The Fengsu-Driven Practice of Sending Infants to China: The Experiences of Chinese Immigrant Mothers in New York

Kitching Rhoda Wong
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THE FENGSU-DRIVEN PRACTICE OF SENDING INFANTS TO CHINA:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT MOTHERS IN NEW YORK

By

Kitching Rhoda Wong

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the graduate faculty in Social Welfare in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

THE *FENSU*-DRIVEN PRACTICE OF SENDING INFANTS TO CHINA: 
THE EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT MOTHERS IN NEW YORK 

By 
Kitching Rhoda Wong 

Adviser: Professor Harriet Goodman 

This dissertation explores Fujianese women’s transnational parenting experiences. Although transnational mothering is ubiquitous in an era of globalization, this study surfaces the unique aspects of this phenomenon among Chinese female migrants to New York City. These women send months-old infants to China for care expecting their return at school age. The “satellite-baby” phenomenon (Bohr, 2009) appears unique to Chinese immigrant mothers, particularly those from the Fujian-Fuzhou region. Conducted in the phenomenological tradition of qualitative research, I sought to uncover the complex, contextual experiences mothers experienced in their migration to the US. This included their experiences as immigrants, their decisions to send infants to China, their separation from their babies, and finally, their children’s return to New York. This study employed homogeneous and criterion sampling. Informants were immigrant mothers aged 18 to 45 from the Fujian-Fuzhou region of China who spoke Mandarin, who had sent at least one infant for care in China, and whose children had returned to New York within the last six years. Recruited through fliers distributed by key members of the New York City Chinese community, sixteen migrant women participated in semi-structured interviews designed to collect narratives for this study. 

Two themes dominated study findings. *Fensu*, or social customs, norms, and traditions, and *mei-banfa*, or having no other option, drove informants’ decisions beginning with their
migration, through employment, marriage, child-bearing, and ultimately the decision to send their infants at three to four months to China. *Fengsu-migration* led the women to come to the US. Their immigration status and limited English gave them no option (*mei-banfa*) but to work in subservient jobs. They sent earnings to China to pay migration debts and to support their families. Women had limited social lives in the US, but *fengsu* expectations that they marry led to *xiangqin*, or blind dating for husbands. Themes of deskilling and lack of agency predominated.

Because of *fengsu* practice, many informants bore their first child immediately after marriage. As expectant mothers, they knew because of *fengsu* that their babies would go home to China until they reached school age. Throughout, they struggled with numerous *in situ mei-banfa*, including huge migration debts, poor living arrangements, and lack of childcare. Consequently, the mothers acted against their own desires to keep their infants in New York and sent them to China where grandparents and others cared for them. This study highlights the effects of this separation of child-absent transnational mothers from their babies. However, for some the experience resulted in renewed agency as women made decisions about subsequent children more consistent with their own aspirations as mothers.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Professor Patricia Kolb from Lehman College gave me the opportunity to write a chapter for her book, *Social Work Practice with Ethnically and Racially Diverse Nursing Home Residents and their Families*. Writing this chapter inspired me to consider doctoral studies, so that I could contribute to the social work literature in the future.

With full gratitude, I acknowledge the following individuals: Chun Poon, John Tsoi, Vicky Moy, Wen Chun Hung, and Grace Mo. Because of their connections to the community, they helped me recruit the participants in this study. Chun Poon and John Tsoi also prayed for me and were enormously patient during this challenging time, as were Man Yee Chan, Yung Mei Ng Lau, Lai Kam, Wendy Lau, Fanny Ng, and my cousin, Delia Leung. I also extend thanks to Jackson Chin for his relentless efforts during the first years of my doctoral studies and Linda Yu for reading and editing my papers and dissertation drafts. Finally, I thank my mother, Kwai Chun Lee, who walked along with me during all the difficult moments over the last eight years.
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CHAPTER I: PROBLEM FORMULATION

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore Fujianese women’s transnational parenting experiences. This chapter presents current trends and exhibits the prevalence of transnational mothering in an era of globalization. Transnational mothering is ubiquitous around the world and in the United States and Chinese immigrant mothers in New York practice it extensively. This chapter contextualizes the nature of the problem and concludes with a statement of the research I undertook for my dissertation.

Historically, flows of international migration accompanied different phases of globalization (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Globalization is as an established historical process; it is not a new phenomenon caused by recent technological developments, such as satellites, airline travel, or the Internet (Hope, 2004; Robertson, 2003). Robertson (2003) identified three waves of globalization over the past 500 years. In the 16th century, regional trade networks became globally interlinked. In the 19th century, the forces of industrialization and economic expansion intensified a second wave of globalization that fortified the mass migration of labor. After World War II, the formation of a new world order generated a third wave of globalization, which has propelled new streams of international migration (Robertson, 2003; Hope, 2004).

Globalization accompanies the movement of labor. In the present wave of globalization, increasing numbers of people have left their homes and migrated to other countries to seek a better life. According to the International Migrant Stock (IMS) (2015), there were an estimated 232 million international migrants during the first half of 2013. This number is equivalent to 3.2 percent of the total population of the world (The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2015). At the same time, more and more children face complex
challenges due to the mobility of their parents (Borh, 2009). Often, parents migrate without their children in search of work. In other cases, while they continue working in the host country, parents send their children back to their places of origin. Individual families divided by international borders, and who maintain significant emotional and economic ties to both sending and receiving countries, are called “transnational families” (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p.3; Derby, 2010, p.5). They are multi-local or multi-sited families that live in spatial separation (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Nonetheless, these families maintain a sense of “familyhood” that signifies a feeling of collective welfare and unity, even across national borders (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Derby, 2010, p.3).

Transnational families live out a pattern of cross-border division of labor. In most cases, productive labor occurs in the host country and reproductive labor occurs in the home country (Schmalzbauer, 2004). When parents leave guardianship of their children to immediate or extended family members, they continue to perform their parenting role from afar by sending remittances and other material support to their children. The practice of transnational parenting (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Dreby 2006) is the result of a complicated set of negotiations and decisions made between parents and designated caregivers in terms of household survival and opportunities for the future of their children (Orellana, Thorn, Chee, & Lam 2001). Sometimes children take part in the decision-making. Families strategize to improve their collective conditions. This supersedes the focus on the development of the individual child.

Like globalization, transnational families and transnational migrant households are not a contemporary phenomenon (Dreby, 2010; Foner, 2005; Parrenas, 2005). International separations (Dreby, 2010) or split families (Glenn, 1983) were common over the course of US
migration history and widespread among different national groups such as Chinese, Polish, Jews, Italians, Mexicans, and Filipinos (Foner, 2005; Parrenas, 2001).

Many European families in the 19th and early 20th centuries depended heavily on the financial remittances of their members who worked in the United States (Foner, 2005). Immigrants working in the US often maintained strong ties to their families, their culture and to the politics of their home countries (Schmalzbauer, 2004). An example of this is found with Italian immigrants. Between 1880 and 1910, nearly 80% of Italian immigrants to the US were male. Their expectation was to make money and then return home. They routinely sent money home to the relatives they left behind (Foner, 2005). Upon return to Italy, many purchased new homes or improved the one they owned. In this way, trans-nationalism allowed working-class men to earn money in places where wages were higher, while their families lived in their home country where the cost of living was lower (Gabaccia, 2001).

