from generation to generation. Even today, although more Chinese husbands engage in housework, research indicates that wives still do the vast majority of household chores, with husbands spending an average of 6.1 hours and wives spending 22.7 hours per week on housework (Lu, Maume, & Bellas, 2000). In contrast, men are more likely to assist in food shopping, which involves bargaining with peddlers and going outside the house. This behavior aligns with traditional Chinese gender role ideology, which has men dominating outside the house and women dominating inside. First-generation activity theory explains that artifacts and cultural practices shape the subject (Chinese women) and the object (gender role identity).

Second-generation activity theory is better equipped to explain the following examples. Holland and Eisenhart (1990) interviewed college women to examine why women tend to be dependent on men. Their findings suggest that the gender role identities of female college students are affected by the peer system, class hierarchy, and teacher expectations. Mediating artifacts—the community and school rules—shape the ways in which college women view themselves and develop their gender role identity. Teachers treat male and female students differently, often attributing major skills and talent to males but not to females. These biases, in addition to dismissing academic experiences and values in the peer group, pressure female students to construct their worth according to their attractiveness to men. For example, in Holland and Eisenhart’s (1990) study, female college students were often found to make themselves available by arranging their schedules around their boyfriends’ lives. In contrast, the prestige of male college students depended not only on gaining attention from women but also on their success in sports, school politics, and academics. In this way, traditional gender role identities became internalized from socialization experiences and interactions with others and, in turn, were passed on to future
generations.

Cultural differences also have salience in second-generation activity theory. Specifically, relationships appear to be of primary importance for White women, who are not typically expected to be the breadwinner of the family. In contrast, relationships are not as important for African American females, who are less likely to have the luxury of relying on men financially (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990). Interestingly, as a woman’s relationship with her boyfriend becomes more important, her relationship with other women becomes more fragile. Other factors that shape the development of gender role identity in women include rules at school and in the peer group, the community, the balance of roles at school and associated artifacts, including gender role ideologies and more. Along a similar vein, in a study on the centrality and cost of heterosexual romantic love among first-year college women, Gilmartin (2005) found that most of the women interviewed were unwilling to forgo their romantic relationships despite their negative impact on academic work. The value of romantic relationships for women has not changed significantly and is likely to be passed on to the next generation, if the artifacts around them, such as gender role ideology, do not change. This example demonstrates the use of activity theory to investigate the development of gender role identity in women.

Likewise, third-generation activity theory is well suited to explain gender role identity development. Gender role identity is constructed within different social institutions and depends on the cultural artifacts made available in these contexts. Cultures vary in terms of how particular attributes are internalized and made salient in particular settings. Identical artifacts can hold different meanings for different people participating in the same activity. In terms of gender, men and women experience different realities (with different rules, community, and norms regarding the division of labor) despite living in and interacting with the same world (Epstein, 1997). The
relationship between Chinese women and the object within their activity system (their identity) is
mediated by cultural means (norms and social institutions). As Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and
Cain (1998) point out, “[h]umans are both blessed and cursed by their dialogic nature—their
tendency to encompass a number of views in virtual simultaneity and tension, regardless of their
logical compatibility (p.15).” Any activity in which one engages is regarded as a practice of the self. Many feminist scholars (e.g., Holland et al., 1998) assert that, while cultural discourse rein-
forces the power of social structures and institutions to shape behavior, social structures and in-
stitutions often favor members of one social category over another. In particular, Holland and
colleagues (1998) observe: “[s]elves are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful
discourses and their artifacts—tax forms, census categories, curriculum vitae, and the like”
(Holland et al., 1998, p.26).

All these artifacts combine to shape the development of gender role identity in women. For example, even before immigrants move to the United States the activity system and gender role identity have already developed due to potentially shared objects (such as movies and other media) between the two cultures. The influence of pre-immigration shared objects would be minimal compared to migrating into another culture. After moving to the United States, changes in cultural artifacts (including role assignments, ideologies, beliefs, tax forms and census categories) trigger corresponding changes in gender role identity. To illustrate, on most governmental forms used in China (including forms intended for foreigners), women can choose to
self-identify their occupation as a “housewife” as opposed to being “employed full-time,” “em-
ployed part-time” or a “student.” For example, on the visa application form required for entering
China, occupational choices include businessman, company employee, teacher, student, house-
wife, unemployed, member of national parliament, government official, staff of media, religious
worker, active duty military personnel, retired, crew member and other. Because a “housewife” is a gender-specific term and listed as a type of occupation on forms, women in China see it as their assigned occupation. Thus, the gender-specific term “housewife” functions as an artifact that mediates the way in which Chinese women perceive their gender role identity. Specifically, this artifact embodies the Chinese dialectic of Yin and Yang, which describes a way in which harmony is achieved in Chinese culture—by men dominating outside of the house while women, doing housework, dominate inside the house (Chen & Bo, 2011). When encountering artifacts that embody traditional gender role ideology, Chinese women may turn them into artifacts at the somatic level to guide their behaviors and values.

In conclusion, activity theory suggests that

…human development is based on active transformations of existing environments and creation of new ones achieved through collaborative process of producing and deploying tools …Human subjectivity is revealed as existing only within the broader processes of ever expanding and ultimately practical activities that are stretching both “behind” and “ahead” of human subjectivity (and therefore, co-evolving and co-dependent with them. Human subjectivity then ultimately appears as just another form of participating and contributing to social practice, of changing and advancing this practice, and thus, as the form that realizes practical ties of humans to themselves, to other people, and to their world. (Stetsenko, 2005, pp.72, 82)

Activity theory provides a useful framework for studying gender role identity development among the Chinese female immigrants. This framework highlights the process of the activity mediation and history. In particular, the dynamics of signs and tools are considered instead of a sole focus on the products of activity. Hence, this framework is chosen to reveal a complex
picture of gender identity development that is immersed in the social matrix of the activity system in which the agent, the environment, and all other elements are constantly changing and shifting.

Humans constantly transform their own life while they gain self-knowledge and knowledge about the world (Kirschner & Martin, 2010). Therefore, it is a perfect tool to describe the development of gender role identity.

1.2.2 Activity theory and Chinese female immigrants. Chinese families and social institutions operate in a gender hierarchy that, in turn, compels Chinese women to internalize a ranking in which they are inferior. Furthermore, Chinese women are expected to care for the needs of other family members before taking care of themselves. This ideal may also be internalized so that women think that their needs do not deserve to be addressed. Thus, to avoid spending too much time looking for a better job, women may become more willing to accept a lower-ranking job than when they first arrived in the United States. This example demonstrates how cultural ideologies (one type of the artifacts) influence the way women think when the tool to regulate their behaviors becomes internalized. In turn, the agent (the female) affects how social institutions are set up. In Chinatown, many women fill low-prestige jobs with employers reluctant to pay more than minimum wage because they know that female immigrants will take the jobs. In this way, Chinese female immigrants (the subjects) transform the institution (allowing employers to pay lower wages), which is another artifact and a potentially shared object in relation to other activities. A new sense of identity develops as women navigate their new environment and engage in novel contexts.

Second-generation activity theory can be applied to the development of gender role identity among Chinese female immigrants in the context of career. The uppermost level of the theo-
ry schematic represents collective actions driven by an object-related motive. To illustrate, the business settings in Chinatown can be considered the instruments. The middle level represents the actions of individuals (Chinese female immigrants) that are driven by a goal (which can include gender role identity development, career development, or dealing with everyday life situations with the family as the priority). The lower level refers to automatic operations driven by the conditions and tools of the action, that is, the demands of Chinatown businesses and the rules that they initiate. Most Chinatown businesses are in the service sector. Because Chinese entrepreneurs are more likely to entrust management positions (such as supervisors and store managers) to men than to women, male immigrants have a better chance of finding higher level jobs. At the same time, Chinese customers are used to being served by females. As these expectations become the norm in the community, people feel uncomfortable breaking the norm. In this way, a vicious cycle is formed, with reciprocal relationships between all of the elements.

The application of third-generation activity theory to the development of gender role identity in Chinese female immigrants reveals shared objects between China and the Western world. These potentially shared objects have reciprocal relationships with both cultures. As immigrants move from one country to another, they inevitably learn about new cultures. Although workers in Chinatown may not be as Westernized as workers in other fields, Chinatown workers are still exposed to Western ideology through other channels, including advertisements that they see on the subway and Chinese radio stations in the United States. In addition, immigrants can witness gender equality played out in their everyday life, with women being more assertive and just as likely as men to express their thoughts (Zhou, 2006). Eventually, this interaction between cultures transforms the mediating artifacts of Chinese female immigrants, who may internalize a new set of values and adopt a more egalitarian view of gender role identity.
1.3 Literature Review

My interest in Chinese women immigrants and gender role identities originated from my reading of biographies, autobiographies and novels of traditional American Chinese female writers and from my own experience as an immigrant. In this chapter, narratives from classic literature and research by Chinese and Taiwanese authors will be used to illustrate traditional gender role ideologies in Chinese cultures.

1.3.1 Traditional and modern Chinese gender role ideologies. Traditional and modern Chinese gender ideologies are different yet similar. To understand the development of gender role identity in Chinese female immigrants, as Vygotsky’s suggestion for studying changing phenomenon, we should first understand the history of traditional Chinese gender role ideologies and the historical context immigrants act within.

Traditional Chinese gender role ideologies were mainly influenced by Confucian as well as the famous Chinese book the Analects.

Tung Chung-hsu (179-104 B.C.), the greatest Confucian of his time, said,

In all things there must be correlates. The Yin is the correlate of the Yang, the wife of the husband, the subject of the sovereign…the relationships between sovereign and subject, father and son, and husband and wife, are all derived from the principles of the Yin and Yang. The sovereign is Yang, the subject is Yin. The three cords [Kang] of the Way of the [true] King may be sought in Heaven. (Feng 1948, pp. 196-7, as quoted in Yuan 2002, p. 115)

Besides the Analects, the book NuJie (Admonitions for Women), written by Ban Zhao in the Eastern Han period (A.D. 25-220), also set special roles for women to follow. Women were supposed to be inferior and submissive to their husbands’ family members (usually through ar-
ranged marriages) and were expected to display no independent will. Women’s situation worsened after Confucians in the Song dynasty (A.D. 960) advocated that a woman’s second marriage should be regarded as shameful. Chu Hsi (A.D. 1130-1200), an important Confucian, believed that there were two fundamentals of the universe: Yin and Yang. The interaction of Yin and Yang produced the Five Elements, which then produced the physical universe. Chu believed that women were at the lowest position in the universe and were the most unworthy and least to be cared for. After the Song dynasty, Confucianism became a useful tool to oppress women (Yuan 2002).

In such a patriarchal society, a woman was obligated to conform to existing social norms, and Neo-Confucian masters made efforts to ensure that women were encouraged to be the “virtuous” women who supported the patriarchal hierarchy. A husband, on the other hand, could have concubines even when his wife was alive. The division of labor between the inner (domestic) and the outer (public) spheres of responsibility was very clear, and wives had no right to make independent decisions. Women could choose either self-realization through their roles in the inner spheres or simply accept fate passively without “improving” themselves.³ Women were encouraged to learn and transform themselves with particular emphasis on four aspects of life: “(1) physical, social and intellectual separation, (2) submission of the woman to the husband, within the family, (3) emphasis on complete monogamy of the woman, through requirement for chastity and prohibitions against remarriage, and (4) the exclusion of women either from direct or indirect political activities” (Raphals 1998, p. 254, as quoted in Yuan 2002, p. 124).

³ There is Chinese idiom that said, “a woman's virtue is to have no talent (女子無才便是德).”
Yuan (2002) compared the Confucian concept of *Jen* with feminists’ concept of care. Confucians emphasize the ethics of *Jen*, and feminists highlight the ethics of care. The two concepts seem to be quite similar at first glance because of the “ai” (love) in *Jen* and “love” in care. Can Confucianism be feminist after all? Yuan rejected the idea that because *Jen* is like care it must be feminist. *Jen* is not a theory compatible with feminism. Tu Wei-ming, another expert on Confucianism, described *Jen* as a living metaphor and argued that women, like men, actively shape their moral character. The task of learning to be human involves “a dynamic process of growth rather than mere submission to assigned social roles.” The definition of *Jen* in the Analects, however, is vague, and there are two explanations of the concept. One focuses on the man of *Jen* (loving man), and the other saw *Jen* as overcoming oneself and restoring “*Li*” (rite). Yuan (2002) argued that *Li* and *Jen* are two aspects of the same thing, and *Jen* exists in the relationship between individual men and in doing, hence in *Li*. “*Li* directs our attention to the traditional social pattern of conduct and relationships; *Jen* directs our attention to the person as the one who pursues the pattern of conduct and thus maintains those relations” (Fingarette 1972, p. 42, as quoted in Yuan, 2002, p. 112). Yuan (2002) argues that love, or care, is wonderful for every person, if this love is a universal kind and not particular to one sex. The Confucian concept of *Jen*, however, is oppressive towards women because women are supposed to transform themselves to care for all others but themselves.

Yuan (2002) concludes that “Confucius and Neo-Confucianism encouraged people, including women, to make efforts in keeping supposedly harmonious orders of a patriarchal society, which was deeply gendered in all social institutions, norms, and customs” (p.112).
The Confucian tradition still influences how women behave today, but there have been changes in both China and Taiwan. Although women in China and Taiwan are getting more education, they were still considered inferior to men in many cases.

The 4 May movement launched an attack on China’s feudal past and patriarchal power structures in the family while at the same time upholding filial piety, women’s virtue and maternal sacrifice. (Lingzhen Wang, 2004, p. 20, as quoted in Scaffer & Xianlin, 2007, p. 19)

The May 4th movement refers to the revolutionary period around 1919, which resulted in a series of cultural reforms. The movement started in Beijing, China on May 4th 1919 when a group of students organized a protest, petition, and a series of anti-imperialist activities. Then more cultural and political movements grew out of that event, and so the May 4th movement is also called the New Culture Movement. It challenged traditional Chinese values and became a turning point for Chinese attitudes toward female gender role identities. In the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese feminists examined gender relationships and introduced Freud and psychoanalysis into their ideas of gender role identity, but these new ways of thinking about gender lost salience in the Maoist era, when the “Maoist ideology of gender equality” and the ideology of “iron girls,” who were supposed to “hold up half the sky,” dominated the political landscape. In the mid-1990s, the Women’s Conference opened up new spaces for the exploration of women’s identities, which participants noted have the potential to expand or restrain women’s agency (Scaffer & Xianlin, 2007).

Recent figures show that an alarming number of Chinese women, especially those in rural China, have committed suicide because, having internalized cultural ideology as tools of thinking, they do not see their lives as valuable. Approximately 12% of baby girls born in China are
killed at birth, and around 500 women take their lives every day (Oriental Daily, 2008). \(^4\) Lai (2005), who studies the dynamics of the sex ratio at birth (SRB) and infant mortality rates in China, using data from the 1982, 1990 and 2000 Chinese censuses, finds that the increase in the gap between male and female births coincided with the introduction of the one-child policy. The abnormal SRB of China is attributed to strong son preference, sex-selection abortions, female infanticide, and non-reporting of female births. These statistics, again, demonstrate how cultural ideologies (one of the artifacts) influence women’s behaviors via internalization.

There are two words in Chinese for feminism: nu quan zhuyi, which translates as women’s rights-ism/power-ism (女權主義); and nu xing zhuyi, (女性主義), which translates as women’s gender-ism. Chinese sees their feminism as different from the Western feminism. Chinese feminism is sharp but not aggressive. \(^5\) It explores female issues. It is concerned with the harmonious development of both sexes. Its utmost focus is on the eternal subject of humanity. It draws on historical, contemporary, translated and indigenous theoretical and practical sources and combines theoretical concerns with material practices. For us, it displays a smiley Chinese feminism.

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\(^4\) The articles were retrieved from orientaldaily.on.cc/new/new_a29cnt.html?pubdate=20080327 on March 28, 2008.

There is a rumor that the Chinese government is going to modify the one child policy so that couples who give birth to a girl first can get a second chance to have a boy to solve the problem of baby girls being killed and illegal female fetal homicide.

\(^5\) Chinese culture emphasizes interpersonal harmony, and so aggressive behavior is considered unacceptable, especially for women. So Chinese feminism, according to Lin, is sharp, that is, right on target, but not aggressive, that is not hostile or physically being attractive in nature.
Chinese feminists have attempted to soften feminism in a way that is more acceptable in the Chinese culture. Lately, many women have written about feminism, with four trends or directions discernible in their writings:

1. Writings about rural women, who suffer greater disadvantages, but who have been given voice through personal narratives.
2. Historical novels that deconstruct and reconstruct representations of women in opposition to established versions of Chinese myth and history.
3. Urban-based women, who are depicted as “glam girls,” and whose beauty, allure, and sexual prowess appear in popular fiction and in diaries or blogs on the Internet.
4. Women who explore gender relations through “personalized” narratives that investigate psychological, aesthetic, or experiential forms of female subjectivity.

It was important for women in China to assert their own voices and others through writing, or they may never be heard. After Chinese officials discovered some of these writings the government banned them but not before they had some popular impact. Along with other political and economic forces the feminist movement has facilitated dramatic change in China. Scaffer and Xianlin (2007) concluded that,

In the past twenty years the growth of a market economy has dramatically changed China. Although the overall standard of living has risen, women have suffered a diminution in status both materially and symbolically for women. The reforms offered men increased opportunities in education, employment and financial success. Women, however, had to face the dilemma of choosing between the demands of a career or a family. In the process of reclaiming their identity from the asexual ‘iron-girl’ ethos of the Maoist era, many
fashioned themselves as beautiful objects, accepting their designation as “the weaker sex.” In addition, advertising exploited their sexuality. Some women were forced into prostitution for economic survival; others flaunted their newly objectified status, trading off their bodies for financial reward. Still others, successful in the public sphere, are enticed into training programmes that feature beauty tips and relationship guidance. Women’s resistance writing may be on the rise but male dominance still permeates every corner of Chinese society. (p.30)

Women in China are still attempting to improve their conditions while relying on the tools and ideas of Chinese-style feminism, but they have a long way to go to achieve gender equality.

Taiwan is also deeply influenced by Confucianism, but the first wave of feminism did not begin in Taiwan until the early 1970s—in contrast, it ended in the 1920s in the United States. In 1971, Annette Lu—a forerunner of the Taiwan’s feminist movement and the founder of a publishing company to promote gender equity—wrote that we should first “be a human, and then be a man or a woman” (Wang, 1999). The idea was revolutionary at the time and faced strong opposition from the patriarchal society of Taiwan—Lu was persecuted by politicians. In the past fifty years, however, feminism has come a long way in Chinese communities all over the world.

According to Liu (1997), Taiwanese feminists issued a white paper on the state of women in 1995. They demanded a win-win situation for females, males, and society. Their goals included the following actions and principles:

1. Set the country’s mission as “Taking care of citizen’s lives.”
2. Have men and women share decision making power
3. Give special organizations budgetary resources and power to advocate for gender equality.

4. Eliminate patriarchal capitalism and build a participatory democracy in its place.

Most feminist writers saw that Taiwanese feminism was different from its counterpart in the US, UK or Germany. Instead of asking that females have a way to climb up the ladder in a “male-dominated world” or asking the country to fully protect female caring roles, what Taiwanese feminists wanted was a re-allocation of resources and power and a closer alignment between the current public and private sector and between male and female worlds. They were trying to break the rule that caretakers (females) and those being taken care of were in the “private sphere” and invisible. They were trying to solve the problem by taking the female perspective to rediscover, analyze, and reinterpret caring jobs, and to employ national resources, policies, and rules to solve the problem. It was quite similar to the feminism in Western countries although it happened much later. Liu (1997) argued that women were thought of as salves in the name of “love.” Many women gave up their jobs and income to take care of family members and even became the poor person in a rich family. She argues that the daily job of caring for children, elders, the disabled, and sick responds to the basic needs of citizen, but the burden also falls heaviest on women.

The unequal relationship between Taiwanese men and women was particularly evident to feminists so around 1995 they marshaled data to support their requests for change. They pointed out that according to the 1992 Taiwanese Provincial Female Living Situation Survey, 1.4% of

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6 Chinese feminists call domestic sphere “private sector” or “private sphere.”
women were repeatedly physically abused, and 0.2% of women were physically abused by their husbands to such an extent that they could no longer take it and left their husbands. Before 1985, husbands had the right to all assets in a couple’s name or even those held under a wife’s name. According to the same study, 80% of the assets of deceased parents were shared by the brothers. Thirty-one percent of women were the sole support for their parents, but, by law, they had no right to an inheritance. Taiwanese law stated that “Wives have to reside in their husbands’ residence.” That is, women in Taiwan had to move to their husband’s house after they married. It was unfair, and some husbands used it as ground for divorce. Less than half of married women (45%) work, and almost half of those working (47.74%) quit their jobs after marriage. Family pressures weighed on women to abort female fetuses. Between 1972 and 1993, 15 times as many women obtained tubal ligations as men received vasectomies despite the greater ease that men had in reversing the procedure. Because of the extreme patriarchy in Taiwan, Taiwanese feminists fought against the system, in the 1990s. Liu (1997) contends that separating jobs into private and public spheres and demanding women assume the role of child bearing and household worker is not fair. Females also tend to take up “underground jobs” where they get paid for being maids or nannies for other families. Those jobs also fall into the “private sphere.”

Patriarchal society applies the sex roles of “males rule, females follow” into the public sphere because following their obligation to do the housework it retains the image that “females cannot assume large responsibilities.” From high school to their early college years females receive only “caring education” in “military Caring classes” while males are taught survival skills, military strategies during weekly two-hour classes. Liu (1997) argues that five years of gender specific education serve as a brainwashing mechanism to control females. Also, it is interesting that even though Taiwanese women have high levels of educational attainment, their employment rates are
lower than Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and South Korean. They also occupy the lowest rungs of the occupational status ladder in companies, are homemakers at an exceptionally high rate, and still have the highest rates of divorce in Asia.

Liu (1997) argues that Taiwanese women should learn from the Scandinavian model, and she argues for government-provided childcare, family services, and home aids to release women from family stress. She maintains that citizens have an obligation to pay taxes and the government should provide for the citizens’ basic needs. Lu (1999) adds that 70-80% of caretakers in Taiwan are females and that caring involves a series of tasks and activities on top of the emotional investments in which caretakers must invest. Women usually realize their selves by their caring acts. The belief that females are better caretakers, an image created by patriarchal society, rationalizes males’ superior position in society. The opportunity cost for females to quit their jobs and stay home and take care for family members in need is lower because on average females receive only two-thirds of male salaries. Lu and colleagues find that caring tasks affect female lives in the following respects.

1. Burden and stress
   Caretakers have 24-7 jobs, are unable even to go on trips, take time off for personal illness, and their work is physically and emotionally exhausting.

2. They are torn between protecting loved ones’ feelings and their own right to carry out the tasks when there are conflicts.

3. They experience anger and hurt from family members who misunderstand them.

4. They feel as though they are being controlled.

5. They experience both responsibility and helplessness.

6. They are negatively affected economically.
Lu, Maume, and Bellas (2000) propose government-funded respite care services (in-home respite; day respite; and extended respite). In addition, they recommend companies provide family and medical leave, flextime, and flex-place work arrangements.

Taiwanese feminists have invested much effort in changing social policies to achieve gender equality. They still have a long way to go, however, and change has been gradual. While modern gender role ideology has undergone substantial change in recent years, the behavior of Chinese women (including women of younger generations and women living or even born in Western countries) is still shaped by traditional ideologies.

In a survey of 103 Americans and 119 Chinese in their late teens and early 20s, Zhou (2006) found that American respondents (both male and female) prioritized their own careers above their spouses’ careers. In contrast, Chinese women (in both the United States and China) perceived their husbands’ careers as equally important as their own and Chinese men perceived their wives’ careers as less important than their own. All Chinese respondents (both male and female) expected women to quit their job to take care of the children and the elderly. Thus, traditional gender ideology—the belief that women should take care of the needs of the family before their own—still influences the behaviors of Chinese people.

Traditional gender role ideology affects not only the Chinese population but also Asian Americans (both male and female) who develop their cultural identity based on principles in line with traditional Chinese ideology: self-respect, dignity, and self-control; respect for the family/filial piety; respect for age; awareness and respect for community; fatalism; and humility (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997). Despite not always operating at the conscious level, these principles certainly guide the everyday behavior and worldview of Asian Americans.
Furthermore, Asian men are often strongly masculine in their gender role ideology, embracing the values of obligation to family, the male as authority, and restrictive emotionality (Carter, Williams, Juby & Buckley, 2005). Because Asian gender roles are clearly defined and stereotyping is strong, they tend to be more rigid than those in other cultures. Thus, Asian men and women face strong cultural pressure to fulfill the expectations of others. Asian Americans are more likely than other groups to behave according to the guidelines of their culture (Tuan, 2003; Lee et al., 2000).

Confucian ideas have deeply influenced the development of Chinese tradition. In particular, a set of basic yet rigid guidelines—the Three Obediences and Four Virtues—guide the behavior of Chinese women (Lu, 1996; Duley, 1986). The three obedience commands are to obey fathers before marriage, obey husbands after marriage, and obey the eldest son after the death of the husband. In other words, throughout their lifespan, traditional Chinese women are governed by the male figures. Chen and Bo (2011) observe that, “for most women, even their names were not necessary. They were called someone’s daughter when unmarried, and called someone’s wife when married” (p.147). Chinese women in the past lived in a patriarchal society that emphasized Confucian ideals. From birth, women observed how females in their surroundings interacted with other males. Community norms were internalized to become part of one’s identity, and a woman’s identity was no longer independent of her socio-cultural and historical background. Instead, being situated in the world, her identity formed part of a system that interacted with the environment that, in turn, included other systems. For the most part, men made the final decisions and women positioned themselves as inferior to men (in line with the Yin-Yang dialectic), with many women internalizing the inferior identity as part of their selves.

The four Confucian virtues are morality, proper speech, diligent work, and modest man-
ners. Though **morality** is a subjective term, women are expected to be considerate to everyone (especially in the family) and to put themselves last when conflicts of interest arise. **Proper speech** means not only to say the right things but also to say them at the right time. A traditional Chinese saying goes, “women shut up when men talk.” Even today, this old saying is upheld by many Chinese men, especially the more traditional ones. In Internet debates among the younger generation in China and Taiwan, some claim that this saying is outdated while others insist that this is the way Chinese women should be. The third virtue—**diligent work**—refers to the expectation that women be resilient in the face of hardship and take care of everyone in the family. It requires women to be strong whenever needed. Whereas traditional Chinese women are not typically responsible for finances, they are responsible for taking care of the family. The caring work concerns the wellbeing of others and involves both physical and emotional aspects. Daughters are the main caretakers, and sons typically participate and get involved in only certain circumstances and provide sporadic assistance (Lu, 1999). The fourth virtue—**modest manners**—refers to non-aggressive manners and avoidance of a high opinion of oneself. Women are expected to control themselves, be humble, and refrain from being overly expressive. Buddhism has a similarly ambivalent view of women. On the one hand, women are perceived as evil due to their potential for seducing men, but, on the other hand, they are symbol of purity. They are con-

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7 Although there is no empirical investigation into this particular saying, an analysis of cultural artifacts reveal that the phrase “Women shut up when men talk/work” frequently appears in movies and the mass media. An Internet search showed the phrase referenced in the chapter titles of at least two books and in forum discussions. For example, a woman asked why women had to stop speaking when men talked (implying that she had been told this in the past), and another commented that her boyfriend had repeated the phrase to her.
sidered inferior to men despite bearing responsibility for the ethical behavior of men. This paradox produces an internal conflict that Chinese women contend with on a day-to-day basis.

Chinese women are expected to put family needs (including those of their in-laws) before their own, which can be extremely taxing. Moreover, decisions that women make are necessarily based on other people’s desires. In fact, many Chinese women refer to an “invisible power” that restrains them within a traditional cultural context (Qin, 2009), and it is rare for them to conceptualize their selves independent of their relationships. An old Chinese saying goes: “Sacrifice the small self to achieve the goal(s) of the bigger self (犧牲小我,完成大我).” Applying this idea to the Chinese family means that women have to sacrifice their own needs and consider the big picture to fulfill the needs of the family as a whole. Because the father is often the most powerful figure in the Chinese family “fulfilling family needs” frequently translates to fulfilling the father’s requests. By internalizing these values and developing a growing obligation to put the family before their own desires, women begin to consider the needs of the family as a dominant determinant of their decisions. As women fulfill the requirements of the institutions of the family and womanhood, they are left with few chances to advance themselves. Their gender role identities become a channel for men to oppress them and prevent them from accessing social and financial power and knowledge. Chinese women are in a continual process of negotiating their gender role identities in this “figured world” (Holland & Lave, 2001), a world in which traditional gender role ideologies are internalized through social interactions and, in turn, shape their behavioral patterns.

Today, family obligation continues to be a central part of the lives of Chinese women. For example, daughters-in-law take care of the whole family and expect to sacrifice their own needs whenever conflicts occur. The perception that a husband’s career is more important than
his wife’s can lead to social problems. In the United States, a woman’s living standard drops dramatically when she is divorced, and the drop sends the message: “You have to suffer when you get a divorce.” Heterosexual roles are reinforced under such institutions. Rich (1995) argues in The Kingdom of the Fathers, “…the economic dependency of women, the unpaid domestic services of the wife, the obedience of women and children to male authority, the imprinting and continuation of heterosexual roles” all function as control mechanisms that result in social problems, such as domestic violence. In 2004, domestic violence occurred in 40 percent of immigrant families from Mainland China and 20 percent of native Hong Kong families in Hong Kong (Oriental Daily, 2008). Domestic violence is especially common in families in which the husband is unemployed for some time and no longer the breadwinner. Furthermore, wives are not to talk back to their husbands. The traditional saying “marry a chicken, follow a chicken” refers not only to the expectation that you follow your husband wherever he may go but also that you have to agree with whatever he says and thinks. In the minds of many Chinese women, getting a divorce may not be an option.

Another traditional Chinese belief—the “rules of propriety”—guides social interaction at the levels of five hierarchical dualities: prince–minister, father–son, husband–wife, older brother–younger brother, and senior-friend–young-friend (Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991). Confucian thought employs a holistic view with an emphasis on context. In times of conflict, Chinese people employ behavior such as “face-giving” and “face-saving” as ways of following the five rules of propriety and maintaining harmony. The close relationship between self-image and social approval make “face” central to pride and dignity. It is considered shameful not to give or save face, and a reciprocal relationship exists between giving- and saving-face.
According to Confucianism a paternalistic power hierarchy exists in the family that places the oldest male at the head of the household (Stearns, 2000), and his wife is expected to listen to him. In turn, the oldest son, as the future head of the household, is expected to set a good example for his younger siblings, who are required to respect their elders. As Fineman (1995) argue, “the significance of these provisions in reinforcing traditional norms of the male-headed family and its responsibility for children was evident in the political rhetoric surrounding the (welfare) reforms” (p. 209). In Chinese culture, these provisions are evident not only in the political arena but also in gender role ideology. To this day, Chinese men are viewed as the head of the family (Chadwick, Falla, & Hendon, 2002), and Chinese women are expected to give and save face for their male counterparts.