Comparable to Italian transnational families, split-household families were also prevalent among Chinese laborer migrants from the Guangdong Province of China in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Chinese families sent their married men to Gam Saan (the Gold Mountain) in order to earn a better living for their families back in China. Such practices created two households: one in America consisting of the husband and the father and another in China consisting of the wife, children, parents, brothers, and their wives (Glenn, 1983). The husbands engaged in paid work abroad, while the wives engaged in small-scale farming; the women provided primary care to the young and the elderly in the homeland. Very few Chinese men, except merchants, could bring wives with them because of strict immigration and Chinese Exclusion laws, which restricted women from entering the US. The total number of Chinese women admitted to the US between 1901 and 1910 was 874. However, during that same time
there were 19,702 Chinese men admitted to the US (Hsu, 2000). Chinese men who came to the US were mainly laborers who came to work in gold mines, farms, or to build the railway (Hsu, 2000; Lee, 1996). In order to increase their families’ income and socioeconomic status, they bore the cost of remaining separated from their families for prolonged periods. The term “bachelor society” (Hsu, 2000, p. 92) describes the mostly male Chinese American community in the first half of the 20th century (Hsu, 2000).

Although transnational families are not a new phenomenon, there are critical differences between contemporary transnational families and those from earlier periods. Today’s migrants are relatively literate, and some have had urban experience prior to migration. In contrast, Italian or Chinese men and women in the nineteenth century were generally illiterate and rural. There were no telephones or electronic communication to enable husbands to communicate with their families. Even writing or reading letters was challenging and family members could not fly home for visits (Gabaccio, 2001). Today, however, advanced communication technology and transportation enable families to remain connected. Inexpensive international telephone service allows family members to speak regularly. Video recordings and Internet videophones help capture family activities and allow those living abroad to remain engaged from afar (Levitt, 2001). Airline, train, and bus services make it possible for those with legal papers and financial resources to travel home frequently (Schmalzbauer, 2004).

In addition to technological differences, the new wave of globalization also changed the patterns of migration itself. In earlier times, women often migrated officially as dependent family members, such as wives, fiancées, or daughters of other migrants. In contrast to earlier periods, women are increasingly part of the flow of migrant workers. Among the total number of international migrants in 2013, about 120 million (52%) are males and about 111 million (48%)
are females (UNDESA, 2015). Women are migrating on their own to become the principal wage 
earners for their families (United Nations, 2006). The significant increase of female, as well as 
male migrant workers is mainly in response to changing labor markets globally. There is a 
massive demand for cheap female labor from poor countries to fill the growing demand for 
caregivers in rich countries (The United Nation International Research and Training Institute for 
the Advancement of Women [UNINSTRAW], 2007).

As previously stated, female migration may involve married women arriving with 
children, or they may leave their children behind in their home countries. Some women give 
birth to children after they migrate to a new country. When this occurs, they may send their 
children back home and have them taken care of by kin in extended families. In these cases, 
transnational immigrant mothers continue to work and reside overseas while their children 
remain in their countries of origin. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) called this arrangement 
“transnational motherhood” (p. 548). Transnational families challenge mainstream constructions 
of motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997) and household, as well as middle class 
assumptions that all the needs of children can and should be provided by parents in nuclear 
families who live together in one community (Orellane, et al., 2001).

In some instances, individuals blame the mothers and mothers may blame themselves for 
leaving their children behind (UNINSTRAW, 2007). However, transnational mothers make great 
sacrifices as evidenced by the loss of a quality in their own love for their children and their 
children’s love for them (Orellana, et al. 2001). Transnational mothers may spend years without 
seeing their children. Additionally, because they must remit a huge portion of their incomes to 
their families, they may be unable to save money for their old age. Some believe that when 
mothers from poor countries migrate to work in more industrialized nations, they pass on the
“care deficits” to the children they have left behind. According to some, this reproduces global inequalities within their families (Dreby 2009b, p.13).

**Transnational Mothering**

**Transnational Mothering Practices Worldwide**

The phenomenon of transnational mothering appears around the world (Bryson & Vuorela, 2002). Typical examples include Turkish mothers in Germany (Erel, 2002); Filipino mothers in the Middle East, Europe, and North America (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009; Parrenas, 2001); Caribbean mothers (Smith, Lalone, & Johnson, 2004); Asian Indian mothers in Canada (Aulakh, 2008); and Chinese mothers in Australia (Da, 2003; Landolt & Da, 2005), Canada (Bohr & Tse, 2009), and the United States (Gaytan, Xue, Yoshikawa, & Tamis-Lemonda, 2009; Kwong, Chung, Sun, Chou, & Taylor-Smith, 2009).

Of all those listed above, Filipina migrants are one of the largest groups of independent female labor migrants in the world (Parrenas, 2009). This specific migration flow is part of a larger feminized Filipino migration; it is a response to the demand for caregivers in many industrial countries. Since the 1980s, France has become a popular destination for Filipina migrants, primarily domestic workers, nannies, and caregivers (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009). According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, 72% of deployed Filipino workers in 2005 were women (Frenoza-Flot, 2009). Over 37% declared themselves as married. This migration of married Filipinas has raised questions about their fulfillment of family obligations across geographic distances and its implications for the children left behind (Frenoza-Flot, 2009). Many transnational mothers struggle over separation because of the financial gains they have achieved in migration. When parents work outside of the Philippines, they obtain the financial resources they need to ensure their children’s nutritional, educational, and housing security. In
the Philippines, the education of children is the most significant indicator of material security for migrant parents; it is a central motivating factor for their migration (Frenoza-Flot, 2009).

Another example of transnational motherhood is Turkish mothers who migrate to Germany (Erel, 2002). Fathers of Turkish families usually migrated first, so that many women temporarily became “migration widows” and single mothers (Erel, 2002, p. 130). However, during the period of guest worker recruitment in 1970s, women were preferred workers in the electronic, textile, and clothing industries as well as in the service sector (Inowlocki & Lutz, 2000; Erel, 2002). Because of the inadequacy of the father’s income in Turkey, mothers took over the role of breadwinner, and many decided to work in Germany. They left their children in the care of close relatives, mostly grandparents or aunts. Mothers who sent children back to Turkey for childcare and schooling resolved their difficulties by relying on traditional family networks. Mothers felt sending their children home was a better solution than keeping them. They preferred to have a trusted member of the family in Turkey care for their child rather than to have to rely on the care of strangers in Germany (Erel, 2002).

Like the migrant mothers from Turkey, in Canada, Asian Indian mothers also rely on family members to care for their children. Often, infants are sent to grandparents in India (Aulakh, 2008). Aulakh (2008) told the stories of two mothers, Patel and Jyoti Dutta, in a news report. Patel flew with her daughter Shivanshi to the town of Baroda, in Western India, when the baby was nine-months old; there her paternal grandparents raised her daughter. Patel flew back alone in tears. Every few months, the grandparents mailed a DVD of the child for the parents. Patel reported suffering emotional pain when she saw her daughter’s face in pictures. Another mother, Jyoti Dutta sent her five-month old daughter to Mumbai to her grandparents. She missed her daughter very much and kept in touch with her by Webcam; she spoke to her daily,
sometimes twice or more a day. She believed that her daughter was safe and in good hands and saw positive aspects of leaving her daughter in India where she could learn her native language and culture from her grandparents (Aulakh, 2008).

In Canada, proxy parenting is an increasingly common practice among hundreds of young immigrants especially from India and China. Some of these parents are professionals or pursuing higher educational degrees. Some are low-income workers who cannot afford childcare. However, they all struggle to adapt their lives in a new land without any family or social support to help with child rearing duties. Also, they are reluctant to place their children in the hands of strangers. Besides sending their infants to their home countries, another option is to bring the grandparents to Canada to help raise the children. However, this is not always possible, because the immigration process takes a long time (Aulakh, 2008).