The Chinese words for maternal grandparents literally mean “outside grandparents” or “foreign grandparents.” The phrase articulates the cultural perception that grandchildren of the daughters are not as valuable as those of the sons because they do not carry on the maternal lineage. Along similar lines, people often do not see the worth of raising girls or educating them. Once daughters are married, they are no longer considered part of the family until they are later needed to take care of their aging parents. In terms of the Taoist Yin-Yang dialectic, though Yin (connoting negative or female) and Yang (connoting positive or male) should be seen as equal, the female tends to be perceived as passive, dark, evil and, hence, inferior (Duley, 1986).

Amid such deeply entrenched cultural beliefs, it is not surprising that Chinese parents do not want daughters or feel ashamed when they have too many daughters. They fear being judged unable to give birth to a boy. In contrast, sons tend to be embraced as valuable. In the past, such gender preference biases produced pressures for Chinese families to sell off their daughters or simply give them away when they did not have enough to raise their many children (Mah, 1997).
According to China Census data, in 2010 there were 118.8 men for every 100 women, whereas in 2000 there were 116.9 men for every 100 women. The imbalance in gender ratio is attributed to the one-child policy China introduced in 1979, which resulted in a strong preference for boys over girls as well as illegal sex-selective abortions. The inferior status of girls has remained more or less unchanged. When the one-child policy was implemented, some families continued to reproduce until they had a son, despite monetary fines for breaking the law (Lu, 1996). When the families could not afford the fine, some of them butchered or drowned their daughters (Oriental Daily, 2008). Despite a drop in the female infanticide rate in the past decade, it still constitutes a severe social problem. Even today, when Chinese parents lack the money to provide education for all of their children, they choose to pay for their sons’ education before tending to their daughters’ education.

Not only do Chinese parents favor sons over daughters, many families still embrace male supremacy. As in other traditional cultures, the son, not the daughter, inherits the family fortune. This kind of male supremacy limits the imagination of many women. As a result, the self-esteem of women is usually lower than that of men. Girls are often discouraged from pursuing too much education in line with the belief that education is bad for women because “only ignorant women are virtuous.” Not only are women not supposed to be educated, they are not supposed to “show off” their knowledge. Over time, women have internalized many of these beliefs and are more


Retrieved on July 30, 2013
likely to perceive conflicts between their work demands and family needs (Zuo & Tang, 2000). In this way, cultural ideology serves as a social control system to uphold the superiority of men and the paternalistic social system.

While ideology is embodied in Chinese beliefs and customs, *practices* have changed somewhat in the past two decades. Given the increasing emphasis on the importance of education in Asian cultures, women are now getting more education than before. Still, wives are not expected to be more educated than their husbands. In both past and current generations, husbands may feel threatened or insecure when their wives are more educated and/or earning more money (Zhou, 2006).

Today, many Chinese women realize that the only way to gain more power in the family is to get an education and more income. The power struggle, however, still has a long way to go. Bao (2001) writes that Chinese women who immigrate to the United States and earn their own income may threaten their husbands, and some become victims of domestic violence. Nonetheless, with gender equality being a salient issue across industrialized countries, it should become easier for men in future generations to see their wives’ higher educational status or income as acceptable.

As mentioned earlier, Chinese women are expected to behave modestly, avoid having a high opinion of themselves, and not “show off” their knowledge. Additionally, women should refrain from bothering their husbands at home because husbands “contribute so much” to the family and “work so hard.” For women “modesty” means constantly pleasing their husbands, acting like they themselves are nothing, and never getting angry. Rich (1995) discusses the relationship between anger, tenderness, and motherhood. Just as mothers are not supposed to get an-
gry in European and American countries, all women (as opposed to mothers alone) in Chinese societies should suppress anger and curtail excessive expressiveness regarding family matters.

The world has been changing gradually. Chinese women, to survive in the globalized world, are more outspoken today, especially when interacting with people in other countries. Many women, however, still feel guilty when they get angry or “bother” their husbands “too much” after work. Institutions—both governmental and social—impose a great burden on Chinese women. Feminists in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are growing more conscious of the impact of institutions on women and are lobbying for various types of reform. For example, feminists in Taiwan are arguing for paid domestic work (Wang, 1999).

In summary, Chinese gender role ideology is undergoing gradual change. Younger generations who have received more education in the past ten years would laugh at the rule of three obedience and four virtues, despite being unconsciously guided by these principles (Qin, 2006).

In The Bonesetter’s Daughter, Amy Tan’s book about unwanted Chinese daughters, a missionary school taught unwanted daughters to sing the following song:

We can study, we can learn,
We can marry whom we choose.
We can work, we can earn,
And bad fate is all we lose.

To Western feminists as well as Chinese scholars, the struggle continues to ensure basic human rights for Chinese women.

1.3.2 The experience of Chinese immigrants in New York City. In her book Ambiguous Loss—Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief, Boss (1999) puts forward two types of loss: psychological and physical. The author grew up in an immigrant community where it was nor-
mal to feel homesick and miss one’s beloved family members. Boss writes, “I never knew who was in or out of our family or where home really is” (p. 1). In the same way, Chinese female immigrants are experiencing certain types of loss. Though no one would explicitly mention or consider the concept of loss, “frozen grief” may affect many immigrants and contribute to personal and family problems. In addition to the loss that they and their husbands are facing, the restructured power hierarchy at home also upsets the rules of traditional institution and leads to family problems.

In a study of working class Chinese women in the garment industry, Bao (2011) offers a fresh interpretation of Chinese American experiences in New York City. Using gender, race/ethnicity and class as major dimensions of analysis, the study reveals the complex and multi-layered reality of these garment workers. In particular, gender is found to intersect continually with other principles of social organization and serves to define a major aspect of social identity. Furthermore, Bao observes a gender-based hierarchy in the Chinese garment industry, with the nature of work, skill level and wage scale being defined largely by gender. Men are more likely to obtain better positions associated with higher skill levels and receive higher salaries. Men tend to work long hours, which hinder the development of emotional bonds with the family. Immigrant men with a higher educational status are often frustrated and angry about being unable to find a job in their profession due to their lack of English proficiency.

The incidence of family breakup and domestic violence has risen in the immigrant, Chinese married population. In some cases, immigrant kin may still be in China, leaving the family alone in a foreign country without a supportive social network. Thus, immigrant Chinese women have to adjust to both a new culture and their husbands’ emotional changes. To sustain their families and/or to pay back any debt incurred in the immigration process newly-arrived immigrant
women, being more willing to take lower ranking jobs, end up assuming greater financial responsibility than their husbands (Wong, 1985). Immigrants tend to take the most labor-intensive and lowest paying jobs in New York City because of their lack of relevant skills and inability to speak English. The failure of men to assume the traditional role as breadwinner creates considerable psychological strain. They then vent their frustration on their spouses, leading to further cases of family breakup and domestic violence. The tension between husbands and wives can easily turn into physical, verbal, or sexual abuse. Bao (2001) gives an example of “a Chinese woman psychiatrist in the Chinatown branch of Community Service Society [who] pointed out all these women had to undergo two kinds of adjustment, adjustment to culture, and adjustment to a husband” (p.58).

As Chinese female immigrants take up more important roles and enjoy increased power in the United States, the power hierarchy at home undergoes a major shift. With few exceptions, immigrants with lower levels of education and lower paying jobs either live with their in-laws and extended families or reside close to them. Research by Glenn and Yap (2000) shows the family to be a differentiated institution with an imbalance in the distribution of power. Each member in the family assumes a special position with a special function. In particular, their research documents a shift in the hierarchies of power in immigrant Chinese families. Specifically, power is no longer equally distributed or structured in line with traditional Chinese ideology. Instead, the division of labor is manifested differently, with the power depending more on each member’s contribution to the family.

In a study of immigrant women who work as seamstresses in the New York City garment industry, Chin (2005) writes,
Immigrants often face barriers to full inclusion in the economic activities of the host society. They often lack access to network ties that are necessary to succeed in certain kinds of activities. Licensing requirements often prevent immigrants from entering professional or internal labor markets. (Chin, 2005, pp. 3-4)

There were few choices available for the Chinese women Chin interviewed (2005). In contrast to Korean and Hispanic culture, sewing is a gendered occupation in Chinese culture, and the garment industry is structured specifically to accommodate women. Chinese men, especially new immigrants, are expected to enter the restaurant industry, which is too strenuous for women. Due to these gender stereotypes, immigrant men also have few choices for jobs.

Taken together, the rigid gender role ideology in Asian cultures, the Three Obediences and Four Virtues, the obligation to prioritize family needs, and the power hierarchy at work and in the family function as artifacts in the gender role identity system of Chinese female immigrants. This system has a bi-directional relationship with gender role identity.

1.4 Defining Gender Role Identity

Identity is a concept that interests researchers from multiple disciplines: psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural scholars. It is a concept that marks the intersection of the intimate, personal world with the collective culture and society (Holland et al., 1998). It is a way for people to make sense of the world and events around them. The concept of self is embedded in social practices and, according to activity theory, embedded in people’s active engagement with their environment.

Gender role identity refers to the gender-specific rules that a person assumes at both cultural and individual levels. Those rules form the basis of one’s knowledge about gender-typed behavior (how men versus women are expected to behave), which develops over time within
multiple contexts of social institutions and activity systems. Individual participants contribute to the dynamics of social institutions and activity systems while actively negotiating their rules and affordances.

Howard (2000) believed that gender is a social category:

…(G)ender identities, in the sense of organizing a sense of self around the perception one is female or male, and internalizing pre- and proscriptions of behaviors deemed culturally appropriate to these self-perceptions, are thought to be learned through early socialization and enacted and reinforced throughout the life span…gender is a social category and thus gender role identity is about more than personality. (p. 378)

Holland and her colleagues (1998) maintain that there are three layers of self—universal, cultural, and individual. There are also multiple selves within one person that function in different settings. The self is always embedded in specific social practices that shape and constrain people’s behaviors. Focusing on gender role identity, I will examine the self at all three levels: the universal (Chinese gender role ideologies), cultural (two different occupations representing two different cultures) and individual (individual participants) based on activity theory and the life narrative approach.

At the same time, gender role identity can be examined from two perspectives: positional versus relational. Positional gender role identity is based on day-to-day and on-the-ground relations to male power whereas relational gender role identity refers to women’s social relationships with men. Differences are large between China and the United States in the way in which positional and relational gender role identities are constructed, reconstructed, and manifested. Whether or not a Chinese Female immigrant develops a gender role identity that differs vastly from a previous identity depends on the context and social institutions they are in. For example, a
female immigrant who makes an equal financial contribution to the family is more likely to be involved in joint decision-making with her husband (Wong, 1985).

In theorizing gender, constructivist, interactionist, and Vygotsky’s sociocultural and activity theories draw attention to how, across diverse settings, people produce, sustain, and challenge gender in their everyday activities, interactions, and discourses. This perspective extends beyond viewing women as only passive subjects of social influences and factors, to understanding them as actors involved in a complex process of negotiating and accomplishing the gender dimensions of their identities. This suggests that gender is not something people “have,” but is something people do in their social interactions. As West and Zimmerman (1987) argued in their now classic paper, “Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (p. 126). Doing gender is a relational activity that integrates dimensions of power relations including unequal treatment and other forms of gender ideologies, practices and assessments.

Holland and Lave’s (2001) History in Person addresses the topic of the “mutually constitutive nature of long and complex social, political, and economic struggles and the historically fashioned identities-in-practice and subjectivities they produce.” In Aretxaga’s (2001) chapter “Engendering Violence: Strip-Searching of Women in Northern Ireland” in History in Person, she shows how agents are active in constructing their gender role identity even when they are being persecuted. State use of sexuality as a form of control and violence on the bodies of women creates specific kinds of political subjectivities. Since Aretxaga’s study relates closely to gender role identity and how it is constructed in a socio-historical context, I am going to use her study to demonstrate my definition of gender role identity.
Aretxaga’s (2001) study of strip searching in Northern Ireland in 1992 suggests that identity should be “conceived of as a permutation of difference embedded in social and political practices. Historically, prisoners, especially the political Catholic-nationalists, in Ireland have been key battlegrounds for the colonial state and nationalist rebels. There was a tradition of random strip searches in the women prisons in the name of security. They were stripped not only of clothes but of personhood” (p.44).

Aretxaga (2001) comments,

The control of the prisoners’ bodies must be interpreted not so much as a show of force but more as an attempt to reconfigure the prisoners’ subjectivity—from political prisoners to conforming prisoners but also, and equally importantly, from rebellious to submissive women. This was clearly understood by the prisoners themselves, who claimed that sexuality was being used as a political weapon against them. (p. 54)

The stripping can be understood as the use of bodily violence to subdue the prisoners into conforming not only to the norms of the prison but also to the colonial hierarchy of Northern Ireland, within which Catholics had to be put in their (subjugated) place…The strip searches of 1992 suggest that identity should be conceived of as a permutation of difference embedded in social and political practices. (pp. 57-58)

Aretxaga (2001) shows that the female prisoners were “doing gender” when they tried to survive as a female prisoner in the cells. They were interacting with others within the political and historical context and practicing their gender role identity. For Aretxaga (2001) identity is not an object of free choice or a product of cultural determinism, nor is it purely situational. “Identity is often imputed by practices of power rather than inherited or chosen.” Both Holland and Aretxaga examine in the process of doing gender. Gender role identity is not something that
is given to a person when someone is “born into a culture” nor simply an object of free choice. Women are actively participating in, interacting with, as well as shaping all the activity systems they are a part of. Gender role identity is deeply influenced by social and political engagement with any form of gender inequalities in a given socio-historical context. Therefore, part of this study is to examine how the participants’ gender role identities are constructed in encounters with different political and social contexts.

Holland and Skinner (2001) have studied Nepali women who compose and sing lyrics that criticize Nepali laws and cultural practices that privileged men in the Tij festival. Their close analysis suggests that:

The self-in-struggle is caught up in a field of interrelated others but also directs attention to the point of development—the active, living point of the dialogic relations between self and other…The author narrators of the raajniti songs sang from the perspective of educated women trying to convince their illiterate sister to become politically “conscious.” (p. 127)

Similar to Aretxaga’s (2001) study, Holland and Skinner (2001) also show that gender relations, and hence gender role identity, are not set and static but continuously changing in the process of doing gender within social activity systems and their structures.

Our behavior is largely determined by our identity and self-perception, which are, in turn, determined by social mediating tools, constraints, and factors. Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest that people have many possible selves, with the ideal self being the one that we would very much like to become or feel afraid of becoming. These possible selves influence a person’s perspectives and motivation. In contrast, the environment tends to constrain choices, narrow foci, and limit possible selves because people “create themselves within the constraints imposed on them”
(Kunda, 1993, p. 21). Because men encounter different types of everyday social situations than do women, they develop different views of their possible selves (and impossible selves), resulting in different choices and behaviors. Gender role identity also varies with generational and educational level, socio-economic status, and financial stability (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997). One of the foci of this work is on the constraints encountered by Chinese female immigrants in their work and family settings.

Howard (2000) characterizes identity in terms of its social bases, including ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, class, age and (dis)ability. In particular, postmodernity has caused identity to be fluid, multidimensional, and highly dependent on socio-historical contexts. Furthermore, gender role identity itself poses categorical boundaries that are not only physical but also conceptual. Despite the conceptual nature of these boundaries, most lay people consider them as “real” and act upon them (Epstein, 1997). Females and males, unlike members of racial categories, tend to live in the same community instead of separate ones. The “male versus female” and “masculine versus feminine” dichotomies reinforce symbolic sex segregation and power hierarchy. One’s position and social roles also serve to define identity. In addition, men and women’s identical behavior may be interpreted differently. For example, Korean men are considered successful when they drive a nice car. When a Korean woman drives a nice car, however, she may be accused of climbing the career ladder by sleeping with men, due to the widespread dismissal of women’s ability in Korean culture.9 The growing population of Korean women who wish to

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9 From two articles published in Ming Pao (a local newspaper in Hong Kong) on June 16, 2008. (女卑思想牢固 居要職仍受歧視 & 黃金韓女站起來 《色慾都市》風潮襲韓 衝擊傳統男權社會)
fight against their traditional gender role identity has been dubbed the “Golden Girls.” Typically educated, independent and earning a decent income, the Golden Girls are showing the younger generation of women that they do not have to rely on men. As in the American television series “Sex and the City,” the Golden Girls in Korea (as well as the “Hanako” in Japan) demonstrate that women can be more educated than men and that it is acceptable to have a higher income than men. Thus, despite the powerful forces of traditional gender role ideology, Chinese female immigrants may also be influenced by such new ideals and possibilities, especially in countries that are in contact with Western cultures.

Durakbasa and Ilyasoglu (2001) studied the formation of gender role identity in Turkish women through their narratives. Women who live in an era of rapid change need constantly to adjust their self-concept to fit social expectations. Straddling the lines between tradition and modernity, these women are forced to make adjustments in their career and educational choices and other decisions according to shifting expectations. In this study, the Turkish women were strong and independent, successfully overcoming all “evil eyes”—the jealousy of other women that may cause misfortune. In their public lives, however, these women were still regarded as inferior to their spouses. Differences were also found in how women dealt with conflicts among members of the household and in their public lives. Social expectations and the ways in which these women perceived their gender roles became more important than “real” expectations in understanding their gender role identity constructions. Through interacting with others as their identity developed and changed, their perceptions also changed. In the same way, studying the life narratives of immigrants can grant us further insight into how gender role identity develops and changes over time.
In short, since gender role identity is continuously being constructed by individuals and societies, in this study, this construct refers to the gender that a person assumes at both cultural and individual levels. The construct forms the basis of knowledge about gender-typed behavior (how men versus women are expected to behave), which develops over time under the influence of multiple social institutions and with the active participation of individuals who negotiate their identity. That is, the assumption is that the participants are agents who actively participate in the construction of their gender role identity as they encounter different political and social context through their immigration, their job, and their communities.

1.5 Intersectionality and Hybridity Perspective

Early feminists criticized essentialism and believed that gender psychology needed to be understood as the interaction of many social identities. Mahalingam and Leu (2005) argue that employing essentialism in terms of studying gender may not be sufficient. They argue that investigators could not study gender in isolation from other categories because those categories provide the understanding of various social locations in shaping beliefs, expectations and understanding of gender. Mahalingam and Leu (2005) assert that intersectionality can help us “understand the specific interactions among race, gender and class and to recognize nuances in the ways gendered experience had been understood” (p. 839). Mahalingam (2001) states:

“A person’s race, class, and gendered experience is embedded in a particular social and cultural matrix, and influences the person’s beliefs about social categories and beliefs about the origins of social differences. Intersectionality can be thought of as the triangulation of a subject vis-à-vis her location and social positioning along class, gender, race, or caste. This process is dynamic, multidimensional, multi-sited and historically contingent. It mediates various psychological processes, such as well-being, acculturation, mor-
al reasoning, judgment and decision-making, and everyday understanding of social relations. (p. 839, as quoted in Mahalingam & Leu, 2005, p. 840)

Mahalingam and Leu (2005) also suggest employing hybrid identity instead. Hybrid identities challenge essentialist assumptions in a discourse of difference and highlight the historical need to create different categories with specific intentions in order to legitimize social dominance and control. Both intersectionality and hybridity suggest the importance to study gender at the intersections of various social locations (Mahalingam & Leu, 2005). Besides, hybridity disrupts the process of creating a unitary identity and highlights the historical need to create different categories with the specific intention of legitimizing social dominance and control. Asian-American, for example, is one of the hybrid identities that enables us to form coalitions across various ethnic groups and study them in the intersection of categories.

Therefore, to understand the interaction between immigration and gender, we need to integrate hybridity and intersectionality because both perspectives help us think of gender in “non-essentialist ways” (Mahalingam, 2001). The intersectionality perspective focuses on the uniqueness of immigrant identity, how it is stratified by ethnicity, class, and gender, and specific conditions of migration. It draws attention to the consequence of the collision of various layers of social identities in influencing our attitudes as well as our social behaviors. On the one hand, a hybridity perspective helps us comprehend how immigrant identities are constructed in a complex set of historical processes that accentuate differences between immigrants and the host culture. It contests the notion of “pure” identities and focuses on the degree of overlap between categories. On the other hand,

Hybridity has been proposed to negate dominant, unitary modes of thinking about social differences (Bhabha, 1983; Root, 1999). Hybrid identities problematize unitary, bounded
notions of a category. Homi Bhabha (1983) views hybridity as a critical intervention that disrupts the process of creating a unitary and essential “Other.” Hybrid identities challenge essentialist assumptions in a discourse of difference. They highlight the historical need to create certain categories with the specific intention of legitimizing social dominance and control. (Bhabha, 1983; Root, 1999, as cited by Mahalingam & Leu, 2005, p. 841)

Mahalingam and Leu (2005) demonstrate this argument by studying Filipina mail-order brides and Indian women software programmers, who arrive in the United States with proficiency in English and a college education. Both groups moved to America to satisfy the specific needs of their country. The cultural expectations of gender for both groups are dictated by cultural and colonial factors. They move to the United States to bring prosperity to their families back home. These women come from and arrive at different social locations, and their subjectivity is mediated by social locations situated in the nation-state, workplace, and family. The subjectivities of these women are disciplined by institutional structures such as marriage, work, family and nation. This study shows that understanding gender through intersectional and/or hybrid perspectives has its own unique challenges. Interestingly, intersections and hybridity also contribute to essentialist representations of “self” and the “other,” which are a self-protective mechanism to negate the dominant representations of the “other.” The experience of immigration, even when Asian, female immigrants move to the United States, a place with a higher degree of gender equality, may not empower females. In some cases, immigrants are more likely to find themselves experiencing downward mobility in terms of social status as well retaining their “traditional gender role identity.” Mahalingam and Leu (2005) conclude that,
Understanding intersections of identities within specific social, historical and transnational contexts is crucial because intersections also could produce essentialized identities. We need to understand the various discursive gender relations in shaping immigrant women’s identity in order to recognize the various strands of immigrant feminisms that could transform and contribute to feminist psychology. (p. 860)

Nagel (2002) also argues that it is possible to claim identity as a citizen of a country and yet still negotiate membership within the bounds of “belonging.” Therefore, it is important to think about transnationalism as a process instead of a product. Mahalingam and Leu (2005) also claim that today’s immigrants are able to connect with their home countries and “assimilation is no longer an option because of the rapidity and multidirectionality of mobility and communication” (Castles & Davidson, as cited in Nagel, 2002, p. 4). Nagel suggests that there is no uniform attachment to homeland and immigrants’ identities vary between generation and class groups as well as gender. Identity of immigrants is very complex, contingent and ever-changing.

Hence, conceptualizing gender as a process of doing yields a practice-oriented perspective wherein gender identities, relations, and ideologies are understood to be closely intertwined with sociocultural processes such as immigration. Ethnographers argue that while migration is a process that takes place at the macro-levels of economy and politics, it is also a socio-cultural process mediated by gender-related and kinship ideologies, practices and personal experiences (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 1999; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). From this point of view, individuals negotiating social constructions of masculinities and femininities organize immigration processes and their outcomes. For example, Mahler and Pessar (2006, p. 33) observe that, “while macrostructural transformations unleash pressures and incentives for international migration, it is frequently households and families who deter-
mine which members of the domestic unit will migrate, how their contributions will fit into the household’s economy, etc. That is, individuals are inexorably tied to larger social units” (Pessar, 1982; Wood, 1982; Boyd, 1989; as quoted in Mahler and Pessar, 2006).

Therefore, I argue that Chinese female gender role identity has to be understood from both hybrid and intersectionality perspectives, as Chinese female immigrants embody many dimensions of these complex dynamics.

1.6 Life Narrative

The best way to understand how women define themselves is to study their accounts and analyze the construction of their lives and histories (Durakbas & Ilyasoglu, 2001). Life narratives are psychosocial constructions that develop within life contexts and are reconstructed over time. Narratives are not only about what “really happened” but also about how a person interprets and perceives an event (McAdams, 1998).

The self is like a reflective project on which an individual is constantly working (McAdams, 1996). Modern men and women construct and reconstruct relative integrative narratives of the self to provide unity and purpose to their lives and as a way to understand their selves (McAdams, 1998; McAdams, Diamond, Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997). Their view of selves changes according to the constructed narratives, and the narratives are always affected by what is expected in the future. In this way, the modern self tends to be multi-layered and sometimes hidden from consciousness. Likewise, narratives may be selective in a way that reveals how people view their own lives. Therefore, people being interviewed at different periods of their lives may have a somewhat different narrative and understanding of their lives. Studying their narratives at different points of their lives provides insights into identity development.
Morris (1987), for example, points to the preoccupation with ideas of self-discovery and self-expression as the most important cultural development between 1050 and 1200. Holland and colleagues (1998) suggest that “practiced identities” are constructed through several contexts of activity, including the figured world, positionality, space of authoring, and the process of making sense of the world. More durable social positions, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and class, can frame every activity. The narrative is also a psychosocial construction with an intentional audience in mind and one that is meant to integrate and make sense in a given socio-historical context (McAdams, 1996; Howard, 2000).

McAdams (1998) states,

“At the level of identity, however, the life story exists as an internalized performance whose internalized audience functions as the main reference point from which the self is understood” (p.1139).

Social norms and institutions are two “characteristics” of the “internalized audience,” which must be examined for a full understanding of the narratives. McAdams (1996) posits six qualities of selfhood. First, self is a work in progress and a reflective project. Second, the everyday contexts of work and family are the main domains where selves are made and remade. Third, the modern self is multi-layered, has inner depth, and may be unconsciousness. Fourth, the self de-

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Holland et al. (1998) define the “figured world” as “socially produced, culturally constituted activities,” which can conceptually and materially produce a new self-identity; positionality as the positions offered to people in different figured worlds; and space of authoring as people’s ability to make sense of their self-identity through multiple internal dialogues (Urrieta, 2007).
velops over time. Fifth, the developing self seeks temporal coherence. Finally, modern selves connect most deeply to others in “pure relationships.”\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the interviews used in this study included questions about both family and work settings.

Although Chinese female immigrants share a collective identity and a master narrative, within-culture diversity also exists. The individual process of dynamic engagement and the stories representing the collective together result in unique narratives (Hammack, 2008). In this research, participants share their experience through life narratives, which I then analyze for insights into the development of gender role identity over time.

The analysis focuses on the following features: 1. narrative tone; 2. ideological settings, including ethical beliefs and values; 3. nuclear episodes; 4. imagoes—an idealized personification of the self that serves as the main character in the narrative; and 5. the internalized audience. To focus the interview materials, open-ended questions (e.g., “please tell me about your life”) were not included. Instead, specific questions were asked to probe into different life domains. Previous qualitative studies on immigrants have shown that personal accounts allow deeper insight into developmental phenomena (Yeung & Cheung, 2002; Chung, 2007; Zou, 2002).

Stapley and Haviland (1989) in a survey of 262 fifth, seventh, ninth, and eleventh graders found girls to express more internally directed affect such as shame and guilt and boys to express more externally directed affect such as contempt. Unlike girls, boys were more likely to express

\textsuperscript{11} McAdams (1996) defined pure relationships as “a romantic bond between partners that is not a product of traditional external conditions of social and economic life but rather exists primarily for the personal fulfillment of the partners themselves” (p. 298).
sadness and negative affects when they were alone. Such differences may affect the tone of women’s narratives in this study. Specifically, I expected women to talk more about their internal emotions when asked about past experiences of handling conflicts.

Social categories (such as class, educational level, race, ethnicity, and gender) have important implications about the self and even for some fundamental processes of understanding the self (McAdams, 1996). Thus, I expected to find the above categories to have mediating effects.

Gill and Matthews (1995) examined changes in the breadwinner role in Punjabi families. In many cultures, the breadwinner is strongly associated with power and authority within the family unit. In immigrant families, changes that are discrepant with traditionally prescribed roles lead to shifts not only in the family arrangement but also in power relationships. Furthermore, the change, often representing a complex mix of gains and losses for the group, may happen too rapidly and drastically for smooth adjustment and assimilation. When Chinese men lose their roles as breadwinner, they lose part of their identity and self-esteem. In contrast, when female immigrants take on the breadwinner role, they gain self-esteem and status in the family. Some bakery salesladies actually expressed that they gained additional freedom as a result of going to work after moving to the United States. These changes, however, may lead to family conflicts. Chinese female immigrants, similar to immigrant Punjabi women, have been able to find relatively low paying and low skill jobs to become financial contributors to the family. Dual-earner couples have to modify their traditional gender role identities and become more egalitarian (Zuo & Tang, 2000). When their roles are modified, the narratives of immigrant Chinese women may shift from being focused on the family to becoming focused on career.
According to Tuan (2003), Asian Americans and other ethnic groups expect Asian Americans to maintain their ethnic identity. Asian Americans face strong pressure from others. It is also believed that Asian Americans immigrate voluntarily and, unlike immigrants from Europe, are not worthy or capable of becoming “real” Americans (Tuan, 2003). In response to such pressure, Chinese immigrants may take on very different identities in their own narratives compared with those of non-immigrants or immigrants of other cultural backgrounds.

McAdams (1996) proposes three eras of identity development— the prenarrative era, the narrative proper era, and the postnarrative era. In the prenarrative era, infants, children and early adolescents gather information to construct their life stories later on. In the narrative proper era, adults construct and reconstruct their life stories continuously. The post narrative era, resembling Erikson’s stage of “ego integrity versus despair,” may or may not appear in the lifespan. In this study, we hear from women who gathered material to construct their life stories and continued to actively reconstruct their life stories.

Muramatsu (2002) studied two types of media—children super-hero shows and girl-oriented novels. Three groups of participants (girls who did not read magazines, girls who read girls’ magazines and girls who read non-girl oriented magazines) were studied. The results show that despite the attempts of modern media to challenge traditional gender roles, the media still predominantly functions to reinforce traditional gender beliefs. Girls are likely to read a wide range of information on gender in the media, with stereotyped expressions still common. According to Muramatsu (2002), who conducted a meta study of Japanese feminist studies on mass media texts and audience readings since the 1970s, girls who read more girl-oriented magazines are more likely to endorse values that align with conventional gender roles than girls who do not read magazines, and girls who read magazines have the same reasons as girls who read
girl-oriented magazines to learn how to be more attractive. Thus, the magazines served as cultural artifacts that influence how gender role identity is developed among Japanese girls. Also, magazines are influenced by the community and traditional work and gender roles. In Japan, many women attend community colleges to learn to be good wives by taking classes on cooking and family management, instead of attending four-year colleges to enter professional fields (Harra, 1995). Community colleges reinforce women’s perceived need to prepare to be a good wife. Female-oriented magazines also focus on how to be attractive to men. A survey mailed to Tokyo female residents aged 15 to 69 showed a relationship between women’s awareness of their living and their television viewing behavior. Specifically, television dramas encourage viewers to believe that women should work only until they get married. The institutions not only influence gender role identity development but also provide a framework for women to construct their narratives in traditional ways and refrain from taking their lives too seriously.