**Transnational Mothering in the United States**

The US has 20% of the total international migrants and 20% of total female migrants in the world. In 2013, an estimated 45.8 million international migrants, not including refugees, lived in the US; this was equivalent to 14.3% of the nation’s population. Over half (23.4 million or 51.1%) of these migrants were women (UNDESA, 2015). Many were transnational mothers. Typical examples are: immigrants from Mexico (Boehm, 2008; Dreby, 2005, 2006, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotela & Avila, 1997; Nicholson, 2006); the Central American countries of El Salvador (Hondagneu-Sotela & Avila, 1997; Horton, 2009; Landolt & Da, 2005; Menjivar et al., 2009), Guatemala (Hondagneu-Sotela & Avila, 1997; Menjivar et al, 2009), Honduras (Schmalzbauer, 2004); and the Caribbean countries of Dominican Republic (Levitt, 2001;), Jamaica (Best-Cumming, 2008; Pottinger & Brown, 2006), and Haiti (Basch, et al., 1994).
Each year, over 500,000 Mexicans migrate to the US (Dreby, 2009). Tens of thousands of people leave their children behind when they head north (Boehm, 2008; Dreby, 2005, 2006, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotela & Avila, 1997; Nicholson, 2006). Taking advantage of the economic disparities between the US and Mexico, parents migrate to earn more; their children remain in hometowns in Mexico where the cost of living is low, because they hope to provide more for their children. Their migration represents a sacrifice in the present for the future (Dreby, 2009). Several studies conducted to investigate the experiences of Mexican transnational families, include themes of family structure, parent-child relationships, and psychological impact upon separation and reunion (Boehm, 2008; Dreby, 2005, 2006, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotela & Avila, 1997; Nicholson, 2006). These findings will be reviewed thoroughly in the Literature Review section.

Like their Mexican counterparts, transnational motherhood is particularly common among Central American migrants from Guatemala, San Salvador, and Honduras. Many of these women left their countries to escape economic or political adversity. However, because they cannot readily obtain visas, they must travel undocumented and over land. Journeys across double or triple national borders are dangerous and costly, so most prefer not to bring their children. Some parents may eventually send for them, but it is difficult and expensive to care for their children in the US. Consequently, if the child comes with them to the US, some parents send them back to their home country and have their relatives provide care for them. Whether parents leave the children back home or arrive and send them back, the result is often a lengthy and painful separation (Horton, 2009; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009).

The practice of transnational parenting continues among Haitians. In Haiti, the term “family” refers to a network of individuals in a series of households (Basch, et al. 1994).
Children born in the US and consequently US citizens are often sent home for families to care for. Those born in Haiti often remain behind with family members while their parents migrate to the US. This pattern of child fostering is especially prevalent among poor working class households. Over time, children may move between Haiti and the US for weeks or months. These practices serve to maintain kinship networks. Because households extend transnationally, the pattern of transnational family ties transmits across generations (Basch, et al. 1994).

Within many Caribbean communities, these cross generational familial ties are often linked through the grandmother. Caribbean families are *matrifocal*, or mother-centered, with a long history of child shifting practices (Gordon, 1987, p.427; Ho, 1999, p.36). Caretaking shifts from mothers to grandmothers in response to economic circumstances. The practice commonly occurs when mothers migrate internationally in search of work and then place their children in the care of their own mothers. Because of the uncertainty of migration, children often remain in the homes of their grandmothers for long periods. Grandmothers play the key role as the “other mother” (Schmalzbauer, 2004, p.1320) when the children’s biological mothers are absent or unavailable. The other mother, including grandmothers, sisters, daughters, neighbors or family friends, helps to ensure health and psychical well-being of the children and insures family unity. This eases emotional burdens borne by children who separate from their parents (Schmalzbauer, 2004).

**Transnational Mothering Practice among Chinese Immigrants**

Chinese and Asian Indian cultures have traditionally endorsed multiple caregivers (Borh & Tse, 2009; Aulakh, 2008). Traditionally, three-generations of childcare arrangements occurred in close geographic proximity embedded in one language and culture (Borh & Tse, 2009). In many circumstances, grandparents, parents, and children lived in the same house, down the
street, or in the same city (Aulakh, 2008). However, the contemporary childcare arrangement typically involves greater geographic distance and engages at least two cultural and linguistic settings. Although transnational families and transnational parenting are features of migration, in many ethnic groups the “satellite-baby” (Borh, 2009) phenomenon appears rare outside the Chinese community (Bernstein, 2009; Bohr, 2009; Sengupta, 1999). “Satellite babies” among Chinese immigrants represents a variation of multiple care giving practices (Bohr, 2009).

The practice of sending babies born in the US back to China has become more pervasive in the last fifteen years. The Chinese and American media extensively reports stories of mothers sending US born babies to China (Sengupta, 1999; Zhao, 2002; Kolben, 2005; Jimenez, 2007; Kobodner, 2009; Bernstein, 2009; Chu, 2009a, 2009b). The Fuzhou People's Political Consultative Conference (FPPCC) estimated that there were 10,000 ‘yang-liu-shou’ (overseas stay-at-home) children in Fujian-Fuzhou region. These “yang-liu-shou” children are widely dispersed in several distinct counties, towns, and villages along the Mingjiang River. It is estimated that 5,000 of these “yang-liu-shou” children were in the suburban city of Changle, 2,000 were in the township of Tingjiang and 2,200 in the township of Guantauzhen of Lianjiang County. Qi Zheng, President of The Fukien Benevolent Association of America, believed that the FPPCC estimation was too conservative. He estimated that there were at least 20,000 overseas stay-at-home children in total in Fuzhou-Fujian region (Shang-gaun, 2012).

Some evidence of this phenomenon was reported beginning in 1998. Of the 1,500 babies born to mothers who received prenatal care at the Charles B. Wang Community Health Clinic, formerly the Chinatown Health Clinic, 10 to 20% were sent to China (Sengupta, 1999). In 1999, one-third to one-half of the women who sought prenatal care at St. Vincent’s Hospital’s Chinatown clinic expressed plans to send their babies to China (Sengupta, 1999). Another study
conducted between 2005 and 2007 surveyed 214 patients at a community health clinic serving low-income families in New York City Chinatown; 57 percent of the mothers had planned or had sent babies to their hometowns in China (Kwong et al., 2009).

Yoshikawa (2008) reported that 72 percent of Chinese mother participants in a Center for Research on Culture, Development & Education (CRCDE) “transnational babies” research project reported they had sent their babies back to China within the first 6 months of birth. These participants were from three local hospitals’ postpartum wards. Due to high rates of attrition, the research team had to drop the component of Chinese mothers from their study on “transnational babies.” Researchers continued to conduct the study with Dominican and Mexican participant mothers.

According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Bureau of Vital Statistics (NYCDOHMHBVS) (2014), 10,067 babies were born to mothers of Chinese ancestry in 2012. Over 91.7% or 9,231 births were by mothers born in China. American-born Chinese babies accounted for 8.2% of the total births in New York City (NYCDOHMHBVS, 2014). Based on Kwong and colleague’s study (2009), St. Vincent clinic’s records (Sengupta, 1999) and Yoshikawa’s report (2009), if 50% of these babies were sent back to China and raised by their extended families, an estimated 4,500 babies were sent to China in 2012.

Many new immigrants from Fujian Province sent their American-born infant babies to their hometowns when their children reached three to eight months. Most mothers keep the babies for the first few months of life. When the time comes for the baby to go to China, they take their babies to Kennedy International Airport and place their child into the arms of an acquaintance, a relative, or a stranger, who agrees to courier the baby to relatives in China. In most cases, parents have to pay a thousand dollars for this service, in addition to a one-way fare
for the baby. They prepare an authorization letter for the person taking their child to China, so that he or she can pass immigration and customs inspection (Senguptu, 1999; Kolben, 2005; Wong, 2010). In this pattern, the mothers anticipate they will bring the infants back to the US when they reach school age.

Deciding to send infants to China and to separate from them for four or five years is painful for these mothers. Some reported spending many nights crying for their babies. One said she was miserable because she was unable to see her daughter learning to crawl, stand up, and walk; she missed the opportunity to hear her daughter say her first words (Chu, 2009b) or to hear her daughter say “mama” for the first time. Most importantly, she was not aware that her daughter had delayed speech development until the child reunited with her in New York at the age of five. She regretted that she failed to detect her infant daughter’s problems and later had her daughter receive early intervention services while still in her youth.

Sending babies to China is an expedient solution to financial hardships. However, parents rarely consider the long-term consequences. Many new immigrant parents are low-wage workers from Fujian Province. Some smuggled into the US must pay debts in the tens of thousand dollars to their smugglers (Bernstein, 2009; Sengupta, 1999; Zhao, 2002). Some married couples do not have their own living quarters in New York City. Instead, they share a two or three bedroom apartment with two or three other families from the same township in China. Because of the loss of garment industry jobs and generally falling wages in the last decade, many Chinese laborers have had to find jobs outside New York City. Husbands and wives may work jobs in different places after getting married. They work long hours and frequently work seven days a week.

Few good childcare options exist for these low-income immigrants in New York. In 2013, an estimated 555,756 New York City children aged six and younger needed childcare
services (Citizen’s Committee for Children of New York [CCCNY], 2013). At Chun Pak, a well-known childcare center in New York’s Chinatown, 300 children were on the waiting list. One mother waited for three years to access a city daycare center (Koloner, 2009). The city’s Administration for Children’s Services reported that only 20% of income eligible toddlers and 10% of infants were in the city’s day care system (Koloner, 2009). Low-income parents, who often work twelve or more hours a day sometimes at multiple jobs, find themselves scrambling to secure safe and affordable care for their children. When this occurs, they have to miss work, further jeopardizing their precarious financial security (White, Lemer, Lipsit, & McPherson, 2004).

Some parents place the child on a waiting list for childcare as a newborn, in the hope a slot will open within a few years. For many new immigrant parents, persistent language and cultural barriers limit their access to information about available childcare options (Tung, 2008). Translation of available materials is often inaccurate or incorrect (Tung, 2008). Traditional daycare programs are open between 8am to 6pm. Many Chinese immigrants who work in restaurants work long irregular hours (Tung, 2008). Undocumented immigrant parents are afraid to provide proof of employment, and they worry about disclosing their immigration status if they apply for childcare services. Private daycare costs hundreds of dollars a week and is out of reach for most. The mothers have to work outside the home to pay off immigration-related debts and to make ends meet (Kolben, 2005).

When the “satellite babies” return to New York, they pose a significant challenge for NYC’s public schools. Zhao (2002) reported that 20% of new students came from Fujianese families in 1998 at P.S. 184 in Chinatown. In 1999 to 2000, one-third of their new students were Fujianese; in 2001, it grew to one half. In 2000, more than 1,000 Fujianese students attended
Chinatown’s elementary schools. In addition, 199 children appeared in the mid-2007 semester and 250 in mid-2008 semester at a public school in Flushing (Zhao, 2002). Notably, many of these mid-semester enrollees are returnees or newly migrated schoolchildren from Fujian.

From my personal experience as a consulting evaluator of special education needs of schoolchildren in the New York public school system, I found many Fujianese students referred for special education evaluation are returnees from China. Of the 800 Chinese schoolchildren I evaluated, 375 (47%) were from parents who migrated from the Fuzhou city area of Fujian Province. About 115 (31%) were newly migrated, and the other 260 (69%) students were born in New York and a few born in other states. Among these special education referrals of American born Fujianese students, 200 (77%) were raised by grandparents or extended family members in Fujian-Fuzhou region and had returned to New York between 2008 and 2014.

Some schoolchildren only speak Fujianese, a Chinese dialect that few American teachers in bilingual classes understand. In China, the grandparents who raised the children were often illiterate and might have neglected the children’s early schooling. These children may have spent much of their time in China watching television with limited social interaction, stimulation, or discipline. Consequently, upon return to the US, they are behind grade level academically. In public schools, Fujianese children are with students in regular classes or bilingual classes taught in Mandarin or Cantonese. Since Fujianese students understand none of these languages, they remain quiet, talk among themselves in Fujianese, or appear lost. Schools in the US are disorienting for these children. They are afraid and do not feel they can turn to anyone, including their parents. The people who took care of them when they were little are now gone (Zhao, 2002).
Social service workers believe that separation is more traumatizing for the child than for the parents, because the children do not understand what is going on. Infants and toddlers are not able to verbalize but recognize their primary caregiver. When there is a new environment and a new caregiver, they lose their sense of security and become afraid. They may cry a lot, have bad dreams, and stop eating well (Aulakh, 2008). A number of these children exhibit behavioral problems and depression. From a mental health perspective, multiple prolonged separations of primary caregivers from their infants or toddlers can translate into a poor prognosis for a child’s later social and emotional development (Bohr & Tse, 2009).

**Statement of Research**

The dissertation sought knowledge about the experience of transnational mothering of Fujianese immigrant mothers. Immigrant mothers in this study gave birth to and nursed their infants in the first few months of life, after which they sent them to their parents in China. Perceptions of early motherhood and infant caring experiences were crucial factors affecting these mothers’ experiences in deciding to send their babies away, reacting to their babies’ leave, recognizing and managing their emotional distress during separations from their infants, and making plans for their children’s return.

Although the practice of sending babies to China has become more pervasive in the past decade, little literature or research addresses this phenomenon (Kwong et al., 2009; Bohr et al., 2009; Wang, 2009; Da, 2003). Researchers confirm we know little about the short-term and long-term outcomes of the transnational mothering practices on both parents and children. To fill this knowledge gap, I conducted a qualitative study that sought to answer questions about immigrant mothers’ perception of motherhood and their experience of separation from their infants.
The gaps in the literature raised the following questions that guided my inquiry:

1. What are the perceptions and experience of early motherhood among Chinese low-income immigrant mothers?
2. How do Chinese transnational mothers make decisions to send babies to China where family members, especially grandparents, care for them?
3. How do these mothers assess the benefits and loss to themselves and the family because of the separation?
4. What occurs during separation from their infant babies?
5. How do these mothers react, recognize, and manage their emotional distress during separations from their infants?
6. How do they present their love and care for their babies during their absence?
7. What are the birth mothers’ perceptions of their children’s lives with their distant caregivers?
8. How do they acquire this knowledge and develop such perceptions?
9. How do parents explain their absence to their “reunited” children?
10. How do children react when their parents present this information?
11. What are the long and short-term effects of separation and reunification on the child?

These linked and interrelated questions enabled me to fill gaps in the overall phenomenon of transnational mothering in the Chinese immigrant community. In addition, my increased knowledge of immigrant mothers’ perceptions and experiences of motherhood and separation helped me propose strategies and services for mothers to prepare for their children’s return that
may ultimately lessen a rocky mother-child reunification, ameliorate adjustment problems and preclude psychological damage.