In summary, the narrative approach is an effective way to understand the complex phenomenon of gender role identity development in immigrant Chinese women.

1.7 My Own Experience as a Chinese Female Immigrant

Being a Chinese female immigrant myself, I am able to relate to some of the experiences of the participants. To minimize potential biases, I wrote reflective notes immediately before and after the interview. By reading the interviews numerous times, I made sure that I was as objective as I could be in inter-

12 Participants had the choice of being interviewed in Cantonese, Mandarin, or English.
interpreting the data. Nonetheless, I believe that it is important for me to share my own immigration story for the purpose of transparency.

As a Chinese female immigrant, I experienced difficulties when I first moved to America. The struggles (such as dealing with the cold weather and the pressure to be more outspoken) resonate with those discussed in some of the interviews. I am an immigrant from Hong Kong. I came to the United States for my college education and stayed in the country after getting married. Being Chinese, I was clearly influenced by traditional Chinese values, though I did experience changes in my gender role identity since I moved to the United States.

1.7.1 **Limited freedom.** Traditionally, Chinese women bound their feet when they reached 7 years of age. Though foot binding is no longer practiced, it remains symbolic in certain ways. Before getting married, Chinese women were expected to stay at home and only allowed out of the house a few times a year. After reaching a certain age, Chinese women would enter an arranged marriage with men whom they had never met before, after which they were still not allowed to go out often but were expected to stay home. The following story of my mother provides an example of how tradition can restrict behavior.

My mom quit her job when I was born and stayed home to take care of my year-younger brother and me until I began high school. When she returned to work, I did not like it at all at the beginning. I complained every time she did not come home “early” (which, in my mind, meant 4 o’clock so she could return home before I arrived home from school). I would say, “It’s not a home when you’re not in the house” and accused her of not **fulfilling her responsibility to stay home.** I was so used to her staying home that I assumed that it was her responsibility to wait for us at home. Looking back, I see that I was very selfish. Also, I was clearly influenced by the media, such as the television,
that portrayed mothers as staying home all the time. Those who worked were labeled “strong females”—a somewhat derogatory term for women who spent more time on their careers than families. Through the naïve lens of an adolescent, I thought my mother was too old and had too little education (grade school level) to be a “strong woman.”

Neither did my dad like the idea that my mom went to work. My mom had to call us every hour to make sure that we were doing our homework at home (instead of going out), if not, my dad would not let my mom work anymore. After being laid off a couple of years ago, she did not return to the workforce. Even now, my dad complains if she gets home later than him or if my mom goes out “too much” during the day.

It is still common for husbands and children to complain about their wives and mothers not spending enough time at home. I am now married with a daughter and can begin to understand this pressure. For example, despite the many training opportunities at work of which I would like to take advantage, I give them up because of the feeling that I should be the one taking care of my four-year-old. I know that I can and should pursue my own interests but emotionally I remain bound by traditional gender role ideology. Although this sentiment is not unique to Chinese culture, it is especially strong among Chinese female immigrants. In addition to the influence of traditional values, the situation of Chinese immigrants may be further complicated by a lack of kinship network than that previously existed in the home country and the difficulty of receiving help from relatives who live at a distance.

1.7.2 Putting family before self. To this day, the obligation to prioritize the family before oneself is at the core of the lives of Chinese women. As described earlier, daughters-in-law care for the family and are expected to sacrifice their needs in the case of conflicts, as demonstrated in the following incident:
Two years ago, my mother-in-law was diagnosed with ovarian and liver tumors. She had to undergo a multitude of tests, a biopsy, and regular visits to the physician. She had two sons and a daughter. Because her daughter’s English was not very good and I was the only daughter-in-law at the time, I was expected to accompany her to all of the appointments. Both of her sons (including my husband) and her son-in-law were working full time and “could not” accompany her. At that time, I was practically working 7 days a week teaching at a local college, working as a graduate research assistant, and taking four graduate level classes in one semester. I was responsible, however, for making all of the appointments for my mother-in-law and expected to prioritize these appointments within my already busy schedule by taking days off from work. Yet, instead of finding someone else to help, I felt obliged to aid my mother-in-law so that my husband and other men in the family could pursue their careers.

1.7.3 Male supremacy. The power hierarchy within Chinese families tends to be extremely paternalistic, with fathers exercising the most power and wives deferring to their husbands. When I was young, I was lucky to be my father’s favorite child and enjoyed the additional power that I had as the preferred child. Sons, however, are often favored in Chinese culture, and I was often confused hearing that my father loved me the most.

Once I told my teacher, “My dad loves me more. If my brother and I both made the same mistakes, my brother would be punished but not me.” My teacher nodded and replied, “Um…of course, he thinks that there is no need to discipline you, but he wants to train your brother since he’s a boy.”

As a young child, I was upset for a few days thinking that this statement must be true given that it came from a teacher—an authority whom I trusted. At the same time, I wanted to
believe my father. After remembering the many things that my father did that proved his love, I finally let my doubts go.

The example above shows how hard it can be in Chinese culture to entertain the possibility that a father might love his daughter more than his son. Although Chinese immigrants are reticent to admit such male supremacy in public, many couples still feel pressured to conceive again when their first baby is a girl.

1.7.4 Only ignorant women are virtuous/proper speech and modest manner. Traditionally, only Chinese men had the chance to attend school. Many families believed that their daughters should not receive too much education to avoid learning wrong ideas and having too many of their own opinions. Even today, it is hard for husbands to accept that their wives are more educated or earn more money than they do. Mah (1997), the author of Falling Leaves: the Memoir of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter, relates that,

We women doctors have unhappy marriages because in our minds we are the superstars of our families. Having survived the hardship of medical school, we expect to reap our rewards at home. We had to assert ourselves against all odds and when we finally graduate there are few shrinking violets amongst us. It takes a special man to be able to cope. Men like to feel important and be the undisputed head of the family. A man does not enjoy waiting for his wife while she performs life-saving operations. He expects her and their children to revolve around his needs, not the other way. But we have become accustomed to giving orders in hospitals and having them obeyed. Once home, it’s difficult to adjust. Moreover, we often earn more than our husbands. It takes a generous and exceptional man to forgive all that. (Mah, 1997, p. 207)
When I first decided to apply for graduate school, the first thing my mom told me was to make sure that it was acceptable for my then-boyfriend and now-husband. I was fortunate that my husband was a computer network architect and was already earning a decent income, or I would not know how he would feel about my education. Before I came to the United States, I had always believed that women should find husbands who were smarter than they were to avoid losing respect for their husbands. I assumed that this line of reasoning was universal and was not even aware of harboring this belief. After arriving in the United States, however, I discovered my traditional mentality when I realized that many people here do not share this concern.

Another example of traditional Chinese ideology is a new term that has emerged in China and literally means “leftover woman,” an unmarried woman in her thirties (Yuen 2010). Leftover women are seen as career-oriented and ignorant about how to dress up and be pretty. Some men argue that leftover women are unmarried because they are so focused on pursuing money, status, and other material desires. This phenomenon has received extensive media attention and even spawned a popular stage drama in China called Sheng Gu Niang (Leftover Women). In response, however, women have argued that,

Chinese men prefer women who are easily controlled by them. I think they are less interested in me, not because I am not good enough, but because they are afraid they will not be able to control me. In other words, they are afraid they will not be able to make me do as they say. (Yuen, 2010, p. 24)

Traditionally, Chinese women are expected to hold their tongues and to speak and do only the right things at the right time. Women are not allowed to join “men’s talk” because they know too little. Girls are encouraged to stay quiet.
When I was young, people would praise me in front of my parents saying that my parents had a very good daughter because I was really quiet. People would also praise my brother for being so active. I internalized their praise and believed that girls should keep quiet and “be good” while others were talking.

After moving to the United States, I was somewhat transformed when I realized that I had to speak up for myself at college and graduate school. I am now more outspoken than most Chinese female immigrants and have become used to advocating for myself. There are still situations, however, where I would sit still, stay quiet, and keep my smile. I find myself doing that especially at family gatherings with my husband’s relatives whom I do not know very well. The “good girl” mentality still persists in my heart.

As Chinese women, our behavior is still bound by traditional values because the same value system is manifested and reinforced in our families, in our communities, and in the media. Although old ideas such of “proper speech” and “modest manners” and “only ignorant women are virtuous” are mentioned less often, Chinese women at the unconscious level are still shaped by these ideologies.

1.7.5 Being a good girl. Before I was married when I was still pursuing my undergraduate studies, I lived in the basement in the house of my husband’s family. Although I had planned to live by myself when I first moved to New York for education, living with my then-boyfriend-now-husband’s family reassured my mother. She called me every day and constantly reminded me about proper behavior in their family. She taught me to be a peacemaker, to take care of the elderly, and not to fear suffering. I did not want to cause any trouble for their family and tried my best to be nice to everyone. Eventually, the members of the household felt comfortable talking to me about the different conflicts they had with each other, and I would be
the one who “talked” to different parties and resolved their misunderstandings. I also took care of my husband’s grandmother, making sure that she would not fall behind when the family went out and serving her food at the dinner table. My father-in-law used to eat by himself because he worked till very late. I felt bad for him and saw it as my obligation (which I enjoyed) to stay and chat with him while he was eating because he really appreciated the company. Also, I would help them out in different ways, translating English letters, taking them to doctor’s appointments and food shopping, and so on. Although I enjoyed being a helper and a peacemaker in their family, I also felt pressured and saw what I did as obligations, which were reinforced every time they praised me in front of my mother saying that she had taught me very well and I was a very good girl. I felt that I had to maintain that good girl image or else I would be dishonoring my family.

Eventually, I adopted the role of being a “good girl.” This hit me really hard after I gave birth to my baby girl. My mother-in-law loved me a lot and offered to help me after I gave birth. When she lived with us, she would get into conflicts with my husband (her son) and again I felt the obligation to be the peacemaker between them. I was physically and emotionally very weak at that time yet I was unable to dismiss the urge of taking care of my mother-in-law’s emotional needs. Due to the extreme and prolonged stress of becoming a mother and taking care of other family members, I developed postpartum depression and did not get better until I had an acupuncture session four months later.

13 Chinese usually eat around a table having a bowl of rice in front of each person and had all the dishes in the middle. Some dishes may be harder to reach by certain people.
To this day, I am still considered the good girl in the family and continue to experience “obligations” from time to time. Now, however, I am actually happy to fulfill my obligations.

1.8 Being a researcher? Being an insider?

Because I was the investigator as well as a cultural insider, it was inevitable that perceptions of my role affected my interactions with participants. Interestingly, the social workers I interviewed in the study often perceived me as a complete insider and assumed that I shared a similar background as theirs. In contrast, the bakery salesladies related to me only after I told them more about myself.

At the beginning of interviews, I asked simple questions (such as the number of children they had, if any) to create a relaxed, safe atmosphere. I would also share that I had a little girl, who was one and a half years old at that time. These measures were taken because it is considered very rude in Chinese culture if you do any type of “business” (including interviews) without establishing some form of personal relationship.

In addition, I believe that we could establish the “personal relationship” relatively easily without affecting the study too much if I tell them a little about myself including my native language when they talk about theirs and also about my daughter’s age when they talk about theirs (if any).

In his discussion of differences in communication style between Chinese and U.S. college students, St. Amant (2007) stated:

In Chinese culture, the significance of others is closely related to Chinese values about smooth and harmonious personal relationships. Personal relationships are often encountered when seeking to establish friendships or even business partnerships in China. The
way to establish personal relationships is to develop networks of mutual dependence.

(p. 68)

Seeing me as an insider, the participants expected me to embrace the same value system and core Chinese values as they did. For example, when discussing what was expected of Chinese women and how these expectations differed from American values, participants would (occasionally/frequently pause) to seek my consent/affirmation before they continued. Once I nodded that I understood, they would continue.

Overall, my interactions with the participants were interesting and rewarding. Being aware of the purpose of the study, the social workers were very open when sharing information about themselves and their experiences. Even before the interview, a sense of trust was established due to our similar educational backgrounds. Most commented that they thought this study would help professionals like themselves understand more about the Chinese immigration experience, and they were glad to be part of the study. In contrast, at the beginning, the bakery salesladies were more reluctant to share their life stories and would give only short answers to the interview questions. Once I told them a little more about myself and reassured them of the confidentiality of their answers (despite having already addressed the issue when they signed the consent form), they usually opened up. In fact, the salesladies often started asking me, in return, whether they had answered my question properly and I had to keep reassuring them that I was learning from them. For example, when trying to articulate what they perceived to be Chinese gender role ideology, the salesladies often ended their statements with a question, “right?” When this happened, I would assure them that I wanted to hear their opinion about the subject because I was trying to learn from them. After that, they became more comfortable talking about the topic because they were no longer trying to answer the question in “the right way.”
interviews, five out of six respondents asked me, “Did you get the information you need?”

Therefore, the bakery salesladies were also happy that they could help in the study.

As the interviews progressed, although the social workers had a clearer idea than the bakery salesladies about the reasons for asking specific questions, both groups were very open to talking about their experiences and contributed rich interview data to the research.
2. Method

2.1 Introduction

Along with other reviews on this topic (e.g., Brettell and deBerjeois, 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999a; Pessar, 2003), Mahler and Pessar (2006) provide a useful summary and overview specifically focusing on how qualitative research at the intersection of gender and immigration enriches the analysis of human experiences and processes constituting this intersection. They note that the strength of small scale qualitative methods might be their ability to produce new research questions and hypotheses from a grounded and contextualized approach that pays attention to local and situated dynamics of participants’ unique experiences within the large scale events and processes associated with immigration. Qualitative research in the form of interviews, along with ethnographic observations, might be useful for exploratory purposes wherein new questions can be brought to light and later examined through larger surveys and other quantitative methodologies. Feminist ethnographic inquiry tends to focus on the perspectives and understandings of participants’ voices.

To arrive at a more complete picture of gender role identity development in Chinese, female immigrants, I interviewed two groups of female, Chinese immigrants who differed in terms of occupations, income, education, and extent of cultural assimilation. The first group consisted of six Chinese bakery salesladies working in the Manhattan Chinatown of New York City. The second group consisted of six Chinese social workers from human services facilities in New York City. Bakery salesladies typically have lower educational levels, limited English proficiency (with their primary language at work being Chinese), and a tendency to perceive their work as a job rather than a career. Social workers were chosen for comparison given their higher
educational level, more proficient use of English (with their primary language at work being English) and their tendency to view their job as a career. These differences in social context affect how each group perceived themselves as women and individuals in their marriages. All the participants were older than 18 years of age, married and had lived in the United States for at least 2 years. Each participant signed an informed consent form before the study and understood that her participation was completely voluntary. Participants understood that they could leave any time and monetary compensation would be provided.

Participants were invited to participate in a study that may help professionals, including psychologists and social workers, as well as other Chinese immigrants to understand their immigration experience. Flyers were developed for both groups and were posted at their work places or sent to them via emails. The word “gender” was purposefully left out in the introduction and the consent forms (see the Chinese version in Appendix D and the English version in Appendix E) to avoid priming participants with the expectation that the interview was limited to gender issues.

I employed a qualitative methodology to examine participants’ subjective experience of immigration and the development of their gender role identity in the process. I used a narrative approach to derive a complete picture of the subjective immigrant experience from the participants’ own voices.

The purpose of the study was not to generalize about the population of all Chinese immigrant women to New York but, rather, to conduct an in-depth exploration into the situated and contextualized experiences of women from these two populations. This is important because there are relatively few qualitative studies that take a close look at the gender identity related experiences of Chinese immigrant women to New York. This methodology emphasizes women’s
own voices and recognizes the importance of everyday, personal experiences in the production of social processes as participants negotiate their identities at the intersection of gender and immigration.

2.2 Participants

Female Chinese immigrants who come from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds tend to live in different realities. As such, the immigration experience, as well as the development of gender role identity, can also vary tremendously.

Twelve female Chinese immigrants in New York City—six bakery salesladies and six social workers—participated in this research. All participants, whose ages ranged from 22 to 51, were married to Chinese men and resided in various boroughs of New York City, including Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan (Chinatown). Due to the different nature and qualifications associated with the two types of work, the salesladies were, on average, younger ($\bar{x} = 31.33$, $SD = 7.00$) than the social workers ($\bar{x} = 42.33$, $SD = 6.83$), $p < 0.01$. Despite the relatively small scale of the study, the primary goal of this work is to provide in-depth qualitative data to reveal important themes and questions about the immigration experience and to provide direction for future research on immigrants.

All of the bakery salesladies had high school diplomas (only one of them did not finish high school), whereas all the social workers had graduate degrees. The social workers moved to the United States at a much younger age ($\bar{x} = 17.66$, $SD = 12.16$) than did the bakery salesladies ($\bar{x} = 25.50$, $SD = 6.69$). Although the t-test yielded an insignificant result, $p = 0.30$, the mean was a little misleading because one of the social workers actually moved to the United States at the age of 42 to take care of the parents (see Table 1). After removing the outlier, the t-test yielded a significant result, $p < 0.01$. Also, the social workers had spent a significantly longer time in the
United States ($\bar{x}=24.58, \text{SD}=11.10$) than did the bakery salesladies ($\bar{x}=5.66, \text{SD}=2.68$), $p < 0.01$. All of the participants were married, but two participants from the social workers group did not have any children. All of the social workers lived only with their core family members. (i.e., with their husbands and children, if any). In contrast, only one bakery saleslady did so, with almost all salesladies having at least one other relative or friend living in the same household. Therefore, the household size of the social workers was significantly smaller, $p < 0.05$, ($\bar{x}=3.2, \text{SD}=1.2$) than the bakery salesladies ($\bar{x}=5.7, \text{SD}=1.9$) (see Table 1). All of the participants spoke one of three Chinese dialects (Cantonese, Mandarin, or Taishanese) at home, and one participant from the bakery salesladies group also spoke English with her children at home (Tables 1 & 2). All of the social workers spoke both English and Chinese at work (with one using English entirely), whereas bakery salesladies only had to use a minimal amount of English at work.
Table 1  *Demographics of the social worker group.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years moved to the U.S.</th>
<th>Age moved to the U.S.</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Household size</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Primary Language Spoken</th>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
<th>Languages Spoken at Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joann (S3)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy (S2)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanny (S1)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel (S4)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan (S5)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy (S6)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 Names of participants are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.
15 P=Participants
16 S=Spouses
Table 2 *Demographics of the bakery salesladies group.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Age P</th>
<th>Age S</th>
<th>Years moved to the U.S. P</th>
<th>Years moved to the U.S. S</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Household size</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Primary Language Spoken</th>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
<th>Languages Spoken at Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katie (B3)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>X^20</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>High School graduate</td>
<td>Cantonese Mandarin</td>
<td>Cantonese Mandarin</td>
<td>Cantonese Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liza (B2)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>High School graduate</td>
<td>Cantonese Cantonese</td>
<td>Cantonese Cantonese</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy (B1)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>High School graduate</td>
<td>Cantonese Taishanese</td>
<td>Taishanese English</td>
<td>Cantonese Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy (B4)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>High School graduate</td>
<td>Cantonese Taishanese</td>
<td>Taishanese</td>
<td>Cantonese Taishanese Mandar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ling (B5)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>High School graduate</td>
<td>Cantonese Taishanese</td>
<td>Taishanese</td>
<td>Cantonese Mandarin English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen (B6)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Cantonese Cantonese</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^17 Names of participants are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

^18 P=Participants

^19 S=Spouses

^20 Katie’s husband had not yet arrived in the US at the time of interview.

^21 Ling indicated it was only a minimal amount of English.
Table 3  
*Individual and Household Income Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Income</th>
<th>Social Workers</th>
<th>Bakery Salesladies</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Social Workers</th>
<th>Bakery Salesladies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>35001-50000</td>
<td>&lt;15000</td>
<td>50001-75000</td>
<td>15001-25000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>50001-75000</td>
<td>&lt;15000</td>
<td>100001-150000</td>
<td>15001-25000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>50001-75000</td>
<td>&lt;15000</td>
<td>100001-150000</td>
<td>15001-25000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>50001-75000</td>
<td>&lt;15000</td>
<td>150001-200000</td>
<td>15001-25000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>50001-75000</td>
<td>&lt;15000</td>
<td>150001-200000</td>
<td>35001-50000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>50001-75000</td>
<td>&lt;15000</td>
<td>150001-200000</td>
<td>75001-100000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 Only the participant was employed. Her husband was retired.
2.2.1 Participants’ profiles. This section presents a brief profile of each participant and her life circumstances at the time of interview. All the participants were married to a Chinese husband and might or might not have children. Details of the participants’ stories might have been switched around with other participants in the same group to protect participants’ privacy.

Fanny (S1). Fanny, a social worker with a 18-month-old daughter, moved to the United States with her family at the age of 11. She was proud that she had been a good student in China. Because of language barriers she experienced some difficulties when she first attended school in the United States but eventually did well and adapted to her new life in America. She lived with her in-laws for one year at a two-family house right after they got married and before she had her baby. She found it difficult because she would have liked to have more privacy than the situation allowed. Her husband had to work night shifts sometimes and would have liked his family to take care of her, but it did not work for her at all. Fanny had some conflicts with her in-laws before and after they moved out. The couple moved out to another borough in NYC, which was closer to her family instead of his, and she rarely visited her parents-in-law although her mother-in-law was helping her with her daughter. Her husband dropped their daughter off and picked her up every day at his parents’ house. She did not visit her in-laws unless it was Chinese New Year or special occasions. She would go visit her mother and her sisters, who were all living in the same area, and the children would play together. She explicitly expressed that she felt more

23 To clearly differentiate between participants in the two groups, a subject number is assigned to each participant. Social workers have subject numbers starting with “S” and bakery salesladies have subject numbers starting with “B.” The subject number will be used throughout the dissertation for easy reference.
comfortable when she went to visit her mother than to her parents-in-law. She stopped working for a short period of time after she delivered her daughter. She was a quiet person and did not become more outgoing after moving to the United States. She was not really a social person, and yet she had to conduct many home visits in her new job, which was not something that she enjoyed. She would like to focus on conducting therapies but she had to do many other tasks instead. Besides, the nurses in the same facility would “boss the social workers around” and she felt that she was not respected. Unsatisfied with her current job, she was looking, at the time of interview, for another job and considering whether she would have another baby.

Fanny believed that Chinese women are not as traditional now and they no longer had to forgo higher education or stay home and take care of the family. Because of her job, she had few connections to mainstream culture.

Overall, Fanny was quieter than other social workers and spoke softly. She wanted to talk about the conflicts with her mother-in-law twice but stopped herself and told me only a little about having the conflict but not its real causes. She just summed up that she “did not have a very good impression” of her mother-in-law.

**Sandy (S2).** Sandy moved to the United States nine years ago when she was in her 40s. She was already working as a social worker, in Hong Kong, before moving to the United States. She enjoyed a decent job and salary and a fulfilling lifestyle. She commented, “Whatever I wanted to achieve, I could do it!” She had to move, however, to the United States to take care of her father, who had a stroke, and her mother, who sunk into depression while taking care of her father. She cared for her parents with her older sister, but her brother opted out of providing care. He had his own family in the United States, it and “was too difficult” for him to take care of the parents. She and her sister lived with the parents until she got married. She got married a couple
of years ago in the U.S. but had no children. She was a social worker for mental health out-patients and called herself a workaholic. Her job was demanding and called for long hours. She was a strong Christian and served as a fellowship counselor at church and had to take care of all the members in the fellowship. Her husband’s job was not as demanding, and he was willing to share housework with her. She always dreamed of integrating mental health care into her fellowship work because many church members had emotional issues. She felt that she was working one and a half full-time jobs and was frequently stressed. Although she believed that she put work first, she believed that family harmony was a woman’s most important achievement. She believed in the traditional women ideologies and believed that women should remain more traditional and see their husbands as the head of the household.

She was determined to fit in to the American culture when she first moved to the United States but found it very difficult because of cultural difference and language barriers. She was struggling to fit in the American culture at work. She always felt like an outsider. On the other hand, she differentiated herself from the Americans in terms of love relationships and discipline toward children.

She felt frequently called to go on missionary trips. At the time of the interview, she sacrificed her own plans to go on trips with her husband, who was also a Christian. Overall, she was a task-oriented person who worked very hard.

Joann (S3). Joann moved from Mainland China to Hong Kong as an elementary school student. At the age of 17, she moved to the United States with her parents, her older brother, and her younger sister. She was not willing to move here until her best friend, whom she had known since grade 2, told her that she would come to the United States for education as well. It was then that she felt more comfortable with immigration.
Her family owns a family restaurant, and she had to work at the restaurant until the year after she graduated from college whenever she had off from school or work. Since she saw the difficult situations immigration families faced, she eventually became a social worker and wanted to be there emotionally and support those families. She believed that she should sacrifice and try to understand others in her family so that her family would have “strong relationships”. She felt that of all the family members she had sacrificed the most. She was the one doing all the housework and helped out the most in the family.

She was the mother of six and four year-old daughters. Her family had expected she not pursue much education but to get married early. They believed that having a family and children was the most important thing for women. She worked three jobs to support her education through college and graduate school and eventually became a social worker according to her plan. She met her husband at work when she was a graduate student. When she attended graduate school, she could not study because there were too many children in her household. Also, she was very stressed dating her husband because she was afraid that her family would find out. Eventually, she decided to move out on her own. Her father strongly disapproved of their relationship given that her husband was almost 20 years older than she was and were angry with her for a long time. Her husband applied for permanent residency through work twice but was denied a “green card” both times. Marriage became the only way for him to stay in the United States, and Joann believed that she had found her Mr. Right. Joann married her husband without telling her family, and tricked her sister, to whom she felt closest, to attend her wedding. Her father threatened to harm her husband, and she was under enormous amount of stress whenever she went to church because her father knew the church location. She dared not go back to visit or even call her family for the first couple of years she was married. Her father finally forgave Joann after meeting
his granddaughters. She considered herself a victim of oppression from her family and was proud to be able to contribute to the society. She hoped to contribute to the world and be helpful in her small role in the world.

She was a caseworker and worked mainly with the Chinese population. Working with Chinese worker was different than working with other populations because Chinese clients would not open up, if the caseworker did not work with them holistically. Chinese clients in general did not understand boundary issues and expected caseworkers to aid them in all aspects in which they needed help. So, Joanne worked long hours to help her clients. She considered work as more important until she worried that her future children would become her clients if she continued to work such long hours. After that, she put family first. When her children were young, she found that being at home was more demanding for her, and she “didn’t have a life” when she stayed only at home and she saw working as a break. She still sees family, however, as more important than work. Now that her children were older, she enjoyed spending time with them more.

Joann believed that Chinese females were oppressed and she was one of the victims. She had no say in any situation at home and was expected to be submissive. She had done a project at graduate school about Chinese females and she found that females who moved to the United States were more resilient than males. She believed that Chinese female immigrants played a more important role in maintaining family integrity than male immigrants because Chinese women took care of the family but also looked at the big picture and fulfilled family needs.

Overall, Joann was a very helpful person and was willing to take extra steps for her clients, friends, and family.
Angel (S4). Angel moved to the United States at the age of 14. She felt that she lost all her friends once she moved here but started to really focus on her studies. She had been a very quiet person, but she found that she had to fight for her own rights in the United State and believed that she had to be more outgoing to have more friends. So she started to talk more and eventually built up a circle of friends. Her friends in Hong Kong thought that she changed a lot when she went back after living in the United States for a couple of years.

She gained admission to an architecture program at Cornell even before she graduated from high school but she decided that she did not want to continue after the a couple of years. She was extremely stressed in the architecture program and got very depressed and could not continue at one point. She felt strongly that, “it was not the kind of life that I want. I had no friends. I had no time to sleep. I had no time to call my friends. I had NO LIFE.” She found that she was a people person and switched to psychology major and then studied social work in graduate school.

She worked as a social worker for about 40 clients who had different degrees of mental health issues. One-third of her clients were Chinese. She found that it was very draining to work with the Chinese population because, as Joann mentioned, Chinese clients expected a more holistic approach and expected her to help them in all aspects of their lives. Therefore, she told her agency that only one-third of her caseload could be Chinese Americans. She really enjoyed her job but quit when she was pregnant with her first child and for nine years stayed home to take care of her two sons and one daughter (who at the time of the interview were eight, seven, and five years old, respectively).

She had always been the “quiet good girl” at home and a non-confrontational peacemaker. Now that she was married, she found herself expressing her emotions to her husband only in
English because she was not used to expressing her emotions at home, where she spoke with him in Chinese. She firmly believed in communication and she would communicate with her husband to find a solution for any conflicts they had. She had problems with her husband because of different communication styles, and she tried to change at one point but then found that she changed too much and was no longer herself. So, she decided to be herself again and avoid too much stress. She found that she “couldn’t be a social worker” to her husband or her kids, and she and her husband seldom fought with each other. When she was upset, she would perform psychotherapy to herself and analyze why she was so upset on the situation. Then, she would “find a right time” to tell her husband what her thoughts were.

Her parents and siblings would call her whenever they had conflicts with each other because she was a social worker. She would resolve their conflicts through communicating with each involved party. She believed that her mother developed some kind of depression because of the persecution she experienced in China when she was young. So, she frequently chatted with her mother and let her “dump all her emotions out” and monitored her wellbeing.

At the time of our interview, she had just returned to the field and opened her own practice. She was very excited about going back to work and having her own practice. Being a strong Christian, she hoped that she could touch someone’s life and affect that person in a constructive way.

Angel believed that Chinese women should be wearing qi-pao and getting up early in the morning to care for family. She also hoped they would have the wisdom to maintain the

24 Qi-Pao is traditional Chinese body-hugging one-piece dress for women.
house in good order and even run a business. People would respect their husbands because they
did a good job taking care of the family but were also gentle and accepting. She believed that
Americans had high expectations for Chinese women, and Chinese immigrants also had a high
expectations for Chinese women. They were under great pressure to maintain a good home and
ensure that their children would be academically successful. Part of the pressure is that people
look up to Chinese female immigrants and admire how well they discipline their children.

Angel was a gentle and nice person who was interested in participating in the study and
would like to find out more about Chinese female immigrants in order to help her clients.

_Susan (S5)._ Susan, a social worker, was raised by her grandmother in Hong Kong along
with a brother and a sister. Her mother was the only daughter in the family and got married when
she was very young. She gave birth to Susan when she was 17 years old. Both her parents were
“free spirits” and they moved every 2 years. Her mother left a month after giving birth to her
younger brother to work with her father who was a crewmember on a ship. Susan switched
schools 12 times before she graduated from elementary school. When Susan was 11 years old,
her parents brought her (but not her brother and sister) to the United States (probably because she
was the oldest) and returned to Hong Kong to be with Susan’s father to work on the ship. Susan
was basically left in a foreign country all by herself, with only an aunt who lived nearby and who
checked on her from time to time. Susan felt very resentful when she first immigrated. She felt
that her childhood ended when she arrived the United States. She had a very happy childhood
because of her grandmother. She started learning about reality, and she saw the financial con-
flicts her parents had with other relatives. She learned to take care of herself in the first 10 years
in the United States. She had been working part time to support herself since she was in junior
high school. Her relationship with her family improved only after she became a Christian later.
Her grandmother moved to the United States with her other siblings later, and while Susan was on a missionary trip in her college years, her grandmother, who suffered dementia, was sent to the hospital twice. Susan decided to take the social worker’s advice and sent her grandmother to a nursing home. Her grandmother hanged herself in the nursing home not long afterward. Her mother felt under attack because people were gossiping about how bad she had been to send her only mother to a nursing home. Susan made it clear that she was the one who made the decision, and the gossiping stopped. She had to stand up for the entire family and be strong at that time but cried at night when no one was around.