This chapter presented current trends and the prevalence of transnational mothering in an era of globalization. Transnational mothering is ubiquitous around the world and in the US, and Chinese immigrant mothers in New York practice it extensively. To understand the background for transnational mothering among Chinese, especially Fujianese immigrant women, I will examine the history of Chinese immigration in the US in relation to the US immigration policy and the phenomenon of transnationalism.
CHAPTER II: IMMIGRATION POLICY AND TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

Introduction

In an era of globalization, the practice of transnational mothering is ubiquitous around the world. This includes Chinese immigrant mothers in New York, most prominently among new immigrants from Fuzhou. In order to illuminate the phenomenon of transnational parenting among Fujianese immigrants in the last two decades, I will examine US immigration policy and the history of Chinese migration to the United States (Table 1), transnationalism and the new wave of Chinese immigration. The history of Chinese immigration in the US is linked to the changes and development of US immigration policy. Both early and contemporary Chinese immigrants in the US maintained a pattern of transnationalism; they lived their lives across borders and continued to be involved in the daily life activities in both home and host societies.

The Historical Context of Immigration Policies in the United States

Immigration policies in the United States went through three major phases: laissez-faire, qualitative restrictions, and quantitative restriction policies (Martin, 2014). During the period from 1780 to 1875, laissez-faire immigration policy allowed states, private employers, shipping companies, railroads, and churches to promote immigration to the US. This first wave of immigrants arrived in the late 18th century. In 1780, English immigrants, who came to the US for religious, political, and economic reasons, represented 60 percent of the population of the nation. Beginning in 1820, the US government began to record annual arrivals of immigrants.

The second wave of immigrants came from Europe between 1820 and 1860. These were mostly peasants displaced from agricultural work and artisans made jobless by the industrial revolution. At the time, the young country was eager to have immigrants help develop new territories (Martin, 2014). During the Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, domestic warfare took a
heavy toll on the American labor force. Because of this, the national government favored expansive immigration (Tichenor, 2002).

Nonetheless, strong anti-immigration feelings have existed since the mid-19th century. In the 1850’s, many nativists in the US opposed Roman Catholic immigrants from Germany and Ireland (Dudley, 2003). By the late nineteenth century, when the industrial revolution was transforming the economy and working conditions in the US, many blamed immigrants for labor unrest. Racism and ethnic prejudice also led many Americans to view immigrants as undesirable (Dudley, 2003). This pattern continued into the following century.

Within the anti-immigration atmosphere at the end of the 1870s, the US enacted qualitative restrictions on immigrants (Martin, 2014). These laws enacted in the late 19th century introduced three major new elements into US immigration policies. These included personal characteristics, restrictions based on national origin, and the protection of American labor. These elements also shaped future US immigration policy (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002 as cited in Congress, 2009). Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1875, which barred prostitutes and criminals from entering the US (Tichenor, 2002). Subsequently, the Immigration Act of 1882 banned the immigration of paupers, convicts, and mental defectives (Martin, 2004); all these were considered undesirables.

Among the undesired groups, Chinese were the only specified nationality excluded by immigration laws. This was codified in the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Although Chinese immigrants made up only .002 percent of America’s population in the late 19th century, many Americans voiced concerns that Chinese laborers took jobs from Americans and lowered workers’ wages. Even so, the Chinese continued to stay in the country and became the nation’s first group of undocumented immigrants (Dudley, 2003).
During the economic depression in the 1920s, the US government introduced more quantitative restrictions on immigration. The influx of Eastern European immigrants sparked anti-immigrant fever which led to the enactment of the nation’s first “comprehensive” (Ngai, 2004, p.2) restrictionist law, the National Origins Act (Johnson-Reed Act) in 1924. This law established several limits on immigration and a global racial and national hierarchy that favored some immigrants over others (Ngai, 2004). The national origins quota system was a governmental response to the insecurities of modern industrial economic life (Tichenor, 2002). Between 1921 and 1930, the total number of immigrants in the US dropped to four million. In the depression years of the 1930’s, immigration comprised barely half a million people. Between the years 1940 to 1950, the total number of immigrants only reached a million (Mills, 1994).

During the post World War II period, liberalism and cultural pluralism increased in American society. At the same time, immigration reformers regarded national origin quotas as a deviation from American democratic tradition (Nagi, 2004). In 1953, Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which eliminated racial barriers and allowed Asians to migrate into the United States. Nonetheless, their numbers were restricted. Between 1951 and 1960, 2.5 million Asian immigrants came to the United States (Mills, 1994).

Notably, immigration reform paralleled the civil rights movement and desegregation. Appeals for social justice, human freedom, and equal rights deeply influenced immigration reformers (Ngai, 2004). In 1965, Congress enacted the Immigration and Naturalization Act (Hart-Cellar Act) which ended the policy of admitting immigrants according to a hierarchy of racial desirability; it established the principle of equality in immigration (Ngai, 2004). Since then, immigration policy changed from a discriminatory nationality quota system to a preference system (Waters & Ueda, 2007). The preference system consisted of seven categories. It stressed
family reunification and certain job skills. This introduced standardized admission procedures and set per country limits of 20,000. For Eastern Hemisphere nations, the cap was 170,000. The first ceiling on Western Hemisphere immigration was also established at 120,000.

Both documented and undocumented immigration have increased since 1965 (Ngai, 2004). In response to the economic boom of the 1980s, demands increased dramatically for labor in low-wage jobs. In 1986, Congress passed the Immigration Reform Control Act (IRCA), referred to as an “amnesty” or a legalization program for qualified undocumented aliens. It provided legal permanent residency status to eligible undocumented immigrants who entered the United States before January 1, 1982 and resided continuously in the US. Under the provisions of IRCA, nearly 2.7 million undocumented immigrants eventually established legal permanent residency in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Wasem, 2007). From 2000 to 2011, the undocumented population increased from 8.5 million to 11.5 million (Wasem, 2012).

After 1990, immigration rose sharply. New streams of undocumented migration emerged, primarily migrants displaced from war-torn countries in Central America and because of unstable economic transitions in China (Ngai, 2004). In addition, the negative economic impact of NAFTA drove two million Mexican farmers off the land. They could not earn their living through agriculture and were living in desperate poverty. These people crossed the border to the north to feed their families (Bybee & Winter, 2006). By the mid-1990s immigration, both documented and undocumented, approached one million a year. In 1996, Congress enacted a welfare reform act that severely restricted or banned federal benefits from undocumented immigrants. Later that year, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), which introduced other restrictions on both documented and undocumented immigrants. Despite the enactment and execution of the IIRIRA, international
migration to the US continued to increase. Between 1990 and 2000, an estimated 11.5 million migrants came to the US. From 2000 to 2010, there was an increase of an estimated 9.4 million migrants to the US. This was a 45.7 percent total increase since 1990 (UNDESA, 2015).

At the beginning of the 21st century, immigration became a controversial political issue in American society. The public generally agrees that comprehensive immigration reform is imperative. However, no bills on immigration reform have become law, and the prolonged debates between pro-immigration and pro-restrictionist forces have never reconciled (Jonas, 2006). Moreover, since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, the subject of immigration became intertwined with concerns for homeland security. Many Americans worried that undocumented immigrants posed security threats to the nation and endangered aspects of their lives in the community. Because of failure to pass new immigration reforms at the federal level, increasing anti-immigrant sentiment has led local and state governments to enact restrictive laws. In 2010, more than 1,400 local immigrant-related bills were introduced, 208 laws were enacted, and 138 resolutions were adopted in 46 states (NCSL Immigration Policy, 2011).

During the course of over two centuries, the US has changed immigration policies from that of open laissez-faire to a now more restrictionist policy. These changes have had an enormous effect on the economic, social, and political world (Congress, 2009). The basic motivation behind US immigration laws became increasingly based on corporate economic interests and less on family reunification. Immigration laws have served as a valuable tool to satisfy labor shortages and to maintain a stable pool of low-cost labor. For its first hundred years, the nation was receptive to immigrants because of a need to foster economic and social growth. Subsequently, at different periods, large groups of workers, such as slaves from Africa, European
immigrants, and Mexican workers through the Bracero Program, were brought or came into the United States from different parts of the world under special conditions to fill shortages in agriculture and manufacturing production.

Immigrant labor generally benefited the economy. However, when the need for immigrant labor was low during economic downturns, anti-immigrant sentiment was triggered (Parrenas, 2005, p. 146). In addition, immigrants have been blamed for contributing to crime, unemployment, and poverty. This was particularly true for Chinese immigrants expressed in laws such as the Immigration Act and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and other qualitative restrictive laws.

The History of Chinese Immigration to the United States

From the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 to the present-day, the history of Chinese immigrants in the United States has been inseparable from changes in US immigration policy and political and social events in China. The first wave of Chinese immigrants came in 1848. In the early nineteenth century, major famines, civil unrest, military defeat, and foreign occupation occurred throughout China forcing many Chinese to flee in search for better life. Young male farmers from the provinces of southern China, especially those from Toisan county of Guangdong Province, gravitated to the “Golden Mountains” to mine for gold in California. Following the exhaustion of gold mines, they worked on the inter-continental railways or became agricultural workers on the west coast (Lee, 1996; Lee & Mock, 2005). Chinese workers were largely responsible for laying down tracks and building the prominent transcontinental railroad (Central Pacific, 1999). These early immigrants worked hard and sent money home; many returned to China after they saved enough.
Subsequent to the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1868, waves of anti-Chinese sentiment broke out throughout Western cities such as Los Angeles. Violent riots and discrimination targeted Chinese laborers for at least a decade (Pfaelzer, 2007). This led the U.S. Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which banned all immigration from China. This Act and its fourteen subsequent extensions decreased the number of Chinese immigrants for a period of sixty years and forbade Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens (Chang, 2003). These laws forced Chinese laborers to suffer prolonged separation from their families who stayed in China. Many could not even bring their wives or women to the US as brides.

To contest the Chinese exclusionary actions of federal immigration officials and to challenge the legality of immigration laws (Chang, 2003; Lowell, 1996), Chinese immigrants filed thousands of lawsuits, recognizing that the U.S. Constitution offered protection to all people in America. The U.S. Supreme Court eventually heard cases challenging anti-Chinese laws as a violation of the 14th Amendment. Finally, in 1898, the U.S. began to recognize American-born people of Chinese ancestry as U.S. citizens (Chang, 2003; Cornell Law School, 2015).

In 1906, the San Francisco earthquake caused the destruction of all immigration papers stored in that city, and many people of Chinese ancestry claimed that they were US citizens (Chang, 2003), but in fact some were not. As US citizens, they could visit their hometown and marry in China. When they returned to the US, many of them left their wives and children at home, although they might have sponsored them thereafter and reunited in America. At least four or five generations of Toisanese entered the US through a network of so-called “paper sons” and “paper daughters” from 1906 to 1950 (Wong, 1995). These Chinese people immigrated to the US
based on a sheet of paper purchased in China identifying them as sons or daughters of Chinese Americans (Chin & Chin, 2000).

Following the fall of the corrupt Ch’ing dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, political conditions in China remained chaotic. The weak Chinese nation continued to suffer from foreign powers’ imperialist intrusions, the Warlord Partition, the Japanese invasion, and the Chinese Civil War. This unstable period lasted for the next forty years.

US immigration laws passed in 1930 allowed wives of Chinese merchants or Chinese Americans married before 1924 to immigrate to the country. Before that, some first generation immigrants left their families in China; some only brought their sons, some of them paper sons. In some cases, Chinese husbands lost contact with their families. Chinese men remained single or married other women after years of separation from their wives. Under the new law, many Chinese men brought and reunited with their wives and children after long years of separation. Most Chinese immigrants entering the US after the 1940s were women. Some migrated to the US to reunite with their husbands after a long separation. Many of the early male immigrants returned to China or Hong Kong and brought their brides to America. These women were usually ten to twenty years younger than their husbands. Since then, the second-generation Chinese immigrants began to increase in the US. Many laborers simultaneously worked in the mines and railroads and began small businesses, including laundries and small fishing businesses. Chinese immigrants and their children began to function as productive units (Chang, 2003).

The repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1942 resulted in an increase of Chinese immigrants to the country. During World War II, sixteen thousand Chinese Americans served in the U.S. Armed Forces. The passage of the War Brides Act in 1945 allowed spouses and adopted
children of military personnel to enter the US after World War II. Subsequently, in 1947, the War Bride Act amendment allowed Chinese American veterans to bring their brides into the US (Chang, 2003). In response to the Chinese Civil War (1945-49), the government allowed 15,000 Chinese people including students, visitors, and seaman unable to return to China, to remain in the US as lawful permanent residents (Chan, 1991) under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. In 1949, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established, and the US terminated diplomatic relations with the newly formed Communist government. In response, the US government granted refugee status to 5,000 highly educated Chinese citizens living in the US (Chan, 1991).

In the early 50s, extensive land reform and a series of political movements in Communist China caused many people to flee to Hong Kong. In 1952, the US Immigration and Nationality Act established a quota in preference for skilled workers to migrate to the US (FAIR, 2008). In 1953, the Refugee Relief Act allowed additional 2,777 refugees of the Chinese Civil War to enter into the US (Wong, 1995). President Kennedy signed a presidential directive in 1962 that permitted Hong Kong refugees from the PRC to enter the US immediately as “parolees” (Wong, 1995).

The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA) amendments repealed the national origin based quota system in the US. Instead, the government established a new seven-category preference system, with a limit of two thousand immigrants per country from the Eastern Hemisphere. Under the Act, many Chinese immigrants came to the US as families (Lee & Mock, 2005). From 1966 to 1976, the Cultural Revolution took place in China, and during this time, Chinese immigrants could enter the US based on family reunification (Wong, 1995).

Following restoration of diplomatic relations between the PRC and the US in 1979, the US allowed many long-separated Chinese American families to reunite with relatives from
China. At the same time, the US continued issuing visas to Taiwan’s (Nationalist) Chinese through the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong. The passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 raised the ceiling on immigration visas from Hong Kong from six hundred to five thousand annually. After the events of June 4, 1989, in Tiananmen Square, the US government allowed qualified Chinese citizens already in the US to remain and become permanent residents. In 1997, the territory of Hong Kong returned to China. Worried about political instability, many Hong Kong residents migrated to the US, Canada, and other Western nations. Instability in the political environment and the independence movement in Taiwan also resulted in increased immigration from China to the US. Many Taiwanese students and professionals who pursued studies in the US stayed after they completed their studies. The Chinese quota of immigrants from the PRC and Taiwan (Republic of China) combined was approximately 460,000 from 1965 to the early 1990s; non-quota immigrants were approximately 150,000 for that period (Chan, 1991).