After she obtained her bachelor degree, she worked at abuse preventive services in New York City’s Administration for Children and Families (ACF). She held different job titles, but the nature of her jobs was similar to a social worker. Eventually, the government changed the licensing regulation and her boss suggested she get a master of social work degree and gave her a flexible schedule so she could return to school. After she obtained her master’s degree, however, the hospital she worked at closed, and she was laid off. She felt depressed at first and was hurt by the feeling of being rejected. Afterward, she learned to enjoy few months of free time with her daughter. Her daughter really enjoyed the time with her as well. When she was working full time and getting her masters degree full time, she had no time for her family at all. At the time of the

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25 Susan actually believed that it was quite suspicious that her grandmother would kill herself and had some reasons to be suspicious but they decided not to look into the case.

26 Many Chinese believe that sending the elderly to nursing homes is irresponsible. They believe that since the parents took care of their children when they were young, children should in turn take care of the elderly when they get old.
interview, she landed a job that she liked. Her agency had 30 plus teams and only two teams served Chinese population. Her team had 101 cases and 96 cases were Chinese.

She was married at 25 years old and had her daughter after 7 years of trying to get pregnant. She was living with her husband and her 11-year-old daughter at the time of interview. Her husband was a fun father and had very good relationship with their daughter. He suffered from anxiety and depression at the beginning of the interview year, however, and could not work in March and April. Susan paid a lot of attention to her husband but did not pay as much attention to her daughter at that period. Her daughter posted a story on her social media page about how a child was physically punished by her mother because he put a note saying “I love you mommy” on her mother’s back. Susan realized how she had neglected her daughter at that period. She eventually became firm with her husband and asked him to deal with her emotional problem. She mentioned that middle-aged, Chinese, male immigrants in general needed more emotional support than their female immigrant counterparts. Susan and her husband had been best friend since they were young, and they could communicate and support each other very well. Susan explained to her husband that their 11-year-old needed her attention more than he did, and her husband was afraid that he would lose her emotional support so he tried hard to cope with his emotional problems and was okay at the time of the interview.

The family went on many short trips every year. At the time of interview, Susan was really enjoying her life and trying to advance herself continually. She believed that there was no good or bad life because it was a “package deal.” Also, she mentioned that even though there was still no gender equality in society women should not see themselves as inferior to men. Women could still have an impact on their families and communities. She considered having more freedom as a Chinese female in the United States, yet she disagreed with individualism.
She believed that individuals should all look at the big picture and should be willing to sacrifice for the benefit of society. Susan was a very straight person who was more than willing to share her life story. She believed that what happened in her life might offer insights to others.

**Mandy (S6).** Mandy moved to the United States with her parents when she was 11 years old. Her parents believed that their children could receive better education and better job opportunities in the United States. Mandy was excited to move and expected to benefit from different teaching styles and transform herself from a “zero student” to a good student. She stated that 12 years old was a great age to come over because she was able to maintain her Chinese and learn English with no problems. She could read and write Chinese with no problem and she even used to write diaries in Chinese. She was the only participant who chose to be interviewed in English.

At the time of the interview, she was married with no children and was living with her husband and a dog, which she viewed as her child. Her brother was married and the burden of taking care of the family fell on her shoulder until a couple of years ago when her sister moved to the United States from Hong Kong. Mandy was trying to help her adjust. She visited her parents as much as she could, and she would go back to Hong Kong with her husband every couple of years to visit his parents.

Her husband wanted her to be a more traditional woman and be submissive to him. She usually gave in to him more as she aged. They used to go on trips a lot but the motivation decreased as they aged and also because it was hard for them to find people to watch their dog for them.

She just got a new job and was adapting to the new job. She really enjoyed her life spending time with family, serving at church, and working with her clients. She would like to contribute to the community in more ways. She believed that Chinese women should be more
traditional and should be submissive to their husbands and family should be their priority. In general, she was a very gentle and caring person.

*Candy (B1)*. Candy moved from China to the United States at the age of 25 four years prior to the interview with her husband of 8 years because her mother-in-law applied for a residency visa so that they could come over. She was a homemaker in China, but she took a job as a bakery saleslady less than a month after she arrived the United States. Eventually, she would like to own her own business. Her husband had been a high school teacher in China but worked in a computer company at the time of interview. He would have to continue his education in order to obtain a degree to get better job. They had their own house in China but could not afford to buy a house after they moved here. She along her husband and their two children were living with her sister-in-law’s family because of the financial situation, and her parents-in-law were living in government housing. Candy and her sister-in-law helped each other out and got along very well. Candy was a mother of two daughters (eight and two years old respectively). At the time of interview, they were considering having another baby because her parent-in-law would like her to have a boy. Candy and her husband loved their simply life style.

Candy became more mature after moving to the United States because of the financial burden and her growing children. She calls her dad, younger sisters, and brothers back in China whenever possible. She wanted to apply for a residency visa for her family so that her brother and sister may have better future. She was trying her best to learn English at the time of interview. She had dreamed of becoming a “career women” but she fell in love with her husband,

27 Candy’s mom passed away a long time ago.
who was her teacher, and started dating not long after she graduated from high school. They got married two years later and she gave the dream up after she got married and had her baby because she believed that she should put her family first. There is a Chinese saying, “Once your teacher, always your teacher.” So, although Candy developed a friends-like relationship with her husband, student-like respect to her husband is always present in their relationship.

Candy believed that Chinese women should follow the three obedience commands and four virtues, She felt Chinese women are different from American women because they have less freedom and are more traditional. She firmly believed that the family should be women’s priority.

Overall, she was optimistic and believed that she could fit in to the mainstream culture soon because she was still young and could learn the language and the culture quickly. She was living with her sister-in-law’s family, and she felt thankful to have a relative to keep one another company and help one another out.

_Liza (B2)._ Liza moved to the United States with her family eight years prior to the interview because her grandmother applied immigration for her entire family. Her family owns a fashion boutique in China, and so she took some English courses after graduating from high school and did not have to work. She has been a bakery saleslady since she moved to the United States and would like to open her own bakery someday. Her legs hurt when she first started working in the bakery because she had to stand for long hours, but she got used to it after a couple of weeks. She felt that she advanced after going out to work. So, she believed that women should be “traditional and yet not too traditional”. She believed that women should go out to work but yet should not be too open sexually.
She met her husband online through a mutual friend. She, her husband and their three-year-old son are living with her parents-in-law and her sister-in-law (who is single). Her parents-in-law were nice but the sister-in-law was bossy. Because her husband is a younger brother, she is expected to respect her sister-in-law, and she has tried to keep quiet when conflicts occurred.

She lived pretty far from her workplace and had to work long hours. She had to leave her house at 5:30 a.m. every day because it took her two hours to get to her workplace and her parents-in-law were helping her with her son. She would sleep for ten hours straight when it was her day off because it was very tiring for her to commute every day.

She felt like an outsider when she first moved to the United States. She missed her relatives in China terribly and would have tears in her eyes whenever she saw airplanes. She got used to living in the United States by the time of the interview and no longer wanted to return for good.

She was a nice and tactful person. At the time of the interview, she was worried that her son would be spoiled by her parents-in-law because each male in the family—her son, her husband, her father-in-law, and even her grandfather-in-law—was an only son.28 Her son lied, hit people, talked back and said dirty words sometimes. She wanted to discipline him but believed that she might get in trouble if she did. She believed that any physical punishment would be con-

28 Having a son to carry the family name is extremely important for Chinese families. When her son was the only son in the fourth generation, he was very important to the family and hence was more likely to be spoiled.
sidered a case of abuse in the United States.\textsuperscript{29} At the same time, she was worried that her son might get in trouble when he started attending school one year later.

\textit{Katie (B3).} Katie was 22 and the youngest of the participants. She moved to the United States with her parents and her younger sister at the age of 17, five years prior to the interview. Her older sister stayed in China but she calls her older sister and other friends in China constantly. She received some of her high school education in the United States but was stressed because of the language barrier. She married her husband, whom she met in China when she was 15 years old, in Hong Kong, and soon became pregnant at the age of 19. All her friends suggested she get an abortion because she was too young, but she decided to keep the baby. It was hard for her to adapt to being a mother at such a young age. She felt irritated at times when she took care of her baby but felt more relaxed at work. She was also upset that she had much less freedom than her friends because of the baby. It was hard for her to go out with any friends or even chat with them over the phone because of the baby. She expressed that she was much happier back in China although the family had a much higher household income in the United States.

Her parents were working and busy with their own lives. Her father worked at a laundromat and her mother worked at a restaurant. Her father always met up with his friends on his days off and her mother was taking citizenship class at the time. Katie relied on her grandmother, who was old and could only work part-time and did not go out by herself on her days off, to take care of the baby for her when she went to work. Her husband was working in Hong Kong at the

\textsuperscript{29} Many Chinese parents are not familiar with the child protection laws in the United States and believe that any physical punishment is considered a case of abuse.
time of interview, and though he loved their son Katie complained that he was not here for them. Luckily, he was expected to move to the United States to be re-united with her and their two-year-old son the following year. Katie was living with her parents, who viewed her as a child and, at times, wanted to control the way she taught her son. Similar to the dilemma that Liza was facing, Katie wanted to discipline her son by not giving in to his requests right away but was worried that the neighbors would report them to the police, if they overheard her son crying for too long. Her parents also believed that she was too strict with her son. Despite their different discipline styles, Katie believed that the family was more “harmonized” after having the baby because they communicated to each other more.

She looked forward to her husband’s move to the United States and wanted to move out with him after he settled down here. Her father, who had two daughters but no son, was pressuring her husband, however, to be “married into” her family, which implied living with her parents and having their son adopt her family’s last name. Katie and her husband were hoping that her father would agree to having their second son to adopt her family’s last name instead of the first son. She wanted to be a teacher or a cosmetician when she was back in China. She planned to go back to school once her son started school and her husband moved to the United States the next year. She wanted to have a simple life.

She believed that there were many types of Chinese women but Chinese women in general were more hard-working, tended to listen more to their families, and were more conservative. If it were not for her language barrier, she would like to work in a hospital and be a pharmacist. Overall, she was a nice person and was a little shy, but she was very willing to share her story and was a person with her own principles.
Cathy (B4). Cathy moved to the United States when she married her husband, who had been living in the United States and whom she met at school back in China. Her husband moved here with his family first and then applied for her visa as a fiancé around year 2000. Because of the September 11 incident, it took them three years before she could come over. Her own parents decided not to come over because they had their own house and also obtained government benefit there and so she did not apply for them. She had an older brother and an older sister back in China, and they were born before the one-child policy. She mentioned that families in China usually had three children before the one-child policy.

She was the only one in her family who moved to the United States and was living at the time of the interview with her parents-in-law, her seven-year-old son, and her two-year-old daughter. Her parents-in-law were teachers back in China and worked in a factory after moving to the United States. They earned much more financially after getting here and so they worked till 8 p.m. every night. Sometimes they even brought work home and worked till 1 or 2 a.m. They earned about a few hundreds of Chinese yuan per month (less than one hundred U.S. dollars) when they worked as teachers in 1988 but earned a few thousand U.S. dollars when they worked as factory workers here. Before moving to the United States, she did not have to work because her family had their own business. She would go in to work for a day or two at the factory whenever she wanted to, and she had a two and a half hour lunch break in China. It was relatively easy for her to adapt to life in the United States because she lived in Chinatown and there were many people who spoke her dialect (Taishanese).
Cathy did not have to do any housework in China. After moved to the United States, she found that there were few entertainment options\(^{30}\) and she had to work a lot harder. Since her parents-in-law were getting older, she took the responsibility of preparing meals for the family. She had to buy food and rush home every day after getting off work at 6 p.m. On her day off, she had to do the laundry, clean baby bottles, go to the park with the daughter, send lunch over for her son,\(^{31}\) and pick him up from school. She did not have much time to rest on her day off. Although she considered family more important, she loved working more than staying home because she had no patience taking care of her children. At the time of interview, they were applying for and really hoped to move with her parents-in-law into larger public housing. She was glad that her mother-in-law could take care of her children and hoped to send her children to college.

She believed that Chinese females were more conservative, but they no longer were as obedient to their husbands. Overall, Cathy was a down-to-earth person.

**Ling (B5).** Ling, a bakery saleslady, moved to the United States two years ago because of her husband. She was living with her 4-year-old daughter, but most of the time her husband was working at a restaurant in Upstate New York. He went home only occasionally. She was not too comfortable being interviewed although she did not choose to quit the interview. She was hold-

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\(^{30}\) Stores in the United States usually close around 8 p.m. on weekdays, but stores in China usually get busy around 8 p.m. and open till 11 p.m. or 12 a.m. Also, Chinese immigrants have always believed that it is unsafe to go out after dark in the United States. Therefore, it seems like there is no night life for many Chinese immigrants.

\(^{31}\) Cathy’s son did not like American food, and so Cathy’s mother-in-law sent lunch to him every day and Cathy sent lunch on her days off.
ing the newspaper and reading it the entire time of the interview and did not make much eye contact with me. Her answers were very precise and did not contain extra information. She was the only participant who did not provide an example of a conflict at home. It may be partly because she was not really living with her husband and felt embarrassed talking about her family situation.

She was a factory worker in China and worked 8 hours per day. They had a 2-hour lunch break. She lived in Chinatown at first but found that the living environment was not very agreeable and so moved to Brooklyn with her sister-in-law. They lived on different floors in a 2 family house in Brooklyn and sometimes went out together on their days off. She got up every morning at 6 a.m. to send her daughter to school in Chinatown, which is close to her workplace, so that her mother-in-law could send her daughter to school and pick her up at her after school program and then worked till 7 p.m. every day. So, she did not have much leisure time. On her days off, she had to send her daughter to school and ran all the errands, but she would call her parents in China whenever she had time. She went back only every couple of years because of the expensive air tickets.

She commented that the pace in the United States was faster than the one in China and she had to work harder and tried to save up more after moving to the United States. Although she said that working in the bakery was not too hard, she expressed that she would like to save up for her daughter’s education so her daughter did not have to work as hard as she did. She believed that Chinese females should be more conservative than the American females, but she admitted that she did not have much contact with American culture. She also discussed ways of getting help in reading government or other English letters. She had to rely on others, Chinese pharma-
cies, or other agencies to help her with those letters. She also sent her daughter to a school in Chinatown because she could communicate with the bilingual teachers at school.

_Jen (B6)._ Jen, a bakery saleslady, was living with her husband, her children, her mother, and her sister’s family at the time of interview.

She had been a manager in a factory before she moved to the United States eight years ago in her 30s. She moved here because of her children. She had applied for residency through her mother and hence could not officially get married with her husband when she was back in China. Although they had an 11-year-old daughter, they were not officially married until Jen got her citizenship in the U.S. a few years earlier. Jen moved to the United States with her daughter, who was three-years-old, a few months after giving birth to her son. Her son stayed with her husband for five years in China before they received the immigration permit and moved to the United States three years ago. Almost all her siblings and their families moved to the United States through her mother and it took them almost 12 years before all of them could get the document to move here.

She worked as a factory manager in her sister’s factory in China and her husband was a manager at a restaurant. They had their own house as well. When Jen moved here, she worked at the bakery and she had to work much harder than in China because she was no longer in the managerial level. She had to work much longer hours and so her mother and her sister’s family helped to take care of her daughter. She missed the one and a half hour lunch break in China. In almost all the bakeries in Chinatown, the owners provide lunch and all the employees would eat

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32 _U.S. citizens can only file immigration application for their unmarried children, but not the married ones._
in the store and continue working afterward. She felt more tired without the long lunch break. In order to apply for her husband and son to come over, she had to obtain citizenship first. She really wanted to go back to China at first because she missed her husband. It was hard for her to learn English and memorize all the citizenship test answers when she did not even know much English. Finally, she did it and applied for her husband and son right afterward.

Both her husband and Jen found their lives here to be tougher than in China but she insisted on staying for the sake of their children. Her husband did not have to work long hours here, but he had to start his career from scratch again. He was a manager and no longer had to do any hands-on jobs in China but he had to do all hands-on tasks here and it was hard for him to adapt when he first moved here. Jen’s in-laws were all in China and her husband and children would call them every week.

Jen found that she was more irritable after moving to the United States. She attributed it to her getting older and the different environment. She believed that Chinese women typically are the ones who stayed at home, played mahjong and took care of the family. Americans on the other hand had to work as well as taking care of the family. She admitted that she was not typical and she loved to work even when she was pregnant. She felt that she was second-class when she did not speak English, but she was very proud that her daughter was now older and could interpret for her everywhere they went. She hoped that their children would be healthy and successful in this country. She was a nice and caring person and always had a smile on her face.

2.3 Procedures

Participants were recruited using a snowball technique. I developed flyers for both groups and posted them at work places or sent them via emails. It was much harder to recruit social workers; it took over 6 months to recruit the first participant for the social worker group. Later in
the interviews, several participants explained why it was difficult to find social workers who were married. Specifically, many social workers in New York City were still single due to the demanding nature of this job and the small social circles they had. For both groups, however, after successfully recruiting the first participant, it was very easy to recruit the rest of the participants. Given how much easier it was to recruit bakery salesladies, I recruited all of the social workers before recruiting bakery salesladies. Several participants helped to schedule interviews for their friends whereas others provided me with their friends’ phone numbers after obtaining their friends’ consent. I called all potential participants to explain the details about the study and schedule interviews.

2.4 Interviews

All interviews were completed in 2010. Each interview session lasted (see Appendix D for the interview questions and Appendix B for an English translation) approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and participants had the choice of answering questions in one of three languages (Cantonese, Mandarin or English). A demographics questionnaire was administrated at the end of the interview (see Appendix C for the questionnaire and Appendix A for an English translation). All participants provided permission to be contacted in the future if necessary.

Interview sessions were conducted in coffee shops, restaurants, churches, homes or bakeries (in small rooms at the back of the store) close to the participants’ homes or workplaces. When interviews were conducted at coffee shops and restaurants, I intentionally selected venues that were far away from Chinatown so that participants could be interviewed in Chinese without being overheard to ensure confidentiality. All participants provided informed consent prior to the interview. With the exception of one social worker who preferred to be interviewed in English, all participants were interviewed in Cantonese.
During the interview, I followed each participant’s chain of thought as closely as possible and let the interview flow as naturally as possible. Therefore, the order of the interview questions may not be the same for every participant.

Before and during the interview, participants did not know that the research was about gender role identity specifically. At the end of the interview, all participants were debriefed in detail.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative analyses were performed to identify any systematic differences in terms of demographic background between the two groups of participant. Next, a qualitative analysis was performed to address two primary research questions:

A. How do the Chinese female immigrants understand themselves as women?
B. How was their knowledge about themselves represented in their marriages?

As a New York State Office of Mental Health Cultural Competence Journey Award winner in 2011 and a cultural competence director who has been training and certifying interpreters/translators at work for the past seven years, I transcribed and translated the transcripts myself. I first transcribed all the interviews into Chinese. Then, the interview transcription was translated only when an interviewee was quoted in the result or discussion sections. In the process of translation, I tried to stay as close as possible to their original way of expression, meaning, and tone of voice. In cases where direct translations of the terms/expression were not available, I provided annotations on top of the literal translation. I also stayed as close to the original dialogue as possible.

Grounded theory was employed to extract codes for the study because the theory puts emphasis on the complexities of the participants’ lived experiences embedded in unique social
contexts (Fassinger, 2005, as cited in Qin, 2009). All participants were assigned a subject number and no name was used in the process of data analysis. Although no hypotheses were tested, potent themes were extracted from the data and discussed in close connection to the overall experiences of the participants (Yeh et al, 2008).

Interview notes, including those taken before and after each interview, were subjected to detailed qualitative analyses. Key themes and quotations were extracted from transcripts and summarized in an extensive Excel spreadsheet (organized by participant and interview question) printed as a large poster to facilitate the detection of commonalities and disparities across groups and interviewees. Transcripts were read and analyzed a number of times taking into consideration the intended audience, frequency, omissions, declarations, and recurrent themes. Data were then color-coded into different categories based on the Activity Theory Analytical Schema—all three levels as specified in chapter one. Specifically, the subjects were female Chinese immigrants in New York City; the objects were their intended activity (such as fitting in the society and accomplishing other life goals); the tools included values, survival skills, mediating skills, interpersonal skills, language and more. Rules referred to the perceived gender role expectations in Chinese and American society. The division of labor referred to the role of gender identity expressed by participants. All of these tools, rules, and divisions of labor influenced the community (some were more Chinese-oriented and some were relatively multi-cultural) in which they lived and worked. Finally, the two cultural systems (in the United States and in China) may be interacting with each other as well as affecting one another.

33 When extra information was present, it was put under the “other” column on the spreadsheet.
3. Results and Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss the participants’ social contexts and the ways in which these contexts affect the overall activity systems of the participants. Since activity theory provides a useful framework that highlights the process and history of the activity mediation instead of a sole focus on the products of activity, I used levels and dimensions of this theory as the framework to organize the analysis. Activity theory helps us to comprehend a complex picture of gender identity development as a process that is immersed in the social matrix of the activity system in which the agent (the participants in the study), the environment, the cultural tools including gender-related ideologies, and all other elements are interrelated and constantly shifting while mutually interpenetrating each other.

Female immigrants live between modernity and tradition and between different styles of tension management reinforced in the household versus in public social life (Durakbas & Iyasoglu, 2001). I expected to see both inter- and intra-group differences between the social workers and bakery salesladies. In particular, stronger dissonance may be experienced by social workers, who interacted more frequently with the Western culture and dealt with more conflicts at work and at home, than bakery salesladies, who interacted primarily with people from their own cultural background even at the workplace.

The first section of this chapter presents an analysis of narrative tone, ideological setting, themes in the narratives, imagoes, and internalized audiences. I will discuss the results of this

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34 the names of participants are pseudonyms.
analysis in relation to the activity system framework. First, in terms of the top level of the activity system (i.e., the settings), I will introduce the Chinatown bakeries, the human service facilities, the schools and families in which the participants lived, worked, and with which they interacted. Next, I will discuss the lower part of the activity system, which involves tools (language, survival skills, and socioeconomic status), rules, community, and division of labor (traditional gender roles and cultural change). Finally, I will discuss the middle part of the activity system, which captures the development of general role identity—the central phenomenon under investigation in this study. Specifically, I will discuss several issues central to gender role identity, including social relations, endorsement of traditional Chinese values, and life goals.

3.1 Narrative Analysis: Women’s Stories

In being offered the opportunity to provide narratives, marginalized Chinese immigrant women are given space to reflect on their life experiences, to make their private story public, to subvert the socially constructed story and to be empowered (Yuen, 2008). In the process of this research, most interviewees expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the study. In particular, social workers who worked with many Chinese clients and families believed that it was vital to have studies that could help people from different groups gain a more accurate understanding of gender role identity in immigrant Chinese women. On a similar note, a social worker, despite not being able to do the interview, nevertheless requested to be informed about the study results when they become available. She asserted that it was important for her, as a social worker who worked primarily with Chinese clients, to better understand the experience of the female immigrants with whom she was working so that she could serve them better.
A similar sentiment was expressed by the social workers. Susan (S5), in particular, was very eager to share her life story. At one point during the interview, Susan had tears running down her face as she said:

I am very happy to tell you my story. I have been waiting for a chance to share my experience with others. I always feel that there is a purpose behind the many things that have happened to me. Someone may find my story helpful and learn something from it.

In this way, being interviewed became an empowering experience for many participants, who appreciated that there were people who were concerned enough about their group to want to learn more about their experiences.

At the end of the interview, the participants were asked if they would like to receive a copy of the research results. All of the social workers requested a copy but none of the bakery salesladies did so. This was likely due to the language barriers: the bakery salesladies knew that the study would be published in English and that they would not be able to understand it. Therefore, the findings have been summarized in Chinese to be shared with the bakery salesladies.

3.1.1 Narrative tone. Although all participants mentioned difficult times after moving to the United States, everyone, with the exception of Fanny (S1),\textsuperscript{35} told their stories in a very positive light. All shared that they were happy to have moved to the United States and that it would be hard to return to their home countries now because they would not be used to it.

\textsuperscript{35} The social worker who seemed less positive was, at the time of the interview, stuck in a position that did not match her personality. Thus, despite her relative lack of positive tone, she still had a positive tone when talking about the future and when she would find a better job.
Indeed, Chinese immigrants are generally very grateful for the chance to move to the United States despite the hardship they or their parents go through as new immigrants. Getting naturalized and becoming a legal citizen of the United States have always been cause for celebration in Chinese American families. Becoming a US citizen is perceived as a very positive thing in the community and immigrants are constantly reminded that they should be thankful for the chance to move to the United States. The positive connotations so deeply inherent in the socially constructed immigration story may explain why most participants were so positive when interviewed about their immigrant experiences.

All participants appeared hopeful about their future and believed in the American dream. Many of the participants moved here with their whole family. Many Chinese Americans chose to move to the United States because they wanted to their children to receive better education and life opportunities.

Guo’s (2013) work on Tiger Mothers paints a parallel picture of Chinese people immigrating to other countries in hope for a better life. Chinese immigrants, male and female, believe that immigration can improve the quality of their present and future life. They see Western countries as more democratic and less competitive (in terms of their children’s educational opportunities) than in China. Thus, countless Chinese people share the dream of starting a new life in the United States. As expressed by one participants in Guo’s study on Tiger Mothers:

My father was the one who wanted to immigrate to America. Brilliant at math and in love with astronomy and philosophy, he hated the grubbing, backstabbing world of his family’s plastics business and defied every plan they had for him. Even as a boy, he was desperate to get to America, so it was a dream come true. (Guo, 2013, p. 47)
All of the social workers interviewed moved to the United States because of their parents. Most of them moved with the parents while they were still young students, while one moved in her 40s to take care of an ailing parent. In contrast, only two of the six bakery salesladies moved to the United States because of their parents or because their family decided to move here. Three others moved here because of their husbands, and the remaining saleslady decided to move here because she wanted better education for her children.

Thus, in every case, the decision to immigrate to the United States was initiated by a belief in the American dream and a hope for a brighter future. Parents seem to always believe that they can achieve upward social mobility via immigration. Most immigrants, including the participants in this study, remained positive when sharing their immigration story (about their children’s prospects, in particular) despite their harsh life here.

3.1.2 Ideological setting. Due to participants’ prior knowledge about the topic of the interview (i.e., Chinese immigrants), their narratives centered on the immigration experience. As mentioned earlier, a collective narrative of thankfulness can be grasped from the interviews. Despite some mention of the difficulties experienced, all of the interviewees were resilient and adapted to new ways of life in the United States quickly. Interestingly, themes associated with traditional Chinese ideology emerged in all of the participants’ narratives.

Back in China, Jen (B6) was a factory manager and her husband was a manager of a Chinese restaurant. Working at the managerial level, the nature of their work was not harsh with the primary responsibilities being coordination and planning instead of hands-on tasks. Thus, Jen and her husband were enjoying a decent life in China and would not have chosen to move were it not for their children. Due to legal complications, Jen and her older daughter first moved here when they were 35 and 4 respectively and her husband did not arrive in the US until five years
later with the younger son (note: Jen left China when her younger son was six months old). Thus, the family members were separated for a long period of time. Currently, Jen works long hours at the bakery while her husband works at a restaurant. Both of them are facing downward mobility due to their language barrier. Both of them spoke Mandarin and Cantonese but not much English. Jen said,

I really wanted to go back (to China) at first. My husband had not yet arrived, and I was the only one here with my daughter. I had to work while taking care of my daughter. It was very hard…My husband really wants to go back sometimes. I would say to him, “Why do you always say that you want to go back? The children are studying here in the United States. They don’t want to go back anymore…” I think our two kids can develop better here, so it is worth the harder life for us.

As mentioned earlier, it is typical for Chinese women to internalize traditional values and feel obligated to put the family before their own desires, such that family needs become a critical part of even their personal decisions. Jen saw the need to provide the best opportunities for her children as core to her role as a mother. She was proud of surviving the challenging first five years in the US before her husband arrived finally. As a woman, she also had to do some “emotional work” with her husband when he first arrived to assure him that it was worth it for them to move here so that their children could have a better future. Her husband eventually adapted to the environment. Her overall narrative tone was positive despite the hardships encountered.

Jen’s narrative was only one of the examples. The ideological setting will be explored further in the rest of this chapter particularly in relation to the Activity Theory framework. Nonetheless, already it is clear that gender, in addition to the role of being an immigrant, serves as one of the most influential social categories that guide the behavior of the women in both groups.
3.1.3 **Nuclear episodes.** Many participants talked about encountering problems or discrimination due to language barriers and cultural differences associated with the social context of being a minority. In particular, participants suffered from racial/cultural discrimination against themselves, their families, and other Chinese Americans.

Joann (S3) discussed her feelings of inferiority when she first moved to Hong Kong, where she encountered discrimination at school for her inability to speak Cantonese.

It was only until her landlord’s daughter invited her to go to church together when Joann felt more respected:

> I was in Grade Two or Grade Three at the time…we were renting a room\(^{36}\) and the landlord’s daughter would go to play there (at a church downstairs\(^{37}\)). One day, she brought me along with her and, when I got there, I felt that I was not just playing. I felt that I much comfort and acceptance in my heart. I was a new immigrant to Hong Kong so I was still adapting and experiencing a lot of discrimination. I was laughed at, you know, was exploited by others, was boycotted, and I wasn’t able to communicate with my limited language skills. I couldn’t express myself. I spoke Fukienese. When I moved to Hong Kong, I didn’t understand at all and didn’t know what was happening…People at church really accepted me and I felt peace at heart whenever I went to church…That was the first time I smiled from the bottom of my heart after I moved to Hong Kong.

Katie (B3) described the challenges she faced, due to her language barrier, right after she gave birth to her son:

> I was in pain. My mom took a day off and helped me carry my son. I had to walk slowly to take the bus to the clinic. I meant to the hospital. The doctor checked and said he

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\(^{36}\) Many immigrants in Hong Kong, even nowadays, may not be able to afford to rent an entire apartment. Some of them may rent a room. In Joann’s case, her family rented a room and lived with the landlord’s family.

\(^{37}\) House prices and rent prices in Hong Kong are among the highest in the world (Harjani, 2013). There are many small churches in Hong Kong that were established at an apartment of a residential building or at a unit in a factory or office building.
had… it is easy for babies to have jaundice and he had to receive light therapy. We had to send him to the hospital where he was born for the light therapy. My father and my mother did not know English. I didn’t know much either but could communicate using some basic sentences. If they understood, I (spoke) a little better…I had to take the bus there. Wow, I had to go out four times in the first ten days after giving birth.  