The Chinese population in the US has become increasingly diverse, as many ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia came as survivors of persecution, hunger, rape, incarceration, forced migration, and torture. Over time, ethnic Chinese also immigrated from Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Mexico, Canada, South America, and Europe (Lee, 1996; Lee & Mock, 2005).

**Contemporary Immigration Issues**

The Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended in 1965, marked the beginning of contemporary immigration legislation. It established a new race-neutral admission preference system based on family reunification and employment skills preferences. This led to increased
numbers of immigrants from Asia and Latin America who formerly experienced restrictions in bringing their family members into the country.

For many immigrant families, which included Chinese immigrants, reunification and separation were under the control of immigration law. Under the established “family reunification preference system”, the USCIS (formerly INS) controls the entry of family dependents of migrant workers, even when these workers have been legally recognized to fill the employment needs of the US economy (Parrenas, 2005). Still many barriers exist, such as visa preferences, long waiting lists, and age eligibility. These affect family separation and establish hardships for immigrants and their family members. Although a petition for labor immigration is pending at the CIS, potential migrants who are presently in the US do not have legal status. During this waiting period, they cannot safely leave the US to visit their families in the country of origin with assurance of re-entry (Parrenas, 2005).

For more than a century, US immigration policies not only framed the pattern for how people migrate to the country, they also catalyzed and sustained the practice of transnationalism among immigrants. Both early and contemporary immigrants, including Chinese, in the US maintained a pattern of transnationalism; they lived their lives across borders and continued to be involved in the daily life activities in both home and host societies.

**Transnationalism and the New Wave of Chinese Immigration**

Many scholars argue that for families transnational migration is not a new phenomenon (Foner, 2000; Gabaccia, 2000; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Chinese immigrants have lived out a pattern of transnational split-households, both in the past and in contemporary America; they have always lived their lives across borders. Although they remain actively involved in daily life in China, they are working very hard in the US. They maintain close emotional and economic
ties with their transnational families. In this section, I examine the phenomenon of transnationalism and its relationship to Chinese immigration in the US.

**Transnationalism**

Transnationalism refers to the “process by which immigrants build and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, et al. 1994, p.7). Through this process, many contemporary immigrants build social fields that cross-geographic, cultural, and political arenas between their country of origin and their country of settlement. Transmigrants are people who migrate from their home countries but continue to develop and maintain multiple relationships on familial, economic, social organizational, religious, and political aspects across the borders (Basch, et al. 1994; Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992a, 1992b).

Although transnationalism has occurred for many years, it has become more complex in its scale, scope, and its effects on the societies involved (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998). Basch and colleagues (1994) stressed a series of core themes in transnational migration. Currently, transnational migration occurs during a period of restructuring of global capitalism. Through their daily life activities and social, economic, and political relations, transnational migrants create social fields that cross national boundaries. Involvement in both the daily life activities of transmigrants in home and host societies is another distinctive characteristic of transnationalism. Finally, transnational signifies the fluidity that ideas, objects, capital, and people who now move across borders and boundaries. By living their lives across borders, transmigrants find themselves engaged in the nation-building processes of two or more nation states (Basch, et al. 1994, Schiller, et al. 1995). Indeed, transmigrants and nonmigrants in the home societies are both involved in the process of transnationalism. The flow of people, money, and “social remittances”
within these spaces is so widespread that nonmigrants’ lives also become transformed. This includes ideas, norms, practices, and identities (Levitt, 2001).

The concept of transnationalism refers to cross-border activities by both private single actors, including immigrants, and large bureaucratic institutions that have long been part of the global scene (Portes, 2003). One distinction between the activities of single actors and large institutions is “transnationalism from above” and “transnationalism from below” (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998, p.3). Transnationalism from above referred to global capital, media, and the activities of political institutions and multinational corporations. Transnationalism from below implies local and individual nongovernmental activities (Portes, 2003) which also include transnational migration.

Transnationalism is part of globalization (Schiller, et al. 1995). Both are by-products of late stage capitalism, which renders large industrialized countries dependent on cheap labor and small non-industrialized countries dependent on the remittances that workers send home (Portes, 2003). Levitt (2001) stated that local level transnational activities are reinforced by the growing number of global economic and governance structures that make decision-making and problem-solving across borders increasingly common (Levitt, 2001). Under globalization, political, economic, and social activities have become interregional or intercontinental which further intensify levels of interaction and interconnectedness within and between states and societies (Held, 1999 as cited in Levitt, 2001).

Labor is profoundly connected to these global changes. Two major economic forces drive contemporary immigration. One is the labor need of First World economies, in particular the need for low-wage labor. The other is the penetration of peripheral countries by the productive investment, consumption standards, and popular culture of the advanced societies. Both factors
have their roots in the dynamics of capitalist expansion that influences where people seek employment and the willingness of people to do certain types of work (Portes, 1997). In other cases, the scarcity of labor may stem from culturally conditioned resistance of native-born workers to accept low-paid menial jobs commonly performed by earlier immigrants. These occupations include agricultural labor, domestic and other personal services, restaurant kitchen work, and garment sweatshop jobs (Schiller et al., 1995).

By the 1980s, the structure of employment in the US had undergone deindustrialization (Jones, 1992; Schiller et al., 1992a, 1992b). Many stable industrial-sector jobs were lost through the export of manufacturing industries abroad, frequently to third world countries. In many US industrial cities, service sector and clerical employment replaced well-paying and unionized employment. However, other lower-pay jobs found in sweatshops offer few or no benefits or job security (Jones, 1992; Schiller et al., 1992a, 1992b). At the same time, in the global restructuring of capital, large-scale agribusiness, and the investment of transnational corporations destroyed the local economies of the underdeveloped countries (Basch, et al. 1994).

Disruption of local economies accompany the new wave of intense capital penetration that resulted in an increased pool of available labor as whole families often migrated to urban areas. Multinationals dominated the growing but relatively small manufacturing sector. The factories that remained could not easily absorb all displaced and underemployed labors. The economic dislocations in both capital-dependent and core capitalist countries have increased migration to the latter (Basch, et al. 1994; Schiller et al. 1992a, 1992b).

Even though transmigrants may be working in another country, they remain active in their homelands. They are often unable to achieve full social membership in the receiving countries (Levitt, 2001). For example, increasing numbers of contemporary migrants in the US
are ethnic minorities. They often experience blocked mobility, racism, and discrimination. They are also insecure in the labor market. Because of these factors, they are rarely completely Americanized (Levitt, 2001). It is easier for them to maintain a transnational lifestyle (Levitt, 2001), so that they retain connections to their home countries. Because their jobs pay less and provide few benefits, contemporary immigrants face very limited prospects, a condition that may also encourage long-term transnational ties.

**Gender and Transnationalism**

The number of women migrants has increased significantly in response to changing labor markets globally, particularly because of the massive demand for cheap female labor from poor countries to economically prosperous countries. Under such circumstances, more women migrate independently rather than as “family dependents” with their husbands or joining them abroad as in earlier times. The change pattern of gender migration is significant in women’s new roles as actors in migratory processes and as remittances senders (UNINSTRAW, 2007).