Because most of the participants identified themselves as Chinese American (with three identifying themselves as Chinese and the others identifying themselves as Chinese American), the language of choice tended to be Chinese and life stories focused on the immigration experience. Thus, issues related to language and discrimination dominated the interviews as themes that were central to the women’s identity. These issues are further discussed in the section below.

3.1.4 Imagoes: an idealized personification. Imago (McAdams, 1996) refers to an idealized personification of the self that serves as a main character in one’s life story. For the bakery salesladies working in Chinatown, the vast majority of customers were Chinese. Many of them expressed that they did not have “much contact” with the “American world.” Not only did they get their food from Chinese supermarkets or other markets in Chinatown, most sent their children to schools in Chinatown so that they could communicate with the teacher. Consequently, bakery salesladies had less pressure to acculturate to mainstream American values. In comparison, while all of the social workers spent their leisure time primarily with Chinese friends, some of them were more acculturated than others.

38 In the Chinese culture, women are supposed to stay home for a month after giving birth. They should not leave the house unless necessary. Therefore, going out four times within the first ten days was unusual. Katie had to do that only because of her parents’ language barrier.
**Being a good girl.** Overall, the “Good Chinese woman” imago was observed in the narratives of the participants, manifested in several recurring themes. One of the prominent themes was that of Chinese women being more conservative than American women. Thus, for example, as Sandy (S2) commented,

There are many situations where I was working with many people and colleagues who are not Chinese and have different working styles or points of views about their families or relationships…Whenever I compare myself with them, I would feel that, “Yes, I’m Chinese!” As I strengthen myself (her identity), my identity becomes even clearer. We are different…For example, their perspectives toward pre-marital (sexual) relationship and the need for loyalty after they get married…they have their own beliefs. But I disagree. They would…um…that is…they may go out with other men after getting married. Of course I wouldn’t ask, “Did you...(have sexual relationship)?” They may even go on vacations together. And I feel like…ai (sigh)...that’s impossible.

Generally, although Chinese women have generally become more open about sexual relationships, most are still more conservative than their American counterparts according to the perceived major difference between the two groups. This difference seemed salient to participants across age and generations. For example, in many Chinese families, it is considered inappropriate to go out (even just to have dinner or a drink) with friends of the opposite sex once a person is married. Other family members or people in the community may start gossiping and women who behave in this way would be under significant pressure. In Qin’s (2009) study on Chinese American adolescent girls and boys, it was found that Chinese adolescent girls were torn between “being good” versus “being popular” at school.

39 Many participants in this study believed that American females had “too much” freedom and would go out with the opposite sex freely. They got the impression from the media and two of the social workers actually encountered cases where their married female colleagues were dating other guys.
“It was not uncommon for girls to find themselves caught in a double bind: at home, they wanted to please their parents and study hard to get good grades and not pay attention to appearance or things unrelated to academics; however, at school, in order to be accepted by peers, they had to show more interest in appearance and boys, and were discouraged from focusing too much on their studies.” (P. 50)

This study yields similar result in that participants in both groups tended to internalize and conform to the traditional expectations and would rather prefer being a “traditional good woman” than being a woman with “too much freedom,” which will be discussed next.

Another theme that came up frequently was the observation that American women had more or too much freedom. Participants commented that Chinese women were more likely to love their husbands and families more than themselves due to gender role expectations, whereas American women had more of a choice to pursue their own dreams and goals in life. In Chinese culture, women who fail to put their families first tend to be judged negatively by others, especially other women in the same family.

Candy (B2) stated:

…(American women) work very hard to develop their careers, but for me, my priority is my family. I have to take good care of my family first because I’m a Chinese woman after all. We’re different than American women. They can go to work and work hard to develop their career and they take care of their family. But they can do both at the same time. Perhaps their way of thinking is different than ours. They have the desire for a career, but Chinese are different, and we have to keep our family as our number one priority. Right?

Candy’s response implies that “taking care of the family” may have unique connotations in the Chinese culture. Some of the expectations (e.g., preparing food, doing the laundry, taking care of the children) may be universal across cultures. There are, however, additional expectations for the Chinese women that might be more challenging to fulfill. For example, moth-
ers-in-law from the older generation might expect their sons’ wives to take three to four hours each day to make soup for the whole family because they believe that soup was critical to better health. Also, daughters-in-law are expected to buy food and cook daily, with nothing cooked in advance, so that the family could enjoy fresh food on the table every time.

Mandy (S6) also mentioned in the interview that she prefer to wear more formal clothing to work and her colleagues would attribute to her being Chinese:

I got this feeling that they may be looking at me as a traditional Chinese female or what because I don’t wear dresses. I have to go to work with pants and wear slacks. They commented that I always dress…dress very…very…unlively, uncolorful. “Why you always dress in pants?” They always come to work like dressing bold colors, very colorful. Some I don’t think is appropriate for work, but they would dress very fancy, with a lot of jewelries. And I don’t. I don’t wear that. I think they look at me, “Maybe you’re a traditional Chinese.” They comment that too. They asked, “Is that the way you dress? Why do you always dress like that? Where are you coming from?” Things like that. But I …I… the reason I dress like that is because of my mindset. I’m traditional. I have to wear a little bit formal. And I feel confidence if I come in wearing slacks and pants. If I wear funnel dress with a lot of jewelries, I don’t feel comfortable and I don’t feel confident. But I felt like the way they look at me was like a very traditional kind of Chinese female.

She admitted that she was more traditional in terms of what she considered appropriate work attire and would wear “her beautiful clothes and the most comfortable shoes” on vacations; but she did not believe that was due to her identity as a Chinese and not all Chinese dressed like that. She did not have as much freedom in her clothing because she was working mainly with the Chinese elderly population, and so she dressed in a way that her clients would consider appropriate. In the process of negotiating identity, immigrants often challenge and resist certain stereotypes and refuse to represent an ethnic group.

**Diligent work.** Diligent work refers to women’s expectation that they will embrace hardship, to be strong whenever needed and to take care of everyone in the family. These themes were clearly in the participants’ imagoes.
When Sandy’s (S2) father (who resided in the US) had a stroke, she quit her job and moved to the United States. In Sandy’s case, immigrating to a new country meant downward mobility. She had to overcome her language barrier to earn a new social work license in the United States. She had to take care of her ailing father and her mom who became depressed during the caretaking process. Although her brother was physically present, he did not take on any responsibilities. The family lived in poor conditions in a very small apartment near Chinatown. In the first year and a half, Sandy was constantly worried about whether she would be able to be a licensed social worker in the United States. Although the family found an aide who helped with caretaking 8 hours a day, Sandy had to stay up overnight to take care of her father, work on her license, provide emotional support for her mom while dealing with the stress linked to immigration, adjustment, and acculturation. Sandy took care of her parents until her father passed away, and she moved out upon marriage. While she did not have any children, she was constantly busy taking care of her family, spending time with her mother and serving at church. She said, “…I always say that I have one and a half jobs. And this is one of my stressors…”

Chinese women are willing to work hard to fulfill the needs of their families no matter how hard it is. In fact, Chinese women are proud of being hard-working. Katie (B3) was married for a couple of years while her husband was working as a cook in Hong Kong. Katie moved to the United States to live with her parents and had a baby while waiting for her husband to arrive so that she could eventually move out with him. Katie commented, “Chinese women are harder working….It seems like Chinese women listen to their parents more and work harder. Perhaps it’s a cultural difference.”

When Susan’s (S5) husband struggled to find work in an increasingly obsolete field, she encouraged him to change career. She did not mind being the breadwinner for the family because
Chinese women were not supposed to be afraid of any hardship when the family needs them. She was willing to get through the hardship with him and told her husband,

There may be things that you would regret thirty years later. When I married you, our household income was even lower than what we have now (with only her own income). We will be able to handle it. There won’t be a problem.

Her husband accepted the offer and found a job in another field with brighter prospects.

At a glance, this incident might seem a non-traditional act because Susan took up the breadwinner role. Deep down, however, it was actually a traditional act where Susan took up the role of the Chinese female who put her husband’s need first and was willing to work hard and sacrifice for the family when needed.

In some cases, diligent work involves not only physical but also emotional labor. For example, immigrant Chinese women may need to step up to lead the family in decision-making.

Susan also described a time when she had to make an important decision for the entire family.

Susan said,

My grandmother was behaving a bit unusually, and as I look back now, I think it was dementia. She would say nonsensical things, and she had a very short temper. She would forget to turn off the stove before going out. We sent her to the hospital twice. The social workers suggested admitting her to a nursing home. Both my mom and dad did not dare to make that decision…when I came back (from my trip), she felt unwell and was sent to the hospital again…I ended up making the decision to send her to the nursing home. I sent her in (to the nursing home) because her dysfunction was affecting the entire family and all of us were becoming dysfunctional.

It was a hard decision for her to make. She was not the son in the family but her brother was not in the picture at that time. Taking care of one’s ageing parents and grandparents is a big part of Chinese filial obligation. Deciding to send a grandparent to a nursing home also implies a willingness to face criticism from the extended family. Her parents were reluctant to be the one
who made the decision, so Susan (who was closest to her grandmother) had to make that difficult
decision because it was needed for the family.

*Family comes first.* Eight out of the 12 women interviewed perceived family to be more
important than work. One participant (bakery saleslady) saw work and family as equally im-
portant whereas three participants (one bakery salesladies and two social workers) thought work
was more important. Changes, however, were clearly observed in relation to life transitions.
Specifically, many participants indicated that work came before family before they had their first
child. Some of them came to the conclusion that family was more important right after they had
their baby, and others came to think that way after they found an approach to cope with heavy
family demands.

Angel (S4) had promised to give each of her children five years of devoted, around the
clock care. When her youngest daughter turned five, she opened a private practice and returned
to the field:

(My oldest son) is now 8 years old. That means I stopped working for almost 9 years. At
first, I felt like, “Really? Just like that? My life is just like that? But I’m thankful that I
can rediscover the passion right away because it has never changed...

Angel believed that it was extremely important for her to spend time with her children in
the first five years of their lives so that she could teach them the right values, watch them grow,
and bond with them. To achieve these goals, Angel was willing to quit a job that she loved and
sacrifice for the family.

Joann (S3) talked about her changes:

In the past, I believed that work was more important… while I was working, I would
think “Aiya (sigh), one day when I have my own children, I won’t even have time to
spend with my kids. Will my kids turn into my clients, and my family turn into my cli-
ents?”…Now I know that I’m family first, but family is very challenging at times, and
there are too many responsibilities. It is very demanding too. In some situations, I don’t
want to do that much, and I’d rather go to work. Okay, when we go to work, there’s a limit, there’s a setting, there’s always room to take a break. At home, it’s very demanding and I don’t have a life. I feel like I can go crazy in those situations. So, when you ask me which (family or work) is more important, I would surely say that family is more important, but I need to know my boundaries in the family…I enjoy my children more now because um…I have my own space, and the children have their space but we can still be together.

Before she had any children, Joann believed that work was more important than family. She would stay at work until 9 p.m. at times. Then, she realized that to protect her family from becoming dysfunctional, she should not keep working as hard as she did. She reminded herself to put family first and she did, despite still enjoying her work more than caring for the family due to the heavy demands of the latter. As the children get older, however, the family demands became lighter and Joann eventually grew to enjoy her family.

Even Sandy (S2), who was married with no children and believed her career to be more important, expressed:

In the depths of my heart, I’m still a very traditional woman. Okay, family comes first, and then our honor. No matter how well we are doing in our careers…at least to me; even if we are very successful in terms of our careers; if our home is not in harmony or when the family is not happy, I feel like I am still a loser.

In other words, while explicitly endorsing the idea that career was more important, deep down, Sandy was still clinging to the traditional ideology of “family comes first.” For example, prior to getting married, Sandy used to go on frequent mission trips but now she was willing to sacrifice her life passions to meet her husband’s needs:
For example, I would prefer going on a mission trip\textsuperscript{40} instead of a vacation. [Vacations] are such a waste of money. But I gave up my preference. I’d rather go on a vacation with my husband and not to use my money or time to go on mission trips.

Sandy made an effort to put her husband’s preferences first and go on vacations with her husband despite considering vacations a waste of money. Although Sandy saw career as more important to her, in action she put her family first and placed her husband’s needs and preference before her own.

Katie (B3) presents another example, She was with her fiancé, whom she met in China, and pregnant at the age of 18. Her friends and family advised her to have an abortion, but she insisted on giving birth to the baby. Now, finding it too stressful to care for a baby, Katie liked going to work more. She said, “It feels like I had my baby too early, and I’m not used to being a mom. I like going to work better… There’s less pressure at work. I am annoyed and irritated when taking care of the little one.”

Two-thirds of the participants indicated that family was their priority. Surprisingly, no group differences were observed; the same number of bakery salesladies and social workers chose family over work. No effect of generation was observed either; the three participants who prioritized work over family were in their 20s, 40s and 50s respectively. In addition, between the two social workers without any children, one put family first and the other put work first. In sum, group differences were not found in this respect.

3.1.5 Internalized audience. As women move from China to the United States, the ways in which their narratives are constructed tend to change to keep the narratives coherent with the

\textsuperscript{40}For Christians, a mission trip is a trip to another place (usually another country) to spread God’s gospel.
new social context. The internalized audience may change as well. The more immigrant women conform to American gender role ideology, the greater the likelihood for narratives and intended audiences to change. Although both groups of participants constructed their narratives in the immigration framework, social workers had two different types of intended audience (i.e., American and Chinese communities) whereas the bakery salesladies had just one (the Chinese community).

Being a Chinese interviewer, I was clearly part of their internalized audience during the interview. Social workers, however, were also more likely to be telling their stories to other human services providers, who may or may not be Chinese. In contrast, the bakery salesladies tended to have family members, friends, and other people in the Chinese community as their internalized audience. Besides, when social workers discussed Chinese traditional ideologies, they tended to discuss not only these but also the expectations they thought Americans had regarding Chinese-American females. Therefore, we can see that their internalized audience might not be completely the same.

Most social workers expressed how glad they were to participate in this research and how much they desired to see other social workers and human service providers, especially those outside the Chinese culture, come to a better understanding of Chinese female immigrants. It is perhaps to due this desire that social workers were more likely to include people who were not Chinese as part of their internalized audience.
3.2 Upper Level of the Activity System: Instruments (Settings and Tools)

The upper level of the activity system features the instruments in the environment. In our study, the instruments in the female Chinese immigrants’ systems include both the setting (the workplace, the family and the American school system) and the tools (language).

3.2.1 Settings. The settings influenced participants’ gender role identities. They include: work settings, bakeries in Chinatown and human service facilities in New York City; schools; and their families.

Bakeries in Chinatown. Bakeries in Chinatown typically involve three occupational levels: the owner/manager, bakers, and salespersons. Across all of the bakeries sampled in this research, the managers and bakers were all male and the salespersons were all female.

Due to space and liability issues, it was very difficult to stay and observe interactions for long periods of time. Most of the interaction between the salesladies and their male colleagues occurred in employee-only areas—extremely tight spaces that made it difficult to stay and observe. I was lucky enough to interview one of the bakery owners in his office (where security equipment and personal valuables were kept), from which I was able to make several observations during the short span of the interview.

41 The American school system was included given that five of the six social workers and one of the bakery salesladies interviewed had moved to the United States when they were of high school age and all five talked about their school experience as an immigrant. It was evident that their encounters at high school influenced the construction of their gender role identity.
Because bakers and salesladies worked in two different sections in the bakery, there was minimal interaction between them. The salesladies showed respect and listened to the managers and the bakers. Traditional Chinatown bakeries have tight spaces big enough for only a couple of seats (in contrast, modern bakeries have a bigger, restaurant-like layout and carry food items as well). In a typical transaction, a customer would enter the store and tell the salesladies the specific food and beverages that he or she wanted. One of the salesladies would then pack the items while another would partner as the cashier. Most bakeries have no designated cashier, but a security camera connected to a computer in the manager’s office ensures that all transactions are being videotaped. Bakery salesladies are also responsible for carrying the bread/cake/dessert from the back to the storefront as well as cleaning the entire store, including the countertop and baking sheets and the floor and windows. In some stores, the manager/owners may also help at the storefront. The bakers, who are perceived as the professionals in the store, enjoy more bargaining power than do the salesladies, who are perceived as unskilled workers. No training is required to become a bakery saleslady and many do not have any relevant experience. The hierarchy observed in Chinatown bakeries was very similar to the one of the garment industry observed in Bao’s (2011) study, in which males in general had jobs with higher ranking than the females.

It is interesting to observe five out of the six bakery salesladies interviewed reported no conflict at all at work. Part of the reason may be due to the task at hand being very simple. Two of the salesladies even described the work as “手板眼見功夫” (a no-brainer). When there were no customers, everyone shared the workload and was free to socialize with one another. Many of them (even the ones who explicitly put family before work) shared that they enjoyed
working (and more crucially, socializing) at the bakery more than taking care of their kids at home.

Candy (B2) commented:

You know? In the bakery, there’s not much power struggle, right? All of us are regular salesladies, unlike in bigger companies where the power hierarchy is steeper….We don’t have this type of thing. If (customers) want to buy something, anyone would do it. The tasks are very easy, not hard. I don’t really have much experience in this aspect (conflicts).

The bakery salesladies see themselves as a team and even as family members. As Cathy (B4) described:

We are like a family here…We have a lot of freedom here…That’s why a lot of us would not leave…The bakers are separated. They work on their job, we work on ours. So, there’s no conflict… We’re pretty happy here.

The only bakery saleslady who mentioned any conflict was really referring to a conflict that the entire group of employees had with the employer in her previous job. The employees revolted against the storeowner who refused to provide lunch for them despite the unwritten norm in the bakery business to do so. Eventually, the employees left the store one by one. Even in this case, the salesladies remained a tight-knit group that did not experience much internal conflict.

Due to the long working hours (most of them worked nine to ten hours per day, six days a week), the bakery almost becomes a second home. Moreover, the potential need to switch shifts with others is another reason for staying on good terms with coworkers. These reasons, in addition to the emphasis on face and interpersonal harmony in Chinese culture, combine to reinforce the urge to avoid conflict at work and maintain good relations with one another.

In conclusion, the bakery setting functions as a second home for the bakery salesladies. A power hierarchy was clearly observed, with the salesladies having the least power and obliged to
defer to the owner/managers and the bakers. Thus, the bakery setting replicates the traditional Chinese power hierarchy in which males have power over female.

*Human services facilities.* While I did not have an opportunity to observe the participants in their particular work settings, I am able to draw from my yearlong experience working as a volunteer in a human service facility located in Chinatown. In human services facilities, the employees are almost entirely female. The pressure to be politically correct results in more equality between men and women in the workplace, with seniority rather than gender driving the power hierarchy.

Among the social workers interviewed, four worked in mental health agencies and two in home-aid agencies. Most of the agencies at which the participants worked served both English- and Chinese-speaking clients. Five out of the six social workers interviewed spoke Chinese with some of their clients and English with their other clients and colleagues, with only one (who worked in mental health) who worked with only English-speaking clients at her position. In particular, one social worker working with the elderly had to speak not only Mandarin and Cantonese—the two most popular Chinese dialects— but also Taishanese with her clients.

The consensus among the social workers was that their job was highly demanding. Susan (S5) commented that many social workers were Christian, “They believe that there’s a God. If you ask me, I feel like…there are (many social workers who are religious) compared to other fields…”

In a setting with few male coworkers, many social workers remained single. Despite the absence of conflict with men at work, women in such settings can experience complicated power struggles. As mentioned in chapter 2, prince-minister and “senior friend-young friend” constitute two of the five hierarchies in Confucian thought. In terms of the prince-minister relation, the
minister must obey the prince and those at lower-ranking positions must obey or, at least, respect those at higher ranks. Among females, however, the seniority rule— the “senior-friend-young friend” relations—could play a stronger role than position rank. According to this rule, older people are to be respected by those who are younger. Taken together, the two rules make the power hierarchy in human services facilities interesting. Specifically, when older employees work at lower-ranking positions, they may apply the senior friend-young friend rule and expect the younger employees in higher-ranking positions to respect and even to obey them.

Furthermore, social work is a field that is not perceived as a “real job” in the eyes of some Chinese people. For example, social workers may not be respected by some of the nurses or receptionists who have worked in the facilities for a long time. Two social workers described conflicts that they had with receptionists at the workplace.

As Angel (S4) stated in the interview,

They (the receptionists) have worked there for a long time. I feel like they are not very respectful. In my mind, I might think, yes, you’ve been working out there (at the front desk) for a long time and you’re busy, but they might feel like, “you’re just sitting there chatting, and you get paid for just chatting. What kind of job is that?” They don’t understand how drained we are...We feel very “small”...you are only a lowly social worker, you know, like...can’t lift your head up, and that makes me very sad. Working with the Chinese population can be very different too; Chinese clients are very needy. They ask for your help in everything. They don’t really know where the boundary is sometimes, but Westerners (Americans) are clear that, “Once you are a client, always a client.” But for Chinese clients...if you don’t help them, they would respond, I trust you and you don’t help me out?"

As a social worker, Angel had a higher-ranking position than the receptionists. The receptionists, who are older and have been working there for a longer time, however, believe that they know better and expect the social workers to listen to them. The receptionists may even fail to see social work as a “real job” due to the relatively abstract nature of the job. In contrast to the medical approach adopted in Western countries (where problems are sorted into different catego-
ries and clients seek help from different professionals based on their area of need), the holistic approach is embraced in Chinese cultures. Clients often expect their doctors, social workers, and therapists to work with them holistically. In this sense, Chinese clients tend to be more “needy,” and it may be more difficult to draw boundaries with them.

Almost all of the social workers mentioned changes in the field. In the past, neither a master’s degree nor a license was required to perform the same duties that they were doing as a social worker. The policies changed two years prior to the interviews. Now, the social workers are required to have a master’s degree and a license in order to keep their jobs. In other words, they had to either complete a degree in a very short time or lose their jobs. This change was very challenging for many of those interviewed.

In Susan’s (S5) case, for example, even though her boss was supportive enough to encourage her to go back to school for the degree and even accommodated her school schedule; it was still a lot of work for her.

My job title was Social Work Assistant, but they knew clearly that I was doing exactly what MSWs were doing. They asked me to go back to school because the only thing I didn’t have was the letter “M”…I entered an OYR program…which is for social workers with at least 5 years of experience. Other masters of social work programs require 1800 internship hours for licensure, but we only need to do 900. Instead of getting the degree in 2 years, we had to spend 2 and a half years while working full time. There were agreement between the workplace and the school…

Due to a later change in the nature of her position, she had only one year to become licensed. Despite the extreme stress, Susan felt that the process was worthwhile as it enabled her to help her clients better.

These examples show that the senior friend-young friend principle, which is applied more often in private lives, tends to be more prominent than the “prince-minister” principle, which is applied more often in business. Because Chinese women are expected to take care of household
matters and men are expected to take care of outside business, women are much more likely to employ the senior friend-young friend principle in every situation, even in their work settings.

**Schools.** Five of the six social workers and one of the bakery salesladies attended high school right after they moved to United States. Some of the participants came from Hong Kong, which was a British colony at the time and where students started learning English from the beginning of formal schooling. The others came from Mainland China, where they did not have the chance to learn English until attending high school in the United States. There were significant differences between the high school experiences associated with the two groups.

Two participants from Mainland China talked about their anxiety when they first attended American high schools. Fanny (S1) believed that she caught up well at school but was nervous about going to school due to language barriers. Fanny spoke only Mandarin at that time but most of her other immigrant classmates spoke Cantonese:

> In the 80s, most of my Chinese bilingual classmates spoke Cantonese. I was not used to it because I knew nothing when I went to school…There were bilingual teachers, that is, there were Chinese … I was in Chinatown, so my classes were with Chinese people…

Although Fanny was attending a school with bilingual teachers who could communicate with her and helped her to catch up, she was nervous about fitting into a new environment where the Chinese around her spoke a foreign dialect. Over the years, Fanny has become fluent enough in Cantonese to converse effectively with her Cantonese-speaking clients. Compared with the other participants, though, she is still reticent to speak Cantonese.

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42 Funny meant that although there were Chinese speaking teachers at her school who spoke both Mandarin and Cantonese, she was not able to fit in because her fellow students were mainly talking in Cantonese.
Katie (B3) talked about her difficulties in high school. Back in China, she had wanted to become a teacher of young children but has given up her dream since coming to the United States. At school, she did not have a sense of belonging and did not do very well due to her language difficulties.

When I was in high school, it was very different than in China. Because every class here...you have to go to different classroom, right? Every time you go to a different classroom, there were different classmates in the class. Then, when it gets to the next semester, or if you cannot be promoted to the next grade...you’ll stay in the same grade. If you stay in the same grade, you have different classmates again. When we were in China, we would stay with the same classmates and always move up to the next grade together, so those friends...that is...like having lunch now, some people may have after school (activities), or they have...they can’t be with you. Many people are by themselves and I’m not used to it.

Katie discussed at length about friendship in the interview. She was feeling lonely because, now a mother with a two-year-old, she could no longer hang out with her friends as she did in the past. Even in high school, Katie started feeling lonely because it was hard for her to make friends in the American school context.

In contrast to Fanny and Katie, the social workers who moved from Hong Kong generally appreciated their school experience in the United States. The school system in Hong Kong was very competitive and exam-oriented. Students were discouraged from asking too many questions, and it was not uncommon for students to come home from school daily with many homework assignments, tests, and projects on which they had to work until late at night. In the American school system, these immigrants from Hong Kong experienced freedom that they had never experienced before.

Mandy (S6) described her transition in a way that aptly represents the experience of almost all the interviewed social workers who came from Hong Kong:
In Hong Kong, for as long as I remember, I didn’t have good grades. I was a zero student. (laughed) But things changed when I came here. I didn’t know much English, but I suddenly became… I don’t know… I became smarter. I started to love reading. I never enjoyed reading when I was in Hong Kong. I was…and I was quiet. I didn’t speak up. I think my personality changed. I started to open up. I was curious. I asked a lot of questions in English. I loved school. Um…so I picked up English pretty fast. Because I really…I really enjoyed school so much. I couldn’t believe myself. Personality-wise, I’m still quiet. I’m still considered a quiet person. But compared to who I used to be in Hong Kong, I became much more open. Yea. More talkative, more questioning and things like that. Um…maybe it’s the school structure. Because in Hong Kong, I feel like, you know, the school system was pretty bad. Once you start out at grade one and you don’t do well, it’s like everyone knows about it. The teacher makes you go up there…it’s like your record’s there and they look at you as thinking you’re not a good student. Lower class, lower grade student. I felt like I was never encouraged by teachers and the school system. The way they structured learning was very different. Teachers never encouraged students to speak up in class. So, it’s different. The whole setting is so different in the States. You could talk freely. You could ask questions. I remember feeling like I was out of the cage. So, it was a huge change for me.

When the participants were asked about the changes in themselves, many social workers from Hong Kong acknowledged that the American school system gave them more confidence, transforming their personality in such a way that they became more open than they were in the past. In Hong Kong, teachers tend to be strict and students are encouraged to remain quiet, obedient and refrain from asking too many questions. In the United States, students are encouraged to be critical about what they have learned and questions are invited. Therefore, many social workers coming from Hong Kong enjoyed the freedom in the United States. Furthermore, there were many Cantonese-speaking students at school who became friends and helped each other out. In contrast, it was more challenging for Mainland Chinese immigrants to fit in and the immigration experience did not foster the development of higher self-esteem, as it did for immigrants from Hong Kong. A major reason was the language barrier. Specifically, students from Hong Kong learned English early on but students from Mainland China did not start learning English until much later. Thus, it was harder for Mainland Chinese immigrants to participate in the
classroom, ask questions in class and relate to their classmates, especially the American students. Thus, the language barrier barred these immigrants from enjoying the new “freedom” they had.

School experience can strongly influence the gender role identity of female immigrants because so much of one’s identity is constructed during the high school years. Men are still valued more than women by many Chinese people, as shown in the next section. On the one hand, female Chinese immigrants from Mainland China and Hong Kong are brought up with the idea that they should not ask too many questions, especially because they were female. Interpersonal harmony is also important in China’s collective culture, and women, in particular, are expected to be the peacemaker and stay quiet in times of conflict. In the United States, however, female immigrants are encouraged to speak up and ask questions. This becomes an empowering experience for many Chinese female immigrants because they had never been told that they had the right to speak up and ask questions.

Family. In this section, household size, family hierarchy, and male supremacy will be discussed.

Household size. Based on my observation of Chinese families, professionals (including social workers) tend to live with their nuclear family members, and people with lower income levels are more likely to live with in-laws.

First, as confirmed in this study, professionals are more likely to be able to afford living with only the immediate family. At the time of interview all of the social workers and one bakery saleslady were living with their immediate family. The five other bakery salesladies were living with members of their extended family, which included their parents-in-law or other relatives.

Second, people with lower income tend to be paid hourly wages instead of a regular salary and are more likely to work long hours, often six days a week. Therefore, there is a continual
need for family members to help with childcare and other household chores. Due to the mutually beneficial nature of living together, there may be fewer family conflicts among household members. In contrast, the social workers had a different way of dealing with conflict. Nonetheless, the participants showed respect to the older generation regardless of their occupation, demonstrating the subtle yet persistent influence of Confucian ideology over Chinese families.

*Family hierarchy.* Most Chinese families are structured based on a hierarchy. The oldest male family member is typically respected and treated as the most powerful in the household. The rest of the hierarchy is structured by generation and by seniority within each generation. For example, depending on birth order, sisters-in-law may be higher in rank than the participants.

Liza (B2) commented:

My sister-in-law is a good person but has a short temper. Sometimes she criticizes you and you don’t answer, that’s fine. Sometimes when she acts like a Big Sister, I would say a thing or two. But things got very bad one time. I’m your big sister-in-law after all.

The sister-in-law in Liza’s case was her husband’s older sister, which means that Liza was expected to respect her sister-in-law even if Liza was in fact older. In the case of two sisters-in-law married into the same family, the wife of the younger brother has to respect and listen to the wife of the older brother.

Furthermore, the father is still seen as the most powerful figure in a household, especially in the absence of grandparents. Joann’s (S3) father was opposed to his daughter marrying a much older Chinese man. For this reason, Joann’s father would not attend his daughter’s wedding and

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43 Big Sister is a Chinese expression that refers to women who are very bossy.

44 The participant’s sister-in-law was trying to use her birth order to assert her authority over the participant.
(with the exception of Joann’s sister) neither did her mother or other relatives attend the wedding despite their relative acceptance of the relationship. Joann did not see her family again until she had two babies and her father no longer opposed to her going back to visit.

Joann described her experience as follows:

I tricked my sister to come over. My sister was okay about it, although she felt that my decision would upset my parents who would feel really sad. But she understood what type of person my husband was, and she was okay with it. To a certain extent, she was stuck in the middle and did not know what to do. Anyway, on my wedding day, that was the day of the ceremony, I tricked her to come over. I invited her to have lunch together and to meet me at the church. So, she was very shocked. I dared not tell my parents about the ceremony…It was to a point where I was almost disowned. So, when my sister came over, on one hand she was very shocked. On the other hand, she didn’t really know what to do…

…I was very stressed at that time. After I got married, I became pregnant and had a baby and I never told my parents. Only my sister knew about it…and when my daughter was one year old, and I became pregnant again and it was then that my family found out I was having another baby. My sister told them. Knowing that they would have a baby to play with, my mother felt okay but my dad was not – he is still not okay about it. I went back once to visit them…but my dad kicked us out…

Eventually, her father accepted Joann again because of the two granddaughters, but the reconciliation took a long time. Joann’s case is atypical given that she chose her own path despite disapproval from her father. As discussed in the next sections, Joann experienced much discrimination (from her father in particular) simply because she was female, which made her feel determined to establish a new family of her own that was free from discrimination.

Joann’s example demonstrates a case in which the oldest male has the most power in the household. The disapproval of Joann’s father was strong enough to keep the rest of the family from attending the wedding and from letting Joann in the house (despite their endorsement of the marriage and happiness for Joann when she had babies). The power hierarchy is still at work in the household of many Chinese immigrants. As a result, women in the household may internalize the status quo of being obedient and not having the power to make decisions.
Male supremacy. A considerable proportion of Chinese Americans still believe in male supremacy and let this principle guide their behavior and decision-making.

Joann (S3), who worked very hard at her family’s restaurant when she was in high school, portrayed the Chinese female as follows:

I believe that Chinese women are very oppressed, okay, because I’m a victim myself. With all the housework, because I’m a girl, I didn’t have any say. Even if I voiced my opinions, they would just think that I was being rebellious, okay? I was supposed to be a submissive person. In terms of schooling, I fought hard to get a college education. My family feels that, you’re a girl, so your job is to “相夫教子” ("to help your husband and teach your children"). (Her family believed that) it’s impossible for you (her) to do much in the United States, so once you (she) finish(es) high school, you (she) have (has) enough education. You (She) should work in the restaurant for two years, help in your (her) husband’s business for 2 more years, and then have a baby.

Because her family did not want her to go to college, she had to earn her own tuition by working three jobs while attending school full time. Eventually, she had to spend five years at college due to her heavy workload and poor English skills. Joann commented, “I feel that Chinese women are very passive and are being neglected. However, they (the males in the society) really need women in the society to support what they need to do.”

To Joann, Chinese females become passive from all the different restraints placed on them. At the same time, society needs women to share the workload so that men in the family could pursue their education/career/dreams. Joann had been oppressed as a female in her family. She had to do most of the housework at home and had to help out in the family restaurant even when she was working three other jobs to support her own education.

To this day, Chinese families may still prioritize the education of men over women, especially when there are not enough resources for both boys and girls in the family. Because women are ultimately wedded out of the family and their primary role is to get married and have children, it is considered a waste of resources to provide women with too much education.
In addition, some men still believe that they are the most powerful ones at home and that other family members (particularly their wives) must listen to them as they do as they please.

Cathy (B4) commented that her husband is such a “大男人” (“big man”):

(My husband) embraces the “big man” ideology. He really dislikes it when you don’t listen to him and rebel against him. For example, if he is sitting there and you ask him to do something, he wouldn’t do it. He would ask, “Why don’t you do it yourself? Why don’t you go do it? He’s really all about this “big man” ideology.

Cathy used the expression “rebel against him.” When Cathy did not listen to her husband, whom she met online, it was considered a rebellion rather than simply having a different opinion or idea. Today, many Chinese husbands might help with housework. Cathy’s husband was willing to help occasionally but only depending on his preferences and his mood.

When women interact with other people in an environment where males are considered superior, women may come to see themselves as inferior and incapable of competing with men for higher positions and, as a result, settle for lower positions. Being in a lower position in society reinforces the inferior self-perceptions and this may become a vicious cycle in which the setting, by shaping internal beliefs, influences the entire activity system.

**In-law relationships.** Shih and Pyke (2010) found that women who had children reported more conflicts with their mothers-in-law than with those without children. Many women would ask their husbands to be the mediators. Women whose husbands were willing to be the mediator tended to have better relationships with their mothers-in-law. This finding is in line

45 This is similar to paternalistic ideology. It includes two parts: Women are supposed to be submissive to men but men are also obligated to provide for the family.
with the three obedience commands that demand a woman to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her eldest son after the death of the husband. Indeed, many women listen to their sons to a certain extent even before the death of their husbands. In contrast, the daughter-in-law is expected to respect her mother-in-law. Given the hierarchy, it is much easier for the son to communicate with the mother and make requests to improve the situation.

Mothers-in-law who provided more resources to the couple tended to enjoy greater power, filial care, respect, and freedom (Shih & Pyke, 2010). This pattern was corroborated in the interviews. Two of the social workers did not have any children. Three took care of their children on their own. Only one received childcare support from her mother-in-law.

Fanny’s (S1) relationship with her mother-in-law was relatively distant although her mother-in-law was providing childcare to the couple:

Whenever I arrive at my (in-laws’ house), there’s really nothing (to do). My daughter will be with them, and I don’t know what I can do there. Everyone is focused on my daughter, and I just sit there like a fool. I don’t know…in my own mom’s house, I just feel comfortable no matter what I do.

Fanny chose to avoid visiting her in-laws to circumvent awkward situations. Also, Fanny and her husband earned enough to afford daycare and other types of childcare services. Thus, Fanny saw the time her in-laws spend with her daughter as a favor that she did for her in-laws (who delighted in seeing their granddaughter) rather than a favor that her in-laws were doing for her (by providing childcare). In Fanny’s case, even when providing resources, her in-laws did not earn greater power nor more respect from her.

The dynamics appeared different among the bakery salesladies. Cathy’s (B4) mother-in-law helped to watch the children while Cathy went to work. When disagreements arose with her mother-in-law, Cathy resolved them by actively reconciling with her mother-in-law.
After a few days, I talked to her, and she was fine with that. Yes, it happened many times. I thought to myself, “She helped you take care of your baby. Aiya (Sigh), I could go out and work. I should feel very happy about it.”

Without help from her mother-in-law, Cathy may have to stay home to take care of her children, which was something that she really did not want to happen. For this reason, Cathy was grateful for the help and more willing to take the first step in reconciling with her mother-in-law. In this case, the mother-in-law certainly enjoyed elevated power in the relationship in return for the help she provided for the couple.

Liza (B2) also explained why she would rather be humble and “be a small potato” at home:

Because yes…it’s troublesome when you live together. You know. I don’t want to bother either (my) husband or mother-in-law. It’s tough. If you quarrel, it’s not good for the family, and it’s not good for myself. No one would help take care of your kid. You have to take care of your own kid. So you have to take care of your kid, right … So, just don’t bother.

Family circumstances shaped individual women’s interactions with their in-laws and their role in their family and, in turn, affected their self-perception as a female member in the household. The social workers, who did not have to rely on their in-laws to look after their children, enjoyed more bargaining power with their in-laws. The in-laws, who did not live in the same household, did not affect the social workers’ gender role identity within the family very much. In contrast, almost all the bakery salesladies interviewed relied on their in-laws to provide child-

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46 Katie (B3) was living with her parents while waiting for her husband to move to the United States. Because her parents were working, her grandmother was the only one who helped Katie with her child while she worked part-time at the bakery.
care for them while they worked. In return, they tried their best to humble themselves and avoid conflict in the family. Therefore, material conditions also shaped family relations leading to the bakery salesladies being more submissive than the social workers. This point will be discussed later in more detail together with the discussion of the socioeconomic status.

3.2.2 Tools. According to activity theory, tools refer to social artifacts, including both language and socio-economic status. In this study, Chinese female immigrants are viewed as actors embedded in sociocultural contexts and their activity systems and actively negotiating their rules while relying on available cultural artifacts.

Languages. Participants in both groups described difficulties that they had experienced in terms of language barriers. It was not surprising that all of the bakery salesladies chose to complete the Chinese version of the consent form and questionnaires and to be interviewed in Chinese. Surprisingly, only two social workers chose the English version of the consent form and questionnaires, and only one social worker chose to be interviewed in English. Despite having received their license in the United States (which evidences a good understanding of English), most of the social workers chose to read the Chinese version when given the choice. The vast majority of the participants felt more comfortable speaking and reading in Chinese. A similar language preference was found in Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe’s (2009) interviews of Chinese parents and students in their study on language attitudes and heritage language maintenance. Findings showed that Chinese immigrant parents (including well-educated Mandarin-speaking parents) felt more comfortable speaking Chinese, regardless of their English proficiency because they view their heritage language “as a resource, as an epitome of their ethnic identity, and as a factor contributing to family cohesion” (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009, p. 91).
In this study, five of the six social workers moved to the United States when they were high school aged yet they still chose to respond to the Chinese forms and questionnaires. Similarly, five of the six social workers chose to be interviewed in Chinese. Interestingly, almost all social workers discussed their language barrier issues. With the exception of Sandy (S2), who did not have much experience with American schools and described a current language barrier, all social workers talked about language barriers when they first arrived in the US and the way in which they overcame the barrier. Nonetheless, all social workers talked about cultural differences as an ongoing issue.

The bakery salesladies typically talked about the language barrier as one of the difficulties they experienced in their immigration journey. The salesladies were also prone to internalizing their language barrier and perceiving themselves as inferior.

Cathy (B4) commented:

...They know English, and we are just new immigrants. They (Chinese Americans) all know English and have better jobs than we do. It’s different for ABCs (American Born Chinese). We, the ones who moved here, can’t compare to them. Our jobs are always inferior.

Jen (b6) also commented, “(I) don’t know English and am not as good as the others. It feels like I’m second-class.”

It is not uncommon for Chinese immigrants, especially those who are not proficient in English, to think in this manner. The experience of downward mobility, the constant need to rely on others (e.g., to read letters and fill out applications in English), and a general sense of dependency and helplessness reinforce a perception of themselves as second-class.

Participants who immigrated at a young age indicated that it was very helpful for them to have access to bilingual teachers and classes when they first arrived. They talked about receiving
encouragement from their schools, gaining self-confidence, learning to speak up, and becoming more open as they navigated the very different school system in America. This process is illustrated in Mandy’s (S6) experience in the previous section.

Without the language skill, immigrants are more likely to feel inferior, as did Joann (S3) when she first moved from Mainland China to Hong Kong, Mandy (S6) when she moved from China to New York, and Jen (B6) when she moved to the United States. Once the language barrier was overcome, however, each of the interviewees developed the confidence to achieve their goals. While it is easier for students to overcome the barrier, it is very difficult for working adults to do so because of their demanding work schedules, long commutes, family needs, and other obligations.

Language is an everyday tool that immigrants need to interact with their environments. It also affects their choice of environment and how they interact with others and with whom they interact. The social others is one of the mediating tools.

**Socio-economic status.** Relative to the social workers, the bakery salesladies reported a significantly lower household income and larger household size. For example, Candy (B2) lived with her sister-in-law’s family. Each family had two children, resulting in a total of four children and four adults in the household. As she says:

> The children are happy living together. You know children need playmates…If there’s anything, you help me and I help you. People can’t stay healthy all year round. There will be times when you get sick, right? Then, they can help you take care (of your children). When anything happens, we can take care of and help each other.

Because most bakery salesladies lived with their extended families, the household sizes tended to be much larger—an average 5.67 people per household compared to 3.17 for the social workers. The bakery salesladies emphasized the positive aspects of living with their extended
families. Many mentioned the advantage of helping one another out and keeping one another company. Many bakery salesladiess were paid hourly wages without any paid sick days, so it was a problem, if they could not make it to work. Hence, they had to count on their family members to watch their sick kids and help them with other chores when they fell sick.

Socioeconomic status and the household situation also affect how women cope with conflict. Because Liza (B2) could not afford to move out with her husband and her children, she had no choice but to live with her mother-in-law, father-in-law and sister-in-law.

Liza discussed why she would not argue with her sister-in-law:

Because you’re living together, if you argue with them, there won’t be a way to repair the relationship. Can’t live together anymore. It is hard for my mother-in-law to take care of my son at home. She won’t be happy if we argue.

Liza was thankful that her mother-in-law was helping her to take care of her children. She tried not to argue with her sister-in-law because she did not want to upset her mother-in-law. Also, it would be hard to live together if they ever got into a big fight. A woman who moves in with her husband’s family may feel that she is not being a good daughter-in-law, if she causes any fights at home. Therefore, women tend to avoid starting fights and may try to quit even when someone else initiates a fight. When living with their own families, however, women become more likely to speak up for themselves because relationships with members of the immediate family are not as vulnerable to the impact of conflict and argument.

Katie (B3) discussed parenting issues with her parents:

I want them (her parents) not to say anything when I am teaching him. You can talk to him after I teach him, but not two or three people talking to him at the same time. The child doesn’t know who to listen to.

Though her parents did not listen to Katie as they still considered her a young child who did not know better, Katie never hesitated to discuss parenting issues with her parents and would
even get into arguments with them. As her parents were both still working, Katie could only ask her grandmother, whose old age proved debilitating, to watch her son briefly during nap time. Therefore, Katie could only work a couple of hours a day and rarely had a chance to socialize with her friends from high school. She felt trapped at times and looked forward to her husband’s arrival in the United States. She hoped that one day they could afford to move out and resolve the child rearing conflicts she had with her parents. She also hoped to work longer hours when her son grew older.

Jin and Keat (2010) state that Asian men might find their traditional position challenged post-immigration. Kim & Sung (2000, as stated in Jin & Keat, 2010) report that Korean men tended to be more satisfied with the economic status they held back in Korea, and their wives tended to gain individual socioeconomic power post-immigration. Many immigrants who had worked in the primary labor market in their home countries had no choice but to work in the secondary labor market after immigration given their lack of recognized qualifications and experience, their language barrier, and limited social networks.

As Mar (1991) points out:

Modes of Economic Adaptation segmented labor market models divide the labor market into a primary segment and a secondary segment. Jobs in the primary labor market possess relatively high wages, job ladders with promotional opportunities, a high degree of job security, and good working conditions. The secondary labor market is characterized by low wages, high turnover, poor working conditions, and fewer promotional opportunities. Once employed in the secondary labor market, immigrants are unable to acquire skills and training that will allow them access to better jobs… Thus, immigrants are stuck with these low-paying, low mobility, secondary labor market jobs. (Mar, 1991, p. 5)
A similar trend was observed among the bakery salesladies, who agreed that they worked harder and worried more about their economic situation and their adaptations after moving to the United States.

Candy (B1) said,

(In China), I was always home, just an ordinary housewife who took care of the children. I went shopping occasionally. There was not much difference from the lives of other ordinary housewives. There were not many worries; there were not many ups and downs in my life. I didn’t think much. Right? My life was very simple. Took care of the children, went to buy food, cooked for my husband and children. When they ate happily, I was happy. If we had time, we would go shopping together as a family. Sometimes I went to his (her husband’s) colleagues’ gatherings, like barbeques. My life was very simple…. (After arriving in the States), my way of thinking changed. I am more mature now because life is different here. Life used to be very relaxing in China, but everything happens much more quickly in the States, and it gets quite tense…

The economy here, those people, that is, in the United States, the economy…I don’t know…seems to be very bad. The unemployment rate is very high. That’s the thing that I worry about. When my baby grows up and tries to find a job, it might be difficult. Right? There would be things like that (economic difficulties) back in China. I didn’t have to worry about a thing. After all, (we) all have to work very hard to buy a house, right? In China, we didn’t have to because we had already bought a house in the past. We didn’t have to worry.

Life was much tougher in the United States for Candy, but she did not regret moving here because she wanted to apply for an immigration visa for her family as well. Although people do not make as much in China in terms of dollar amount, the living cost in the United States is much higher. Many immigrant families may own property in their home countries but cannot afford to buy a house in New York City after immigration. From the Chinese perspective, a family is less stable without a house. Therefore, immigrants may experience more worries after they arrive in the United States. This is another reason why many bakery salesladies live with their extended family members. They are then able to split the rent in order to save money to buy a house. Al-
ternatively, they may be unable to afford the cost of a house on their own and need the financial support of their extended family members.

When asked about changes they experienced after moving to the United States, many participants (especially the bakery salesladies) stated that they worked harder after their immigration. Most of the bakery salesladies did not have to work too hard back in China. A couple of them mentioned having two-and-a-half-hour lunch breaks when they worked in a factory in China. Their parents also held respectable jobs but had to accept lower-status jobs in the United States due to language barriers.

Cathy (B4) commented on the different lifestyles,

It was much more relaxing to work in China. It was not tense at all. For example, when we worked in the factory, we had a break at 11:30am. They would let you go home to have lunch. When I got home, my parents would have the meal ready, so I could watch TV or take a nap for an hour or so. It felt so great.

In the United States, Chinatown bakery owners typically provide lunch for the staff, and the salesladies, separated into two groups, would take turns eating lunch at the bakery. The lunch break lasts only half an hour—two hours shorter than those who had long lunch breaks in China. The work itself was more exhausting and the commute was also much longer. Thus, it was hard for bakery salesladies to adjust when they first started on the job.

Jen (B6) compared her working life in China with her experience in the United States, In China, we would have a “break” in the afternoon…and we would eat or take a nap, and it wouldn’t be as tiring. In the States, when there are too many customers, we cannot take a break. Sometimes we have to work even when we are having lunch. It’s getting better in recent years. It was even harder at first.

With the growing number of bakeries in Chinatown in the past decade, competition has increased, leading to Jen’s comment that the situation was “getting better” (fewer customers) in
recent years. These descriptions show how bakery salesladies were working much harder in the United States than in China, which has a vastly different work culture.

Liza’s (B2) parents owned a fashion store in China, and she did not have to work, if she chose not to. When her parents moved here, her father found work passing out promotional material on the streets and her mother worked in a restaurant. She stated,

I was so not used to it when I first arrived here. I had to work every day. Back then I had no work experience and had never stood for an entire day. Wow. It felt as if my legs were burning! It hurt so much.

Back in China, Liza occasionally went to work at a factory but did not have to go back after lunch if she chose not to. She really enjoyed her privileges and freedom there. After moving to the United States, not only did she lose her privileges and freedom, she also had to adapt to a harder working life that required her to stand for an entire day. Even in the face of downward mobility, the entire family quickly adapted to their new environment.

In contrast, the social workers had more resources in terms of income and time, lived with their immediate family only and had a little more time for leisure activities. Yu (1999) discusses the relationship between women and leisure activities, finding that Taiwanese women are wont to accommodate family demands and willing to sacrifice their own free time and hobbies to take care of the family. Recreational activities were much more likely to include family gatherings, shopping, and other family activities. Other entertainment or outdoor activities were rare.

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47 Social workers have 5-day work weeks, public holidays and vacation days. Bakery salesladies have 6-day work weeks and minimal vacation days, which many of them choose not to use because it is difficult to find coworkers to cover for them.
Also, women rarely enjoyed “pure” leisure activity. In other words, they were always multitasking. For example, women might listen to music while cleaning the house. Yu argues, however, that gender differences in socioeconomic status play a role. After controlling for social status, educational level, and income level across gender, men and women do not differ in terms of the nature of their leisure activity.

Women believe that spending time with the family and their spouses is the ideal leisure activity, reflecting the mindset of “being together.” In this study, the bakery salesladies had only one day off per week. Most of them used the day to take care of household chores and had little time for themselves. They referred to shopping (for food and for the family) and playing with their children as their main leisure activity. Thus, there was little quality leisure time left for themselves. For social workers, leisure activities included participating in religious activities, traveling, providing educational opportunities for their children, and visiting family. All the social workers identified traveling (short or long trips) as their main leisure activity as a family, whereas only one bakery saleslady mentioned that she would love to go on more vacations despite seldom having the chance.

Socioeconomic status (a social tool) shapes the system (household size, childcare practices, work life, and leisure activities) that participants encounter in their daily lives. Tools in the activity system influence both the actor and the structure. The actor-structure interaction is affected, and interactions change within a context of accumulating experience. In the lives of female Chinese immigrants, the tools were clearly important in shaping interactions with the environment, the social context itself, and the development of gender role identity through internalization. Therefore, we can see that class and hence socioeconomic status are part of the activity
system and affect how the two groups understand their gender role identity as well as their interaction with others within their activity systems.

3.3 The Lower Part of the Activity System: Rules, Community, and Division of Labor

3.3.1 Values, rules, and division of labor. In this section, values, rules, and division of labor will be examined in terms of traditional gender role and changes in cultures.

Traditional Gender Role. Two themes were found in the interview data in terms of the traditional Chinese gender role—valuing males over females and “three obedience commands and four virtues.”

Valuing males over females. Fanny (S1) commented, “…Chinese women…should…um …stay in the tradition; they should not be pursuing high levels of education. They should stay at home and take care of the family.”

Due to the traditional belief that “only ignorant women are virtuous,” some Chinese people might still be convinced that women’s pursuit of higher education is a waste of resources. These people tend to believe that the life purpose of women is simply to stay home and take care of their families. Both social workers and bakery salesladies alluded to this cultural expectation, although the social workers did not accept it. Again, class and educational background were part of the activity system that shaped how they viewed traditional gender role ideologies. Similar traditional beliefs still hold true today. The tendency to value men more than women (重男轻女) is one of them.

Fanny was born into a family with four daughters and a son. She did not believe that her father valued males over females until she had her own children, when she noticed that her father loved her brother’s children more than her and her sisters’ children. Fanny’s family pressured Fanny to have another child because Fanny had only one daughter, but there was not much pres-
sure on her brother, who had two sons and a daughter. With the same last name, the children of Fanny’s brother were considered “inside” grandchildren whereas Fanny’s children were considered “outside” grandchildren. Among all grandchildren, “inside” grandsons typically have the highest status, followed by “inside” granddaughters, then “outside” grandsons, and lastly “outside” granddaughters. Parents with traditional beliefs would pressure their daughters to continue giving birth until they had a son. As a Chinese saying goes, “母憑子貴” (A mother becomes valuable because of her son); having a son is their daughter’s claim to higher status and power in the husband’s family.

In cases when only one son is born in a given generation (or when a son is born in a family where his dad is the only son in his generation), the Chinese describe the situation with the special term “三代單傳” (“the only successor in three generations”). These valuable sons are more likely to be spoiled, especially by their grandparents. In addition, because filial piety (孝) is seen as the single most important aspect of Chinese culture, parents may refrain from arguing with the doting grandparents even when their children are being spoiled.

Candy (B2) commented that in her family, “My father-in-law is more traditional. My father-in-law was the only son himself. My husband was also the only son and so they wanted to have a grandson.”

It was lucky that Candy had a son and was no longer being pressured to give birth to a son to “fulfill her obligation” to her husband’s family.

Liza’s (B2) family was similar. In her words:

My husband has only one son and my father-in-law has only one son—my husband...so he (her son) is really spoiled. My mother-in-law is very simple-minded. He does whatever he wants to. I don’t even know. I’m afraid that when he goes to school, the teacher will scold us saying, “What are the two of you doing (in terms of teaching her son)?”
Although Liza was very concerned about her son’s discipline at home, she dared not oppose her parents-in-laws’ permissive style of raising her son because she needed them to help with childcare and because she felt an obligation to respect filial piety.

In an extreme but nonetheless common case, a father who has no son will ask his son-in-law to be married into their family and let the grandson use the maternal last name.

Katie’s (B3) father had two daughters and no son. Katie had a son who was two years old and her father asked that Katie’s husband to be married into his family. In other words, when Katie’s husband arrived from Hong Kong, he would live with Katie’s family and their first son would take Katie’s last name. The arrangements were still being negotiated, Katie said, “We’re still talking about this. We don’t know yet. Perhaps we could change the last name with our next baby instead.”

Having a son to preserve the family name is important in the Chinese culture. It is seen as a way of making one’s family last forever. Having a daughter does not count as much because daughters eventually take their husbands’ last names. Thus, traditional parents see daughters as outsiders and sons as extremely important. A Chinese saying describes married daughters as “嫁出去的女儿，泼出去的水,” (“married daughters are splashed water”). In other words, once a daughter is married, she does not belong to her maiden family but to the husband’s family. At the same time, the daughter’s behavior is no longer relevant to her maiden family and will only bring honor or disgrace to her husband’s family. A married daughter is no longer considered a successor to her parents in any way.
Three obedience commands and four virtues. Three obedience commands and four virtues were clearly in bakery salesladies’ activity system and affected them in terms of their daily behaviors as well as decision makings.

Candy (B2) commented on the need for Chinese females to be obedient:

…the three obedience commands and four virtues. I think the Chinese way of thinking is different than the American way. American women have a lot of freedom and are not as traditional as Chinese women. In the Chinese culture, it is very important to have offspring. In the United States, it doesn’t matter because many don’t want a baby. I’m a very traditional woman. I respect Chinese values—important to have offspring. I’ll try my best to match the needs of the elderly at home. The elderly have a very traditional way of thinking, right? So, I’ll respect their point of view. If they want me to have children, I’ll try my best to do it although I can’t do anything if I (can’t get pregnant).

Candy believed that women should obey the elders, who have the most power in the household, and also put family needs before her own. Thus, when the elders in the family wanted a baby boy, it was important for Candy to honor their request and have another baby despite already having a baby girl.

Also, some Chinese women are still influenced by the traditional ideology of modesty. For example, as Liza (B2) commented,

If you tell me to fight for something, such as being the class leader, I wouldn’t want to be the class leader. I don’t want to be at the top. I don’t want to be the sharpest. I’d rather have freedom…Perhaps I am lazy. I don’t want to work too hard and I’m lazy. I don’t want to act like my sister-in-law, who acts as a big sister and comes across as very “cool” (nonchalant). I don’t like that. I won’t do that.

Liza’s beliefs resembled the way in which Joann (S3) talked about her life goals. Joann, like Liza, did not want to be at the top. She was content with helping others in her own small ways and stayed behind the scene, in line with the traditional value of modesty and the virtue of not thinking too highly of oneself. Although she went against here entire family to get married, she was still being held back by the ideologies of modest manner.
Because social workers and bakery salesladies developed their gender role identity in a Chinese family environment, both groups internalized at least some traditional Chinese values.

**Change in Culture.** In this section, both changes from Chinese culture to American culture and changes within the Chinese culture will be discussed.

*From Chinese culture to American culture.* The social workers mentioned that it was very challenging for them to assimilate into the mainstream culture or even to fit in.

Sandy’s (S2) husband, despite having lived in South America for 10 years and in the United States for a long period of time, only socialized with the Chinese community. Sandy herself expressed difficulties at work due to cultural differences:

> Sometimes I don’t really understand what’s going on when we are in a meeting. They would laugh happily and I would feel like an outsider…I feel like it’s very hard to communicate with them on the social level. I guess I’m not confident in myself. When I first came to the United States, I really wanted to be assimilated into the American society and was quite determined not to stay in my own (Chinese) circle, but it’s been hard.

Although Sandy wanted to be assimilated into the United States culture, she found it to be challenging. First, she was uncomfortable with her English proficiency level and lacked the confidence to express herself in front of her colleagues. There were also cultural differences that made her feel like an outsider.

Typically, the social workers had an easier time adapting to American culture because having attended high school they received support assimilating. Sandy’s case was different because she moved to the United States as an adult, and she had to interact daily with many Americans in her work environment. Despite her desire to assimilate, Sandy felt profound cultural barriers between her colleagues and herself, did not agree on certain American values, and did not receive much support from her Chinese American friends.
In contrast, the bakery salesladies commented that they did not have much contact with mainstream American culture at all. There were not a lot of American customers at the bakeries, and all of them did their grocery shopping in Chinese supermarkets, watched Chinese TV, and listened to Chinese radio stations at home. The only English they had to speak at work was with American-born Chinese customers who did not speak Chinese. Thus, there was little pressure to assimilate. Despite their sparse contact with mainstream culture, cultural change still influenced the gender role identity of the bakery salesladies.

Liza (B2) talked about her immigration experience:

When I look back now, I don’t have regrets about moving here. I met my husband here and got a family. There’s no regret. There’s no regret. I don’t know what I can do if I’m still in China. At least I can think about what I want to do now. I don’t have to rely on anything here. I can rely on myself…I am not good at studying, but I can use my hands and work harder. Even if I graduate from school in China, I don’t really know what I can do, especially in Taishan. Life is backward there.

Back in China, Liza believed that good networking is necessary to get a job. Being a woman without helpful connections, Liza was not confident about finding a job. After moving to the United States, however, she became confident that she could get a job here by being a hard-working worker. When she was in China, she believed that it was not mandatory for women to work, but now Liza believes that a woman should take a job and develop confidence in herself, not only by working but also by achieving her personal goals.

Interestingly, the key factor that influenced the quality of immigrants’ assimilation experience was not occupation nor socio-economic status but their age of immigration and the education level achieved in the United States. Sandy (S2) was the only social worker who talked about experiencing pressure due to assimilation. Other social workers mentioned the process of fitting in with mainstream culture, but they found it was relatively smooth and easy with the support
from their school environment. Among the bakery salesladies, Katie (B3) was the only one who received her high school education in the United States. In Katie’s case, however, she had attended school for less than a year when she got pregnant and dropped out. The other bakery salesladies did not have the urge to assimilate because they did not feel a need to fit into mainstream culture to sustain their everyday life. The social workers who received a significant part of their education in the United States did not have much problem fitting in but still differentiated themselves from Americans.

Nevertheless, regardless of immigrants’ perceived level of assimilation, the mere exposure to American culture may influence their gender role identity after a period of time.

*Changes within the Chinese Culture.* Cathy (B4) discussed how the Chinese culture itself has changed and that fewer men nowadays see themselves as the head of the household to which everyone must heed.

Nowadays, in China, there are no longer many arranged marriages. It’s not like you (the husband) (always) said the right thing. If you’re home and I said something right, you would have to say that I was wrong and that I had to listen to you. In the past, it was very conservative and things would have been like that. But nowadays, it (this type of situation) happens less and less. Everybody will talk it out. That is, if you said something right, I would obey you. If you said something wrong, I would rebel against you. Right?

Globalization appears to have caused people to become less traditional in recent years.

Susan (S5) commented on the way in which Chinese women should see themselves:

Although we don’t see gender equality in society yet, we also don’t see ourselves as being inferior to men. We have more influence and not only in relation to your family members, which would have already been good enough. If all of us take up our own responsibilities, society won’t be as chaotic. I believe that is what we Chinese (should do)...That’s why I said we couldn’t be too left or too right. Too left meaning...to an extent, where you become a “甩繩馬騮” (monkey on a broken leash, which describes people who have too much freedom and do not behave). There would be no morality or restraint left. I think that is a big problem.

Susan believed that Chinese women should see themselves as equal to their male coun-
terparts although equality is not yet achieved in the Chinese society or community. Women have played an influential role in the society and within their families. Still, they are still expected to behave responsibly, ethically and with restraint. This paradox is demonstrated in the interviews, which suggest that gender role ideology is changing in the Chinese community, yet, at the same time, the paradox reveals participant behavior and values that are (consciously or unconsciously) rooted deeply in traditional values. Although there were feminist movements and conferences in China, the average laypersons seem not to have been much affected by feminist ideologies.

3.4 The Middle Part of the Activity System: The Intersection of Gender Role Identity and Behavior

In this chapter, I will discuss the similarities and differences in gender role identity that I observed in the narratives of bakery salesladies and social workers. Next, examples of participants’ life goals and conflict management will illustrate the influence of gender role identity on the participants’ behaviors in their daily lives.

3.4.1 Immigration and Changing Gender Role Identity. Immigration changes both the upper and lower part of immigrants’ activity system and hence changes their gender role identity.

The immigration experience has brought about shifts in gender role identity for some participants. For example, Liza (B2) talked about her beliefs regarding Chinese women:

…I believe that Chinese women should be traditional but can’t be too traditional. It’s not good to be too traditional where you always stay at home and never go out to work. Not good! It’s better to go out to work. I felt like, “ai (sign in a happy way), I improved!” There were a couple of years when I didn’t work, and when I first returned to work, I felt that I had become very slow in thinking. Had slow responses. Now that I keep working, it seems like I’m smarter…Yes, when you’re not working, you become very slow.

As mentioned in the previous section, because Liza’s family had their own business in China, she did not have to work even after graduating from high school. She had taken Basic
English classes in China but did have any working experience. When Liza arrived in the United States and started working and accumulating life experiences, she realized how naïve she was in the past. In this way, Liza’s gender role ideology was influenced by her immigration experience. Instead of being satisfied with staying home and not working, Liza flourished in the new freedom and personal development made possible by her new lifestyle in the United States despite that she felt oppressed by her in-law at times.

Traditionally, Chinese American females value interpersonal harmony and employ not just the strategies of assimilation and acculturation but also the strategy of accommodation, which allows them to develop co-existing group identities and cultures (Woo, 1999). Immigrants who adopt the strategy of accommodation must negotiate the tension between majority and minority cultures, though their internalized idea of being a good girl still shapes their social interactions.

Both Joann (S3) and Angel (S4) from the social worker group considered themselves as peacemakers who negotiated their way through conflicts by establishing relationships with others.

Joann characterized herself in the following way:

I hope I can be a peacemaker. I hope everything will turn out well and there’ll be no need to make things problematic. When a problem comes up, I try to solve it rather than to make things worse. And I believe that if the relationship between people is good, many things can be solved automatically… I don’t like to have too much conflict with others.

Angel also served as a mediator and peacemaker in her family:

I would quiet down when there conflict occurs. It’s interesting. My family is kind of like, um…not talk too much… don’t argue don’t argue… So when problems come up in my family, the relationships within the family would worsen because there were too many misunderstandings. I was usually the peacemaker… They know that I’m a social worker, and they all come to me.
Both Joann and Angel aspired to become peacemakers, who improved people’s relationships in line with the Chinese cultural expectation that good women should bring harmony to the family (as illustrated by the Chinese saying, “好女兩頭瞞,” which means “good girls cover for both sides.”) Women are expected to serve as the mediators in Chinese families. When conflicts arise in the family, women are expected to help and even cover for both parties to enable reconciliation.

In interviews with six adolescent Chinese girls, Woo (1999) found that all interviewees embraced traditional gender roles and believed marriage and family to be more important than establishing a career. The result from this research was similar. Eight out of the twelve participants believed that family was more important than career. As mentioned previously, one saw both as equally important and three saw career as more important than family. This reflects the Chinese emphasis on the family even when both spouses were in the workforce.

Furthermore, there was a consensus among participants that they had changed considerably after immigration. Most bakery salesladies found themselves becoming more mature, worrying more and even developing different perspectives of their gender role. Most social workers found themselves becoming stronger and more outgoing. Angel (S4) went into further detail about her changes:

I was a very quiet person. When surrounded by friends, my friends would joke around and I would laugh. But it’s different in the United States. I have realized that you need to fight for your own rights. I would have to be outgoing in order to get more. Then, I started to change. I began to step out. I came to know more people, made more friends and slowly built up my circle of friends.

Most female immigrants in the social workers group came here at school age. They had to negotiate their identity at school, which celebrated values that clashed with traditional Chinese
gender role ideals. For example, although Chinese women were expected to be submissive and protected by males, which would no longer be the case for female immigrants.

When Angel’s cousin moved to the United States, he attended a high school, where people would bully him. Angel helped him out. As she recounted,

“It is my fourth year here, and nothing has happened to me.” I told him honestly. It was almost lunch period. I told him that I would bring all my friends there, and I did – both Black and White boys – to eat with us. After that, no one bullied him anymore…We needed a network and couldn’t just stay in the Chinese circle.

By then, Angel had learned that she had to advocate for her own rights. One way to protect herself was to have a big group of friends that included people from different racial groups. She also had to speak in English. Women who were more assimilated into the mainstream culture were less likely to encounter discriminative behavior.

The bakery salesladies also mentioned that they had become more mature after moving to the United States. Liza (B2) stated,

I was different. I am a little more mature now. Because I was very naïve, had very simple way of thinking…I can no longer be thinking in simple ways here, I was different…I had more real-world experience.

While having more worries is a part of growing up, immigrant youth may have even more to worry about. This was especially true for the bakery salesladies. Many of them had to worry about housing, finances, the language barrier, and how to discipline their children. For example, traditional Chinese parents spank their children as a disciplinary measure. After learning a little more about American culture, immigrant parents become fearful about spanking their children and may flip to the other extreme to start feeling helpless about discipline. Some bakery salesladies expressed that they understood that there were different policies in the United States than in China about physical punishment of children. They believed that absolutely no physical
punishment was accepted in the United States. Parents who were not U.S. citizens still were afraid to punish their children in any way because they were afraid that they might get into trouble in the legal system and risked their legal status in the United States or risked the custody of their children. In conducting parenting workshops in a Chinese church in New York City, apart from this study, I have also observed that parents had expressed very similar concerns about disciplining their children.

According to Guo (2013), immigration represents a series of stressful experiences and involves a high level of uncertainty. Parenting is especially stressful for immigrants, as revealed in Katie’s (B3) story.

When Katie’s son wanted something, she would not give it to him right away. Her parents, however, would try to stop her son from crying as soon as possible by giving in to him. The toddler quickly learned to use crying as a way of getting what he wanted. Katie stood by her principles at the beginning but was soon worried that the neighbors might hear her son cry, report her to the police, and get the entire family into trouble. Therefore, and especially during the night, her son got whatever he wanted. Katie was struggling with the differences in parenting ideals and child discipline practices in the two parts of the world. Many Chinese immigrants believed that letting children cry for a prolonged period or punishing their children in any way would turn into a case of child abuse. Because they were so afraid of getting into trouble and losing their immigrant status, some immigrants began to raise their children differently than they would had they been in China. Cultural differences and continual negotiation between assimilation and acculturation form a chronic source of worry. The unfamiliar culture also makes their adjustment to a new world a confusing process.
While still holding onto certain traditional ideologies (e.g., being a good girl and being a peacemaker), female Chinese immigrants tend to have more worries and be more involved in family matters and decision making. This is because the entire family is adapting to a new culture together and women are discovering a new sense of freedom and rights.

3.4.2 Life goals. It was fascinating to observe how social workers were much more likely to talk about their dreams, aspirations, and hopes. The social workers’ dreams tended to be abstract (such as making the world better in some way) whereas the bakery salesladies were much more likely to talk about concrete goals (such as opening their own stores or hoping that their children would do well at school and get a good job). The picture emerging from these responses shows social workers identifying themselves as contributors to the world and bakery salesladies identifying themselves as good mothers.

Ling (B5)’s husband was working in a distant town and could only come home occasionally. Ling articulated her life goal in the following excerpt:

My life goal is to work hard, earn more money, and raise my daughter. In the future, (I) will pay for her college education. I hope she will be successful at work, have a more comfortable job…and won’t have to work as hard as we do.

As did other Chinese Americans, Ling valued education. Although Ling reported being happy at work, her working life was still hard, and she wished that her daughter could get more education and not have to work as hard as she did.

Joann (S3) commented:

Actually, my life goal is to do what I should and can do well consistently. I hope that my life is useful. I hope that as I came to this world… I hope that my life can contribute to society and be useful to others. I don’t want to be a great person; I love being a small potato. I love being a small potato and not taking up big roles. As long as I can help a little, I am satisfied. There may be things that I want to do more, but I don’t have to be eager to a point that I must get those things done. I’m willing to do whatever that needs to be done in every situation.
Joann was willing to help out in every situation but shied away from taking up “big roles.” This mentality resembles the Chinese female ideology of being modest. Joann wanted to have a meaningful life and was content in her modest behavior.

For four of the social workers, Christianity is also a big part of their identity. Four out of six social workers mentioned serving God as part of their life goals. For example, Sandy (S2) had been serving God all the years she spent in Hong Kong, and her life goal was also related to serving God. In her words:

My life goal, I believe I’m more faith-oriented. I will do my best to do my best no matter what role assigned to me. I will… share this faith with others. But I don’t know how to spread the gospel continuously. But I would …like I work in mental health because my life…I believe if I live a Christian lifestyle, this is my biggest goal. People can see God in me. That is my God.

Sandy (S2) did not have any children and her life was God-oriented both before and after she got married. She believed that God had an assigned role for her and she would do it and spread the gospel. She was one of the two participants who saw career as being more important than family, possibly because she had no children and was free from the pressures of being a mother. Thus, Sandy was able to work more without worrying so much about not taking good care of her family.

Three social workers (Mandy, Sandy, and Angel) mentioned serving others as their life goal, which was why they chose to become social workers in the first place.

Angel (S4) mentioned:

As long as I can touch someone’s life, that’s good enough…That is, if my life can influence other people’s lives in the right way, in a good way, that’s enough.

This was the statement Angel wrote on her application to enroll in her social worker program. Years later, she realized that her life goal had not been changed at all. Her passion was still
there even though she stopped working nine years ago to take care of her three children and did not return to the workforce until shortly before the interview.

Mandy (S6) said:

My life goal...um...is to do something more “out of the four walls,” which means other than my family. Sometimes, I’m torn between my role as a wife, my role as a daughter. I try to maintain that. Um...my role at church, and the commitments I have. But I’ve always desired to do something much more community-oriented, something that goes beyond these four walls in which I’m so much enclosed. So far, I haven’t reached that goal yet...but it’s my plan to do something more in that wider sense.

In contrast to Angel, who spent nine years taking care of her three children and was ready to return to the workforce and make a difference in the world, Mandy had no children and had been spending all her life taking care of her family. Now, her goal/dream was to step out of the family and do something for the community. When asked about their life goals neither Angel nor Mandy focused on their family. Instead, both focused on the outside world and what they could do for others.

The bakery salesladies clearly differed on this aspect and took up the more traditional role of focusing on family needs. They derived a sense of success based on the harmony of the family and the success of their husband and children. In contrast, even though the social workers reported that family was more important than career, their life goals showed them looking beyond the family and dreaming of making a difference in the world.

Significant differences were found between the two groups. Traditionally, Chinese men would handle all matters outside the house, and Chinese women would handle all matters inside

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48 Mandy was very busy with her role as a wife, a daughter, and an active church member. She did not want to give up those roles, but she was still wishing that she could find time to contribute to the community in other ways.
the house. Due to their social contexts and past experiences, social workers were more comfortable stepping out of the comfort zone (occupied by traditional Chinese women) and focusing on the needs of the community. The bakery salesladies, however, focused more on the needs of the family.

3.4.3 Conflict handling. As expected, women focused on their internally directed emotions more than externally directed ones. When discussing conflicts that occurred at work and at home, both groups attributed their actions and reactions to their cultural beliefs, unwritten rules in their family, and their gender role identity.

Family conflicts in immigrant families are complicated by the acculturation gap and the different rates of acculturation among different members (Lee et al., 2000). In a study of social support and social conflict among Chinese Americans, Hwang, Myers, and Takeuchi (2000) found that the collectivist culture fosters a heightened sensitivity to the presence of interpersonal tension and conflict. Chinese women, expected to take care of group members, are more vulnerable to the effects of interpersonal problems. Differences between kin and non-kin relationships also determine their help-seeking behaviors. The level of acculturation also varies across different generations, depending on the extent to which a person is proficient in English, has adopted Western values and lifestyles, and socialized into the mainstream society. Family conflicts related to acculturation can be found in older immigrants and later-generation families in which parents have kept traditional cultural values (Lee et al., 2000). The length of time each family member has spent in the United States may also influence how the family, and thus the participant, copes with conflicts at home. A more traditional way of addressing conflict can be expected in conflicts with family members from older generations (especially those who have just moved to the United States).
When asked about how she dealt with conflicts at home, Candy (B2) said:

When people live together, whether it’s husband and wife, or other relationships, there will be (conflict). But there’s a saying in Chinese—tolerate. “忍一時風平浪靜” (Yield for a moment, and the wind shall calm and the wave shall subside.) That is, don’t have too many opinions. Don’t say a word, and the matter will pass and it will become nothing. That is, don’t let the matter…don’t let it happen. (We) should deal with it calmly together. We don’t say anything and everything will pass and nothing will happen.

“忍一時風平浪靜” (“Yield for a moment, and the wind shall calm and the wave shall subside”) is a common Chinese saying. It is followed by the second phrase “退一步海闊天空” (“Step back, and the sea will broaden and the sky open”). In other words, when things happen, yield and step back and everything will be fine. As the peacemakers in the household, women are especially encouraged to adopt this Chinese way of viewing hardship and conflict.

Jen (B6), who was living with her sister’s family (in a 7-person household), also commented:

Just take it in. Sometimes it could be my fault. No matter if I’m wrong or not, just keep quiet and everything will be okay…it is unpleasant. But I feel like if you are living together, then you have to tolerate each other. When you keep quiet, the matter will pass.

Like Candy, Jen was convinced that she should not say anything in times of conflict, and everything would be fine. When conflicts emerged many bakery salesladies expressed similar views and mentioned that as soon as one party voiced his or her opinion or opened their mouth the relationship was ruined and it was hard to reconcile.

In Chinese culture, “face” is extremely important. For females, in particular, respecting the principle of modesty means giving face to others and refraining from directing negative remarks to someone else in front of the entire family. Because bakery salesladies were more likely to share a household with other family members, it was hard to communicate in private with the other party with whom they had a conflict. Even if they were ready to argue with their husbands
in private, they did not want other family members to overhear the conversation. Most of them let the matter settle itself and did their best not to mention it again. In addition, they tended to face strong pressure (especially from the older generation) to behave in line with traditional expectations of Chinese women.

As mentioned earlier, the bakery salesladies mentioned that there was no conflict at work except for one case in which all of the salesladies entered into conflict with the storeowner in a previous job. Typically, bakery salesladies dealt with conflicts in more traditional ways, avoiding conflict and had a more modest manner. Even the saleslady who mentioned a past conflict believed that there was no use to argue with the storeowner; the salesladies who worked there simply quit one by one and found other jobs.

In contrast, the social workers, who lived only with their immediate family members and had more privacy in the home context, handled home conflicts differently.

Joann (S3) said, “Perhaps it’s me, or both of us, we believe that everything must be clear. Make it clear. So, that’s our routine, we have to discuss with each other after arguments.”

Angel (S4) commented,

Whether it’s a small argument or if it’s a big fight, I usually stop talking to him at first. I would go upstairs or take a break. I would reflect and figure out why I had such a “big” reaction. Why was I so angry? Er...if there was something wrong with my tone of voice, I would say sorry to him first. I would say, “I’m really sorry that I was so angry. My tone of voice was not good.” But that’s all I will take. If I don’t feel that it’s my fault, ...No, I don’t think you’re right all the time. I would discuss with him and came to a conclusion of why I reacted like I did. If it’s because of “this,” I would ask him to help me manage my anger next time. If he could do “that,” it would help me a lot. And then we would have a solution. It would usually work well for a few days. Then he would do the same (wrong) things again, and the situation would return to normal. This is usually how we deal with our conflicts.

Interestingly, whenever Angel argued with her husband, she would automatically switch to English. As she said, she suspected that was because she was trained not to talk about her
emotions when she was in her Chinese household with her parents. Thus, she is more comfortable switching to English when expressing her emotions, even though the couple usually communicated in Chinese at home.

Everyone in the social workers group preferred to resolve issues with the other party through discussion. This style of conflict resolution may be due to their occupation, in which they encourage clients to discuss matters and solve the problem collaboratively. Thus, it is reasonable for the social workers to do the same thing at home. In fact, two of the social workers see themselves as social workers for their families. When there are conflicts in the family, family members come to them for help and expect them to solve their problems.

All social workers talked about conflicts at work, with some of these conflicts stemming from discrimination or cultural differences.

Sandy (S2) had to mediate conflicts stemming from cultural differences between her Chinese student intern and her American colleagues.

I was supervising a student and perhaps I was not used to it. Perhaps I didn’t know how. The student had many problems, many difficulties, gave me a lot of trouble, and I sought help from my team. I asked my team to help me. They made a lot of suggestions, but they didn’t understand my culture. Because I was a Chinese and a student myself (so I understood the student I supervised)…they didn’t really understand some of our cultural behavior, so some of the suggestions that they gave were not that feasible. The suggestions may not have helped the student or myself. Yet they believed that I should do as they said. In those cases, I would have to explain myself to them and explain my culture. For example, when we Chinese go to a new place, we won’t...(be greeting others), they complained that my student didn’t greet them or that she seemed very weak and stuttered. They would think, “Why are you acting that way? You wouldn’t be presentable.” And they would ask me to talk to the student. But the student needed time to adapt and I needed to give her a little space. And we needed a lot of support… …They would respond in certain ways that were not culturally sensitive. I had to explain to them but it was difficult. I used to work with Chinese people. My English…my communication skills were not strong and so that made the situation very hard.
Sandy felt that she was not understood and that her colleagues did not provide the support she really needed due to the cultural differences and her language barrier. Being Chinese, she could understand why her intern was not greeting everyone but it was difficult for her team to see the cultural difference. The situation put pressure on her because she was so enmeshed in it. Her colleagues expected her to communicate their complaints to the intern and to educate the intern to act more appropriately. At the same time, she understood why the intern was acting that way and why she never received support and feasible advice from the team. At first, Sandy tried communicating with the team to resolve the conflict but eventually she gave up. The problem was solved naturally at the end of the internship period.

Susan (S5), who was quite outgoing and outspoken, once confronted a receptionist when she witnessed discriminatory behavior toward a Chinese client at work.

I felt like they didn’t understand the Chinese culture and perceived Chinese people in a very condescending manner. For example, they didn’t have the patience to deal with (Chinese patients). I remember clearly how I was walking by the counter of this receptionist who didn’t know that I was right behind her. A Chinese man approached her and I have to admit that the man did not make a lot of sense. But even if he didn’t make sense to her, it doesn’t mean that you can treat someone like this…The Chinese went in front of the Black receptionist and started talking in Chinese. The receptionist was very rude to him and said, “Are you blind?”…Then, I went up to her immediately and said to her, “He deserves better attitude than this. This is not the way that you should treat him.” Then, I talked to the client in Chinese and told him what to do. I couldn’t take it. You can mis-treat me, but you can’t threaten members or patients in such a bad way.

Normally, social workers tend to solve conflicts through communication and try not to be confrontational at work, unless when they see something that is unacceptable, such as discrimination. Susan, who was the only participant who had confronted others at work, stated, “it’s part of the Chinese culture. We don’t like direct confrontation, especially at work. I guess in the Chi-
nese culture, once you confront someone, it’s very hard to reconcile the relationship. So, I always avoid this.”

This mentality resembles the mindset of one of the bakery salesladies at home, with the difference that the bakery salesladies did not even talk about conflicts while the social workers communicated about issues despite avoiding direct confrontation.

Mandy (S6) just got a new job when she was interviewed and was very frustrated that she was being accused of not returning one of the forms needed. That was not her fault, and she was very angry at one point. As she said,

I was angry at that time, so angry that I said to her, “What do you want me to do? Should I resign?” (Laugh) My response was that. But I was just angry. I saw them (her boss and the lady who had a conflict with her earlier) last week at a meeting and they didn’t mention the incident again. I just left it at that. If they mentioned it again, I…I would probably feel angry again. That might happen. I mean I didn’t sound angry. But I would state my mind. It’s true that no one asked me for it. I said, “Believe it or not, I don’t have it. If I have it, I would have given it to you. But I don’t have it.” That was what I said. Then, she said, “Well, if you don’t have it, you shouldn’t see clients.” I said, “What do you want me to do? I was with clients when you called me.” And she became more frustrated and upset when I said that. I was frustrated too and I knew that I had the right to (fight back)…so that’s pretty much the only conflict.

Although Mandy felt greatly angered, she tried her best to communicate gently and not to sound angry. When she saw her colleague at a later meeting, she chose to let the matter go. As mentioned earlier, face is very important to Chinese people. Being confronted strips a person of his or her face and it becomes very hard to continue working together.

It is interesting to find that the social workers were more confrontational at home than at work, which contradicted my hypothesis. I had expected that, given their relatively more American-style gender role at work and relatively more traditional gender role at home, the social workers would act more “non-traditionally” at work than they did at home. The flipped result
may have been due to me overlooking that many Chinese social workers in New York City actually worked with many, if not exclusively, Chinese colleagues.

The social workers’ education and their job environment have transformed their gender role identity in subtle ways of which they might not even be aware. Because none of the social workers interviewed lived with their in-laws or extended family, they may have felt safer to be confrontational at home with their closest family members because their behaviors were not restrained by the traditional ideologies that were imposed onto them by other family members.

**Summary.** For both groups, their style of conflict management was affected by gender role identity, household size, and family members’ level of acculturation. No age differences were found.

Bakery salesladies, who were living with more family members and those from older generations, were more likely to experience the pressure to behave like a traditional Chinese woman—modest and non-confrontational. At the bakery, which served as a second home for the women, the salesladies were under a similar pressure to behave in traditional ways and to avoid conflicts.

In contrast, the social workers were more likely to express their concerns at home and discuss conflicts with the party involved. Sharing a household with only immediate family members, they were not under pressure to behave traditionally and enjoyed the freedom to express themselves at home. At work, they experience the expectations and influence of the surrounding Chinese community. Specifically, the social workers were expected to behave as traditional Chinese women and they were also likely to see themselves as representatives of Chinese culture. When the identity of being a Chinese woman became salient at work, they actually behaved according to perceived expectations.
Whereas both groups tried to avoid conflicts at work, social workers were more likely than bakery salesladies to express their frustration when encountering conflicts. While trying not to be too aggressive or confrontational, the social workers voiced their opinion and expressed their dissatisfaction in a calm manner. The bakery salesladies, however, appeared to experience no conflict at all at work. Interpersonal harmony was so important to them that they overlooked potential conflicts at work with a “let it go” mentality. The bakery salesladies’ life goals may have also affected how they address conflicts. Wanting to work hard and save up for their children’s education, they did not want to create trouble at work and risk losing their job or address conflict as home and risk breaking the family up and lose the financial benefits of living together. In this way the bakery salesladies drew on their cultural resources and their goals to cope with conflict.

3.4.4 Gender role identity and gender role ideologies.

What people say, what people do, and what they say they do are entirely different things.

— Margaret Mead

As previously defined, gender role identity refers to the gender that a person assumes at both cultural and individual levels. It forms the basis of one’s knowledge about and positioning regarding gender-typed norms and behavior which develop over time as a result of activities and interactions within multiple social institutions. Women are not passive subjects of social influences and factors and it is important to understand them as actors involved in a complex process of negotiating and accomplishing the gender dimensions of their identities.

In the interview, there was a specific question about the participants’ gender role ideologies: “What do you think Chinese women should be like?” Investigating the differences between the participants’ answers to this specific question and the way they handle conflicts or other be-
haviors they discussed in the interview yielded interesting result. It was found that there may be some discrepancies between their gender role ideologies and their interactions within the activity system.

All bakery salesladies expressed the view that Chinese women should be more traditional and more conservative; most explicitly expressed that set of values was particularly salient in terms of romantic relationships. Although some bakery salesladies mentioned that women should work and not stay at home, they all believed that Chinese women should maintain the Chinese tradition ideology. On the other hand, three social workers had an egalitarian view on gender ideologies and believed that women should no longer be oppressed and Chinese women should be more educated. The other three social workers believed that Chinese women should remain traditional.

In contrast, there was no group difference found in the way women prioritized their work and family. One bakery saleslady stated that both work and family are equally important; one bakery saleslady and two social workers expressed that work is more important for them; all other participants indicated that family is more important to them.

First, in discussing participants’ ideologies versus their life goals, the following should be noted. These ideologies are somewhat reflected in their life goals yet not completely so. As mentioned previously, all the bakery salesladies’ life goal focused on the domestic sphere. They aimed at working hard (at their job or eventually opening up their own business), saving up and hoping that their children would be more educated and not have to work as hard as they did. One bakery saleslady believed that work was more important and one believed that both work and family were equally important, yet all of them focused on the inner sphere in terms of life goals. The social workers focused instead on the “public sphere.” They wanted to contribute to the so-
ciety: by touching other’s lives, contributing in small ways to their communities, starting community programs, or through their religion. It was interesting to see that four out of six social workers put family as their priority in life and three of them believed that Chinese women should be more traditional. Yet all of them had a life goal that focused on community wellbeing instead of their own families.

Second, in terms of the gender role ideology of Chinese women, their own gender role ideologies, and their interaction with others in their activity systems, the following findings are noteworthy. There were cases where participants’ ideas of gender role ideology for Chinese women as a group contradicted their own individual gender role ideologies, and there were cases where participants’ interactions with others in their activity system were the opposite of their own gender role ideology. For example, Joann (S2) considered herself the mediator and peacemaker at home, yet she married a husband much older than she despite her family’s, especially her father’s, strong opposition. She noted that Chinese women are oppressed and that she was a victim herself. Because she was a female she was expected to do most of the housework, help out in her family’s restaurant, and discontinue her education. Although she was born in a really oppressive family which emphasized the traditional family hierarchy, she learned to fight for her own rights and got married despite her family’s strong opposition. Additionally, another social worker, Sandy, indicated that work was more important than family for her, and so she was non-traditional and did not put family first. On the other hand, she believed that Chinese women should be traditional and see husbands as the heads of household. Although she put work first, she seemed to adapt to the traditional gender role ideologies she believed in because she assumed that no matter how successful a woman was, if there was no harmony in her household, she had failed.
The examples above reveal complex relationships between gender role ideologies, gender role identity, and social interactions with others in the activity systems. When immigrants interact with others in their activity system, within particular contexts they are negotiating and doing gender and establishing their gender role identity. The participants interact with the tools and signs around them in their community. And they face different rules and division of labor to gain the knowledge of gender role ideology while also acting upon this knowledge, negotiating it, and developing their gender role identity. While the women are doing gender and negotiating their gender role identity, they may or may not follow their knowledge about gender role ideology. While they are trying to function as females in their context, they react differently in different situations; therefore, the relationships of social gender role ideologies, the women’s gender role identities, and their behavior appear to be complex.

3.5 Discussion

Combining a narrative approach and activity theory is effective in generating rich information on how Chinese female immigrants understand themselves as women and how their knowledge about themselves is manifested in their activities and identities in the institutions of work, school, and family.

In their narratives, almost all of the participants expressed positive reactions, saw themselves as Chinese immigrants, and wanted to be “good girls,” and discussed language- and discrimination-related episodes. Their activities and gender identities were mediated by signs and tools present in their environment and activity systems (workplace, schools, family, and others), which included language and socio-economic status. These activity systems differed in terms of the values, rules and division of labor that were different for the two groups.
Because of all the differences in their activity systems, the participants developed somewhat different gender role identities. Participants from both the social worker group and the bakery saleslady group understood themselves as women who were different from American women in terms of having less freedom and being more conservative.

Many of the gender-related challenges and issues addressed in this study such as the pressure to combine work and family obligations are not limited to Chinese immigrants but are also prevalent in American society. Other ideology-related pressures such as the drive to give birth to a son and to have a special relationship to mothers-in-law, in contrast, appear to be specifically Chinese. Yet because all of these pressures and challenges are negotiated by Chinese immigrants based on their unique history, including their gender ideology, their participation in unique activity systems, and their access (or lack thereof) to cultural tools and resources, it is hard to see American counterparts equally experiencing these pressures. Chinese female immigrants are acting within the context of the Chinese traditional ideologies and their historical legacies to a certain extent, for example, facing specific pressure to serve the family that permeate all other aspects of their lives and careers. Because of family constraints of these histories and ideologies, how immigrant Chinese women perceive and understand the challenges and employ the tools available to them, appears to be unique to them to a significant degree. As Mahalingam and Leu (2005) argue, immigrant females do not simply assimilate into the mainstream culture. For example, quite paradoxically, in confronting American ideologies, they resort to essentializing gender norms and even strengthen Chinese values as a self-protective mechanism to preserve one’s cultural identity and uniqueness. This point again highlights that women are not passive subjects of social influences and factors, instead being actors who are actively involved in the complex process of constructing their gender dimensions of their identities while negotiating
various ideologies and pressures. This suggests that gender identity is not something people simply “have”; but that instead, they are “doing gender” in their social interactions and contexts, and thus actively constructing their identities.

For example, although three social workers explicitly expressed that they did not believe in traditional Chinese gender role ideologies but believed that men and women should have a relatively equal relationship and that women should be oppressed, they also mentioned that Chinese women were different from Americans because Chinese women should still be more conservative and should sacrifice for the family.

Similarly, it was hard to separate the influence of class from other effects on gender role identity development. The gender role identities of the participants were not simply given to them when they moved to the United States. All the participants were negotiating gender ideologies and their own gender role identity while interacting with others in their activity system at the intersection of their family, their immigration experiences, and other contexts.

As Brettell and Sargent (2006) suggest, identity construction, especially for immigrants, should be studied as a process of “making people” who have the contradictory sense of “belonging” and the experience of mobility. Different subject positions—racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and generational—and gender terms as well as class should be taken into account. Brettell and Sargent also illustrated how identities are constructed in the context of everyday practices; partly by immigrants negotiating for themselves and partly as defined by the host culture.

Therefore, it is important to study gender role identity development at the intersection of immigration, class, generation, language and other contexts even though it is hard to separate the influence of every single factor.
Besides, both groups used the term Chinese exclusively in the interviews and none of them ever used the term Chinese-American although sometimes what they meant was specifically Chinese immigrants in the United States. Not only did they differentiate themselves from the American groups, they also tended to attach to their Chinese identity more than to a Chinese-American identity. It was interesting that most of them (5 bakery salesladies and 4 social workers) chose their identity as Chinese Americans and yet they referred to themselves and their population as Chinese in the interview.

Influenced by traditional ideology, both groups were ready to take up diligent work and prioritize their families. The bakery salesladies, however, tended to have only the Chinese community as their internalized audience whereas the social workers tended to have both the Chinese community and Americans as their internalized audience. As a result, the social workers also saw themselves as representing Chinese culture when interacting with American culture, especially in their work settings. Therefore, despite employing the senior friend-young friend principle and respecting lower-rank coworkers who had a longer tenure at their workplace, they also acted on behalf of their cultural group by being cultural brokers and advocates. Therefore, although both groups expressed that they would like to avoid conflicts at work; the social workers were a little more likely to express their opinions and to attempt to do it in a non-confrontational way.

In addition, both groups believed that traditional values still influenced their day-to-day life but were being challenged after immigration. The tradition of valuing males over females, three obedience commands and four virtues, the family hierarchy, and male supremacy still existed in their families, but Chinese female immigrants were no longer expected to be only homemakers. They enjoyed greater freedom in the United States and believed that they could be
the female heads of the households. They were more likely to see themselves as equal to their male counterparts, although it was not yet reflected in the Chinese community.

The two groups differed in the extent to which they were influenced by American culture, though. Specifically, the social workers, who had more contact with mainstream culture, were being more strongly influenced by it than the bakery salesladies, who tended to interact only with the Chinese community. The social workers were more likely to voice their opinions and have discussions with their husbands when issues arose, although they still made an effort to stop themselves when they sensed that their husband disliked being confronted. They also were more likely to view their life goal as something bigger than their family and would like to do more for the community or society. In contrast, the bakery salesladies tried “not to say anything” when conflicts arose at home and to let matters pass. They were very uncomfortable being confrontational because they were afraid that relationships would be hard to repair.

Overall, Chinese immigrant women’s gender role identities and their functioning in their system were influenced by the settings they were in, their family situation (including household size), their language ability, and the value, rules, and division of labor in their system.

This work reveals that the activity systems of the social workers group and the bakery salesladies group were somewhat different. The differences are reflected in the participants’ understanding of themselves as women, in their life goals, and in the ways in which they negotiated and handled various conflicts and challenges stemming from their participation in diverse activity systems.
4. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Studies

4.1 Conclusions

Returning to the country of origin, though, is just the next country of migration: when one lives abroad one’s neighborhood changes, just as one does oneself.

(Mleczko, 2011, p. 46)

This study integrates and extends the efforts by scholars from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and psychology to bridge the gap between research on gender and on immigration. These efforts mark a countermovement to prevailing conceptions that view gender and immigration experiences as separate sets of factors or variables. Indeed, for many decades, immigration researchers paid little attention to gender and have only recently begun to remedy this situation. In an analysis of the history of these efforts, Mahler and Pessar (2006) recognize the growing importance of gender as not merely a variable in research on migration despite that “gender is still not viewed by most researchers in the field as a key constitutive element of migrations” (p. 28). Furthermore, the same authors note that, “the field had eschewed female migrants owing to the widely shared assumption that women (and children) migrate to accompany or to reunite with their breadwinner migrant husbands” (p. 28). There is a clear marginalization of gender in research on immigration which finds its expression, among other forms, in the undervaluation of the qualitative data on this topic (Mahler & Pessar, 2006).

This study addresses the interrelationship of immigration, gender role identity development, class, education, and the overarching social context. One of the most striking findings of this study is that many Chinese female immigrants have a sense of “frozen grief” (Boss, 1999) and a sense of insecurity when they no longer sense where their “homes” are. They expressed a
dilemma: they do not completely fit into American culture yet “feel like outsiders” when they visit their home country. Many recounted the difficulties they encountered when they first arrived in the United States. As time went by they adapted and their selves and identities changed. Yet those changes meant they could no longer return to their home country and live there. While they did not feel American, neither did they feel Chinese. Most of them saw themselves as Chinese-American, but they did not consider it a “real identity.” From the time they moved to the United States, they have actively engaged in their new environment to construct, de-construct, and re-construct their gender role identities. Their subjectivities and gender role identities have been continually renewed and negotiated as their experiences and contexts have changed.

Activity theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study because it offers a way to study the interaction between human agents and the world. Activity theory focuses on the evolving dynamics of activities and allows us to study the ever-shifting and constantly unfolding interrelations. It also acknowledges that the person is situated in a sociocultural and historical world and immersed in interactions with cultural tools and other people. Human subjectivity is seen as a relational process in which individuals play an active role as agents of sociohistorical practices. As Stetsenko (2005) notes:

…by returning to the world through activity processes in their endless manifold transitions, human subjectivity inevitably changes the world, positing (externalizing) itself in the materiality of human practice in its reified objective forms. The latter form, that is, the cultural-historical objects, not only come to embody communal social practice and they “reflect” and carry on the history and vicissitudes of their social production (as aptly shown by Ilyenkov, 1984, and A.N. Leontiev), but also appear as coming into being only when being again involved—further transformed and creatively developed—in human
practice that is carried out by concrete individuals. That is, the world of cultural-historical experience (reified in tools and objects) and human subjectivity appear as co-evolving and existing through conjoint constant reenactments in, and by the processes of, active transformations of the world. (p.83)

The activity theory framework, with its analytical categories and levels of analysis, captures the critical themes in the development of gender role identity in immigrant Chinese women. Based on this framework, gender role identity is not viewed in isolation but within the context of the entire activity system. This approach uncovers the process of development and accounts for the bigger picture surrounding the phenomenon. Specifically, the findings suggest that gender role identity and related activities (the outcome) are influenced by the settings in which the women take part, the language(s) they use, socio-economic status/social resources (the tools) and traditional Chinese values they have available, which include the endorsement of male supremacy, and the ideology that follows with the three obedience commands and four virtues (values, rules and division of labor). Each part of the activity system affects the development of gender role identity and the resultant behavior, which, in turn, shapes the entire system. Furthermore, an additional aspect taken into account is that the two activity systems (in China and in the United States) interact with each other. Female gender role identity development can be understood as a socially constructed relational process through which immigrants cultivate their unique ways of how to be, act, and know as females. At the same time, their development reciprocally changes the circumstances of their lives in the process of their development and learning.

Because the two interviewed groups of immigrant Chinese women differed in many ways (age, household size, level of acculturation, income range, educational background and working environment), I expected to find considerable differences between the two groups on how they
perceived themselves as Chinese women and how their self-perceptions were manifested in their marriage dynamics. Specifically, I expected the bakery salesladies to be more traditional than the social workers in terms of their gender role identity, with the differences manifested in the bakery salesladies being more submissive and more adherent to the ideology of the three obedience commands and four virtues in their marriage dynamics. This expectation found some support in the interviews. To my surprise, however, the social workers turned out to be more traditional in their work environment than in their home environment in terms of handling conflicts. In particular, although many of them worked with both Chinese and American coworkers, they behaved in accordance with their Chinese gender role identity.

Although this is a small study not intended for large-scale generalization, the findings suggest a complex picture of how gender ideologies “travel” across contexts. Female immigrants take their ideologies with them. Yet this process is far from a mechanical transmission of traditional ideologies to a new context. Instead, these ideologies are continuously reframed and actively negotiated by women themselves as they enter new activity systems, develop new interactions, acquire new knowledge, and rely on new cultural tools. This research illustrates the transition zone in which the received gender ideologies are transformed as they are applied in new contexts at the intersection with other ideologies within ever changing activity systems. What accounts for these transitions and transformations in ideologies and associated gender role identities is the active process of women doing gender in everyday life within the contexts of work, school, and family.

Comparing the two groups of participants reveals that each of the participants underwent changes after moving to the United States, that those changes occurred not only in their environment but, more crucially, in their values, behavior and self-perceptions. Overall, the bakery
salesladies and social workers experienced different socioeconomic statuses, leisure activities, educational backgrounds, and types of work. What the two groups clearly had in common, however, was their close ties to Chinese culture. Participants perceived traditional Chinese ideology as central to their lives, influencing their attitudes, beliefs, and identity in subtle and obvious ways. When the participants moved to the United States, they did not adapt to the culture as passive agents. Each moved to the United States with her own history and subjectivity closely tied to traditional Chinese gender ideologies. And each changed as she interacted with the real conditions of her activity system.

Holland et al. (1998) define identity as “a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations” (p. 5). All women actively participate in, interact with, and shape all elements and dimensions of the activity systems in which they participate. As they are doing gender, they are transforming not only themselves but also their activity systems with which they interact. As the Chinese, female immigrants who participated in this study moved to the United States, they were performing gender in an ever-shifting multi-layered sociocultural and historical world. Their performances of gender took place in the context of a changing Chinese culture, changes associated with the move from a Chinese to American culture, and changes in their immediate practices and communities. The gender role identities that they developed were not purely mental processes within isolated individuals. The development of their identities involved a continuous dynamic process that happened in their own context at particular levels within the historical socio-cultural system. Participants who moved to the United States early in life and received their education here learned that they could take on a more empowered gender role, and they acted differently as a result. In their formal education, they acquired a set of new psychological tools, which enabled
them to categorize their world in a different way and to view “acceptable female behaviors” differently. When the agent of the system changed, the entire interaction changed as well, which in turn influenced their gender role identity in a bi-directional and dynamic manner. Besides, material conditions also changed, and many bakery salesladies had to work and expressed concerns about their financial situations. Since class, socioeconomic status, and material conditions were all part of their activity systems, these dimensions affected the entire system and in turn affected the agent herself.

As shown in the interviews, the social workers learned that it was acceptable to express their emotions, to be outspoken, to see themselves as equal to their male counterparts, and to fight for their rights. The bakery salesladies, who moved to the United States later in life, may not have developed a complete psychological tool set that was significantly different from the one they had before, but it still affected their daily life and identities. The systems for both groups were constantly growing and evolving.

According to CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity Theory), human activities are goal-directed and collaborative with the goal of changing and creating the environment. We constantly make decisions in our daily lives based on our long-term and short-term goals. We strive to change and create an environment that would enhance our possibility of achieving our goals. The participants’ goals and purposes in life served as their compasses. The bakery salesladies frequently explained that their life goals were to provide for the family and raise successful/good children, whereas the social workers’ life goals were to actualize themselves or to serve the communities. Participants in both groups, however, expressed, with varying degrees of explicitness, that they wanted to fit in with their work or family environment as they were “doing their gender.” Therefore, Confucian ideals such as the principle of senior friend—young friend, male
supremacy, family hierarchy, maintaining interpersonal harmony, and women being peacemakers were clearly guiding the everyday behavior of the participants who continued to face traditional hierarchies in both their work and home settings. Many participants identified themselves as Chinese and discussed differences they saw between American and Chinese women. The more participants identified themselves as Chinese, the more their behavior and valued systems were guided by Chinese ideology. Although Chinese culture itself was undergoing gradual changes, whereby wives in both groups felt more freedom to voice their opinions and were not as submissive to their husbands as traditional Chinese women in the past, all participants still refrained from fighting and did their best to save face on behalf of their husbands, especially in front of the other family members.

The above themes in the narratives showed that immigrant Chinese women still held onto traditional Chinese values. Yet instead of being passively persons situating themselves in and reacting to the socio-historical context, they negotiated, contested, and engaged with the history and culture of their diverse contexts. Each brought with her her upbringing, her own history and culture and actively interacted with the entire activity system to develop her gender role identity.

While the gender role identity of immigrant Chinese women was definitely influenced by traditional Chinese values, the value system they embraced was also shaped by the women’s gender role identity and behavior. As seen from the interviews, the value system was changing and becoming less traditional. Nonetheless, changes occurred slowly because the immigrant women themselves served as a “monitoring system” that perpetuated traditional ideals and behavior. In fact, even the women’s behaviors and ways of thinking may be monitored by their own internalized audience. Therefore, more Americanized behaviors were considered acceptable by participants in the social worker group, who tended to have a mixed American and Chinese
audience. This was not the case for the bakery salesladies, who tended to have a Chinese audience in their minds.

Their gender role identity was deeply influenced by traditional Chinese ideology, with the effect observed in the narratives of both bakery salesladies and social workers. Interestingly, although both groups mentioned a newly found freedom in the United States, they distanced themselves from American culture and refrained from being too “Americanized.” Both groups held onto the traditional gender role identity to a certain extent. They chose to stay traditional in terms of sexual relations, forgoing confrontation unless necessary, maintaining interpersonal harmony whenever possible, and being a good girl. They were not simply transposed into the American socio-historical context but were actively participating in it. The results also show the importance of studying gender role identity through the lens of intersectionality and hybridity.

Mahalingam and Leu (2005) suggested using hybrid identity and intersectionality to understand gender role identity development suggests that immigration to the United States may not necessarily enhance gender equality in immigrant families and communities. Rather, immigrant women may actually develop their gender role identity in a way that strengthens the traditional gender role identity. Mahalingam and Leu (2005) argued that,

For immigrant women, essentialism serves as a self-protective mechanism to negate the dominant representations of the “other.” They discursively alternate between biological and social essentialist construals of ethnic identity. Understanding intersections of identities within specific social, historical and transnational contexts is crucial because intersections also could produce essentialized identities. (p. 857)

Similar to the Filipina mail-order brides and Indian women software programmers in Mahalingam and Leu’s (2005) study, both the bakery salesladies and social workers in this study
displayed an essentialist representation of self and the other. Participants in both groups differentiated themselves from American women and stated that “Asians were more conservative in terms of relationships.” Mahalingam and Leu (2005) argued that this projection of conservatism was a self-protection mechanism to negate the dominant representation of the other. The participants from both groups also commented that American women had “too much freedom,” in the sense that they could choose to pursue their interests and career over their families. When they used the term “too much,” it reflected their endorsement of more traditional gender role ideologies. They believed that, unlike men, women should take care of the family before taking care of themselves and that women should put the family’s needs before their own.

As Stetsenko (2013b) suggests individual subjectivity should be explained:

…in terms of manifest and inherently collaborative processes of individuals acting as social subjects (even while they engage, as they often do, in their own, seemingly withdrawn and private pursuits) – that is, as members of community practices and agents of communal history who enact collectivities by changing them through their own, individually unique contributions instantiated in each and every act of knowing, being, and doing. (p.9)

As we can see from the findings, female immigrants were jointly enacting collective practices mediated by cultural tools (ranging from their language to the tools they used to deal with everyday situations) in their community, which served the same history, to construct their gender role identities. Although many challenges that the Chinese female immigrants faced were the same or similar for Americans, how they perceived and understood these challenges and the cultural tools and resources they used to deal with the challenges were unique to their culture. In line with Stetsenko’s suggestion, they were all community members and acting together as social
subjects who contributed to transforming their community, activity system, as well as themselves. The female immigrants were not “given” their reality but are rather transforming their world through their collective activities.

Stetsenko’s (2013b) idea of “collectidual practice” helps to explain how the participants in this study were doing gender in their context. Stetsenko argues:

The transformative ontology of social praxis—augmented by the notion of individual contributions to this praxis as its carriers and embodiments (as suggested in TAS\(^{49}\))—can be seen as superseding\(^ {50}\) the very distinction between collective and individual levels or dimensions of social practices. What is offered instead is one unitary realm or process in need of new terms to convey the dialectical amalgamation of the social and the individual—such as the “collectidual practice.” This term suggests that individuals always act together in pursuit of their common goals, being inescapably bound by communal bonds and filaments, yet each individual acts from a unique socio-historical position (stand-point) and with a unique commitment (endpoint), though always coordinated and aligned with the social projects/practices to which this commitment contributes. (p.5)

Stetsenko (2013b) suggests that we need to address more centrally the simultaneity and unity of human transformative practices as well as the process of knowing and becoming. In this

\(^{49}\) TAS: Transformative activist stance

\(^{50}\) The term “superseding,” used in a dialectical sense, “denotes a conceptual move that does not eliminate a given phenomenon or its properties but instead, lifts them up and includes them, albeit in a subordinate role, into a new systemic whole comprised, in this case, by human collaborative practices” (Stetsenko, 2013b, p.12).
light, the Chinese female immigrants were acting together with others in pursuit of their common goals and negotiating their identity in the “ever-changing dynamics of transformative efforts and struggles” (Stetsenko, 2013, p.15) and yet because of their own unique socio-historical position, they contribute to their social projects/practices in their own ways.

This dissertation compares two groups of Chinese immigrant women to investigate the development of gender role identity as a process by which women do gender using different tools within their activity system and their histories. The bakery salesladies (who had limited English proficiency, low socioeconomic status, and did not have much school experience in the United States) were doing gender in the work setting, which they viewed as a second home and was operated based on the traditional Chinese power hierarchy. Likewise, they performed their gender roles in the household context, where in-laws held traditional beliefs and asserted power over the participants. For these women, the changes in their activity system were not as dramatic as those of the social workers. Hence, although the participants did develop a more egalitarian gender role identity (such as feeling fine about venturing beyond the family and having a job), they were still traditional, avoiding conflict at work and at home and pursuing goals that were strictly family-oriented.

In contrast, the social workers (who had good English proficiency, higher socioeconomic status, and received much of their education in the United States) did gender in the work setting, which endorsed both male-female equality and the senior-friend young-friend principle. They also did gender in the household, which consisted of only core family members who did not necessarily hold traditional gender role expectations. For these immigrants, the changes in their activity system were more dramatic and involved more cross-cultural contact and conflict with the mainstream American context. As a result, the social workers developed a more egalitarian
gender role identity than did the bakery salesladies. Nonetheless, traditional gender role ideals continued to deeply influence everyday interactions of these participants. Social workers had life goals focused on the welfare of the outside world but, at the same time, still tended to feel uncomfortable about being too important or influential.

In conclusion, gender role identity development is a complicated phenomenon. In developing their own gender role identities people do not simply change and develop according to their social and historical contexts. They bring with them their own subjectivity and ideologies rooted in their past experiences of interacting with others in negotiating their new social and historical contexts. This study suggests the importance of intersectionality in studying gender not as an individual trait nor “as-is” but in the context of development, history, and activity systems.

4.2 Limitations

The human understanding is like a false mirror, which, receiving rays irregularly distorts and discolors the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it.

( Francis Bacon, 1621, as cited in Brown, 1996 )

To avoid distorting and discoloring the nature of the studied processes and phenomena, researchers need to nurture self-awareness, openness, tolerance of ambiguity, and the ability to think and function holistically. At the beginning of this research, I wrote a detailed narrative of my own gender role development to reflect on how I grew up, what my beliefs were, and how they changed with my experiences within diverse cultural contexts. Brown (1996) also mentions the importance of meta-communication. Researchers should be aware of their own experience and be able to self-reflect. Thus, I took detailed notes of what I expected from the interviews and reflected on the communications I had with the participants. Because interviews are subject to interpretation, I also read the transcripts numerous times to minimize possible “blind spots” and
biases. However, as the interviews have to be interpreted through a set of lenses, there is always a degree of personal belief and interpretation involved. This is a common feature of qualitative research, which relies on interpreting situated experiences and voices while acknowledging the researcher’s views and beliefs as part of the process of conducting the study.

Another limitation of this study has to do with the snowball technique by which I recruited participants. Because of the self-selective nature of the sample, the study findings may not be fully representative of the entire group. For example, Chinese immigrants who agreed to participate in this research might be more ready to share their immigration stories and, in this way, they might be different from women who did not volunteer to participate.

Finally, this research is limited by its small sample size. The study findings may not be generalizable to Chinese immigrants who hold different occupations or Chinese immigrants in other cultural or geographical regions. Despite the small sample size, the interviews were intensive and provided rich information about the two groups. Multiple in-depth case studies about immigrants give the marginalized population a voice and enable them to be heard. In-depth qualitative studies with a small sample size have traditionally been employed to illustrate how immigrants make sense of their surroundings and how their subjective interpretations of personal cross-cultural encounters influence their subjectivities and, in turn, their surroundings (Li, 2009; Qin, 2012). In conclusion, although the findings contribute to our understanding of how Chinese, female immigrants understand themselves as women and how perceived gender roles manifest themselves in conflict resolution; caution must be exercised when applying the findings to the general population.

As mentioned earlier, according to the 2010 census, minorities will become the majority in the United States by 2050. Hence, it is important for future research to continue examining the
quality of adaptation and the nature of identity development in order to help the immigrant families flourish in their new home country.

4.3 Future Studies

Many participants indicated that their husbands saw their family as their priority. For example, Candy (B2) commented,

He (her husband) put his family first. It’s his priority. In terms of work, he doesn’t have much ambition. He thinks that money is not that important to him. He wants his family to be happy. This is the most important thing to him. He is happy to simply watch the children play. He enjoys watching our child’s every move. He just loves children.

Susan’s (S5) husband, who did not want to have children at first, also became a family man after having his first child. In her words, “He is a very good father. He is also a good husband. He really loves our daughter. My daughter participates in many different activities, and he is always happy to be part of it.”

In both cases, the husbands were non-traditional. Specifically, they prioritized their families over their careers when the traditional value should be 男主外，女主内 (Men focus on the “outside” while women focus on the “inside”), which means that men should focus on career development while women focus on the family. An interesting future direction is to examine the prevalence of family men in traditional Chinese cultures and to investigate whether the immigration process produces a change in male gender role identity.

In addition, the participants were happy to simply contribute to the study and many of them even tried not to accept any monetary compensation at the end of their interviews. It was certainly a rewarding experience for both the participants and me. Sharing their immigration stories became an empowering experience for the participants. Thus, it is worth conducting qualita-
tive studies on under-represented populations in the future. While much of the existing cross-cultural research has focused on college students, qualitatively studying under-represented groups, especially using narrative studies, may effectively serve to get hidden voices heard and forgotten lives empowered.

Finally, some participants discussed mental health issues in their households, which included depression and anxiety disorders. Many Chinese do not see mental health issues as real diseases and seldom seek treatments (Mo & Mak, 2009; Ho, Hunt & Li, 2008; Ng, Fones & Kua, 2003; and Chan & Parker, 2004). In one interview, a social worker who worked in the field of mental health commented that mental disorders are highly stigmatized in the Chinese community and much education is needed to raise awareness of these issues. Traditionally, Chinese immigrants have been perceived as the model minority; thus, funding organizations and policymakers may overlook some of the problems emerging in this group. Hence, it is necessary for future studies to evaluate existing mental health education programs in Chinese communities and develop a model for educating various immigrant populations on mental health.
Appendix A: Questionnaires (background information)

Subject #:

I. Please circle one of the following answers:

1. Do you consider yourself?
   a. American
   b. Chinese
   c. Chinese American
   d. American Chinese

2. What’s your marital status?
   a. Married
   b. Single
   c. Divorced
   d. Living with a long-term partner

3. How many children do you have?
   a. 0
   b. 1
   c. 2
   d. 3
   e. 4
   f. 5 or more
4. What’s your annual income level?
   a. Less than 15,000
   b. 15,000 – 24,000
   c. 25,000 – 34,000
   d. 35,000 – 49,000
   e. 50,000 – 74,000
   f. 75,000 – 99,000
   g. 100,000 – 149,000
   h. 150,000 – 199,000
   i. 200,000 or more

5. What’s your household annual income level?
   a. Less than 15,000
   b. 15,000 – 24,000
   c. 25,000 – 34,000
   d. 35,000 – 49,000
   e. 50,000 – 74,000
   f. 75,000 – 99,000
   g. 100,000 – 149,000
   h. 150,000 – 199,000
   i. 200,000 or more
6. What’s your highest educational level?

   a. elementary school
   b. junior high school
   c. high school graduate
   d. 2-year college graduate
   e. 4-year college graduate
   f. graduate degree or other professional degree
   h. others
II. Please fill in the following information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People who live in the same household</th>
<th>Yourself</th>
<th>Other family member</th>
<th>Other family member</th>
<th>Other family member</th>
<th>Other family member</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>Primary Spoken Language</td>
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<td>Languages spoken at Home</td>
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<td>Working Hours</td>
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<td>Languages spoken at Work</td>
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<td>Years you/he/she has moved here</td>
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Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions: (R: Rationalization; A: Activity Theory; L: Life Narratives)

1. How long have you been here in the United States?

   R: A—How long respondents have been to the United States will directly affect the development of their gender role identity because of the influence they get from the artifacts of each culture.

   L—The potential audience may be different. The potential audience of women who moved here more recently may have a more traditional value of the gender role identity. The potential audience of women who moved here earlier may have a somewhat more Westernized audience.

2. Why did you move here?

   R: A—The reason why respondents moved here can influence their perception of their environment, hence the artifact in it, and their motivation to adapt to the new/different gender role identity (i.e. the interaction with the object).

   L—Immigrants’ goals/focus on life may be very different and hence may affect their focus in the narratives.

3. Between your career and your family, which is more important to you?

   R: There may be a difference between their ideal and their practice. This question is asked to understand their ideal gender role identity.
Question 4-6

R: The following questions are asked to understand how female immigrants address conflicts at work and in their family, respectively. Describing a conflict situation and how they handled it will give some insight into the practice of their gender role identities.

4. Can you describe your job?

5. a. Can you describe the last conflict you encountered at work?
   b. How did you deal with it?

6. a. Do you remember the last conflict (or the last incident of conflict) you had with your family?
   b. How did you resolve it?

7. How do you usually spend your days off?

   R: How one spends days off can give insights into life priorities and level of acculturation.

8. What was your occupation before you came to the United States?

   R: A—The social institution they were in before they came to the United States could influence how respondents interacted with the artifacts around them after they came to the Unit-ed States

   L—Respondents’ frameworks may be different depending on their previous jobs before immigration.

9. Have you seen any changes in yourself since you moved to the United States? (Coping Strategies/Behavior/Work)
R: A—Knowing the before and after picture can help us to investigate the interactions respondents had in the contexts of two countries, the changes people encounter as they move from one to the other.

L—Respondents’ perceptions of change affect the tone of their narrative.

10. What are the most important goals in your life?

R: Delineating goals provides a framework to understand respondents’ stories and how their perceptions of life goals may put them in different positions and affect their interaction with the social institutions around them.

11. What do you think Chinese women should be like?

12. Tell be about your experiences as a Chinese woman here in this country and before you moved to the US.

These last questions were asked explicitly about their ideal gender role identity. These questions were left to last because otherwise they would have affected how the respondents would have answered previous interview questions about their gender role practices.
Appendix C: Questionnaires in Chinese

問卷調查

編號: ___________________

請選一項:

一. 妳覺得自己是:
   A. 美國人
   B. 中國人
   C. 美國華僑

二. 妳的婚姻狀況:
   A. 已婚
   B. 未婚
   C. 離婚
   E. 正與一位長期伴侶同居

三. 妳有多少位兒女?
   A. 沒有
   B. 一位
   C. 二位
   D. 三位
   E. 四位
   F. 五位或以上
四. 妳的個人收入大概有:

A. 少於 15,000
B. 15,001-25,000
C. 25,001-35,000
D. 35,001-50,000
E. 50,001-75,000
F. 75,001-100,000
G. 100,001-150,000
H. 150,001-200,000
I. 200,001 或以上

五. 妳的家庭收入大概有:

A. 少於 15,000
B. 15,001-25,000
C. 25,001-35,000
D. 35,001-50,000
E. 50,001-75,000
F. 75,001-100,000
G. 100,001-150,000
H. 150,001-200,000
I. 200,001 或以上
六. 妳的教育程度:

A. 小學或以下
B. 中一至中三
C. 中學畢業
D. 大專畢業
E. 大學畢業
F. 研究院或其他專業學位
G. 其他
II. 請填寫以下資料:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>與妳同住的人</th>
<th>她自己</th>
<th>其他家庭成員</th>
<th>其他家庭成員</th>
<th>其他家庭成員</th>
<th>其他家庭成員</th>
<th>其他家庭成員</th>
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<td>主要說的語言</td>
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<td>在家時說的語言</td>
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<td>工作時說的語言</td>
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<td>他/她來美國多少年</td>
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</table>
問卷問題:

1. 請問妳來了美國多久?

2. 最初為什麼會過來美國呢?

3. 請問工作還是家庭對妳較重要呢?

4. 請妳形容一吓妳的工作?

5. 妳喜歡妳的工作嗎?

6. a. 記得最近一次在工作中遇到的一個衝突?
      b. 最後怎樣解決呢?

7. a. 請試講出跟家人最近一次發生的衝突?
      b. 最後怎樣解決呢?

8. 通常妳放假的時候會做什麼呢?

9. 請問妳來美國前的職業是什麼呢?

10. 請問妳來了美國之後妳有沒有什麼改變呢 (例如對事件處理, 行為或工作方面)?

11. 請問妳的人生目標是什麼呢?

12. 妳覺得中國女性應該是怎樣的呢？
我是紐約城市大學研究院發展心理學系學生張淑筠—這項調查的主要調查人員。現時正在進行一項有關華裔移民的研究。現時尚未有太多有關華裔移民的研究。希望這項研究可幫助我們明白華裔移民的經歷。希望閣下會批准本人與您見面詳談以了解閣下的在家及工作上作為一位華裔移民的體驗及填寫一問卷。我會安排兩節時間與您見面詳談，每節大概維持一小時，而問卷大概需時十五分鐘去完成。若得閣下同意，我會用錄音機把每節的時間錄下來。
Appendix F: Introduction in English

My name is Doris Cheung, I am a doctoral candidate in the Developmental Psychology Ph.D. Program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) and the principle investigator of this project. This study is expected to help us understand more about the experience of immigration. There is not much literature on Chinese immigrants. I would like your permission to interview you about your experience at work and at home of being a Chinese American and ask you to fill out a questionnaire. An interview will be scheduled and it will take about an hour, and the questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record this interview so I can produce a transcript with accurate details.
Appendix G: Conclusion in Chinese

中文結論

很感謝所有參加這個研究報告的被訪者。現特意獻上一份中文結論以便所有被訪者及其他有興趣的人仕閱讀。

這份研究報告是為了找出移民、階級、教育、性別角色及其他社會因素的關係。很多被訪者都提到一份「凍結了的悲傷」和分不清「哪裡是我家」的困惑。本研究報告利用「活躍理論」(Activity theory，又名活動理論)作為體制去捕捉美籍華裔婦女的性別角色。她們的角色發展和有關的活動都是受到以下因素的影響：（一）她們身處的環境—工作環境、家庭、學校等；（二）她們用的語言；社會經濟地位；及（三）傳統的中國思想—包括男性地位崇高；三從四德等。女性移民的性別角色發展可被理解為一個社會建構關係上的變化過程。在這過程中，女性移民們培養出怎樣做一位女性；怎樣做出女性的行為；及怎樣被外界看為女性的一個獨特方式。而在她們的性別角色發展的同時，她們亦在改造她們周邊的環境。

兩組被訪的中國女性移民無論在家庭人數、同化程度、收入、教育背景及工作環境等都大有出入。某程度上，在唐人街餅店工作的女性較社會工作者們傳統。她們相對上對家庭較順從，亦較追隨傳統上的三從四德。社會工作者們卻在工作環境中處理衝突時比在家中傳統。

所有被訪者到美國後在她們的價值觀、行為及自體感受亦有所改變。女性移民們並非「被給予」一個新的性別角色，她們是經過自己與其他人的實際交往中去「做性別」。兩組被訪者同樣被傳統價值在不同層面上影響着。被訪者們都把自己與美國人區別出來。而且她們都是在進行斯捷岑科(2013b)所提出的「集體個人實習」。女性移民都是在一個變幻無常的環境中一起去「磋商」和「做性別」。而每個女性移民都背負着自己獨特的社會歷史位置，亦因而對她身邊的社會項目及社會慣例上有獨特的貢獻。
References