Global capitalism in both receiving and home countries continuously reinforces gender inequalities and exploits female labor migrants (UNINSTRAW, 2007). Most women work in the worst possible occupational niches in terms of wages, working conditions, legal protections, and social recognition. Many families send their female family members from the home country to migrate with the expectation that women will sacrifice themselves to a greater degree than men for the welfare of their families. They may not be able to save money for their old age, because they are expected to remit a huge portion of the income to their families. They may spend less on themselves and endure worse living conditions. They may spend years without seeing their children that they have left back home. Other people may blame them or they may blame themselves for “abandoning” the children they left in the care of families and relatives in the
home countries (UNINSTRAW, 2007). Taken together these circumstances disadvantage female migrants economically and socially. In addition, separation from their children disrupts their relationships.

In the global economy, women who work outside home continue to have responsibilities inside the home. A gender paradox defines the labor of women regardless of time and space. Transnational women continue to provide care to their family and children from afar (Parrenas, 2005). The discourses of women migrants as well as the discourse about women migrants continue to underscore their gender responsibility for family and children. Migrant women often measure their achievements only in terms of the benefits they are able to provide their families, and people praise them in similar terms (UNINSTRAW, 2007).

Transnationalism and the Formation of Transnational Families

Globalizing forces and immigration policies are not concerned with the intimacies and intricacies of family life. International migration patterns provide the basis for the creation of transnational families (Trask, 2009) and geographic dispersion. Most commonly, family members live apart from one another, but bond by feelings of collective welfare and unity. Constructing a transnational family is a strategic response to globalizing conditions that affect every aspect of social, economic, and political life (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Individual family members employ various strategies to maintain, extend, or limit relationships through new transnational spaces (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) argue that various members of the same family may picture their family differently depending on their particular interpretation of “family stories and sense of belonging” (p. 15). This fluidity leads to a constant negotiation of roles and relationships throughout a family member’s life cycle. For many individuals, migration also involves loss, loss of place, loss of relationships, and loss of a
sense of belonging that they may not be able to claim in the same manner, even upon return to the home country (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Trask, 2009). One of the most important current concerns in transnational families is the effect on children who are “left behind” due to parents’ migrations and separations. Another section of this paper will examine the subject of transnational mothering and “good mothering.”

Advanced technological developments, such as electronic mail, real-time chat rooms, live round-the-world television broadcasts, and wireless communication facilitate the process of globalization and transnational migration (Dauvergne, 2008; Foner, 2005; Trask, 2009). With access to media such as the Internet and video conferencing, individuals who leave their homes can maintain ongoing ties to their societies of origin (Matt, 2012; Trask, 2009). Children reunite virtually with their migrating parents periodically. In addition, the invention of rapid transportation and communication systems facilitates contemporary migrants’ traveling home back and forth quicker, easier, and more readily available (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Home video technology plays a similar role in shrinking distance. Family members at home often use video cameras to record important events such as baptisms, birthday parties, and weddings so family members who are not present can also “attend” those family gatherings (Levitt, 2001).

Both economic and social remittances serve to bind family members together. The World Bank estimates that in 2014, formally transferred remittances totaled about $583 billion US dollars internationally (World Bank, 2015) and developing countries received $436 billion (World Bank, 2014). Approximately $238 billion in officially recorded remittances flowed to developing countries in 2008 (World Bank, 2008 cited in Trask, 2009). In fact, the actual amount of remittances may be substantially higher, since this figure does not take into account funds transferred through informal channels (UNFPA, 2006). The top three recipient nations of
remittances were India, China, and Mexico, followed by a long list of countries in the developing world, including the Philippines, Poland, Nigeria, Egypt, and Pakistan. Receiving remittances is a significant contribution to the gross national product of these countries (Trask, 2002).

On the local level, remittances allow families in sending societies to survive and improve their living conditions. The aggregate consequence of sending remittances, buying houses in the home country, or visiting families in hometowns can be enormous (Portes, 2003). Remittances may lead to changes in roles within families, and they can allow household members in the home country to engage in new productive activities (Trask, 2009) such as providing care for young children of the family.

**Transnationalism and the Fujianese Migrants in New York**

Transnational families are common among Chinese immigrants in the US. Chinese immigrants maintain close emotional and economic ties with their families in China while they are working hard in the US. In many circumstances, their family members in China act as caregivers providing care for their young children. These children might be left behind, due to their parents’ migration, or sent to their parents’ hometown after birth in the US. In the following section, I examine the transmigrant lives of Chinese immigrants in the US.

Since the 1980s, many more Chinese immigrants, particularly those from the southern Chinese province of Fujian, have come to the US. The influx of Fujianese immigrants has remade the structure of traditional Chinatowns and the social dynamics of the Chinese community. In the past, people living in New York’s Chinatown mostly spoke the Toisanese dialect. Now, the Fuzhounese dialect is the major dialect among inhabitants in sections of the community. Immigrants from the Fujian-Fuzhou region have clustered around the East Broadway corridor, which has become the center of their daily and social life. Increasing
numbers of Fujianese immigrants settle in the once entrenched Cantonese Chinatown (Keefe, 2009a). These newcomers have spread out to other Chinatowns located in Elmhurst and Flushing, Queens; Sunset Park, Brooklyn; and other thriving communities (Chu, 2001). As a result, Chinese populated areas in New York continue to expand.

Fujianese people have a long history of migration. During the 15th century, they left China to find work as contract or debtor laborers. Massive Fujianese migration in the late 19th centuries changed the demography of Southeast Asian countries. For example, Fujianese comprised 80 percent of the Chinese who migrated to the Philippines, 55 percent in Indonesia, 50 percent in Burma, and 40 percent in Singapore in the late 20th century (Liang and Ye, 2001; Zhu, 1991).

The earliest Fuzhounese immigrants to come to New York arrived in the 1940s. These pioneers were a few sailors who “jumped ship” (Kwong, 2001, p.111; Guest, 2003, p.27). A few hundred Chinese, those who served in the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II, were also granted legal residency. As more seaman escaped from China in the 1950s, they came to the US and chose to stay on undocumented.

As early Fuzhounese immigrants sent remittances to hometowns and villages, the news of economic opportunities spread throughout their communities. After the Fuzhounese migrants settled and established roots in the US, they sent for their immediate family members and then for their extended families. Their friends and fellow villagers followed. Traditional Fuzhounese are strongly devoted to families and their communities are close knit. This greatly perpetuated their chain migration (Keefe, 2008).

The Fuzhounese populations in America gradually grew over the next three decades, especially in New York, as more followed their compatriots abroad to find better lives. They
entered the US either documented or undocumented. Some migrated to the US based on family
reunification after their relatives had obtained US legal status (Guest, 2003). Others came to
study and or to work (Huang & Pieke, 2003). In 1996, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration
Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), which amended the Immigration and
Nationality Act. This act specifically addressed the persecution of Chinese nationals under the
one-child family planning policy. Under this law, people from the Greater Fuzhou region
obtained asylum status and subsequently petitioned so their families could enter the US for
reunification (Edstrom, 2009).

**Geographical and Socio-economic Background Contributing to Emigration**

Fujian is located on the Southeast coast of China, across the straits of Taiwan.
Historically, Fujianese emigrants came from the southern region of the Fujian Province.
Currently, new waves of migration come from the the Greater Fuzhou region of the northern part
of Fujian Province. The City of Fuzhou is the provincial capital of Fujian Province and is a large
metropolis with a population of 35 million in 2005 (Liu & Wu, 2008). In contrast, the
surrounding counties to Fuzhou include Changle, Lianjiang, Mawei, Pintan, Fuqing, and a string
of townships along the northern banks of the Min River, where most of these new immigrants in
the United States came from. In 1995, the Fuzhou area accounted for 65 percent of emigrants
from Fujian province (Liang & Morooka, 2004). Newly emigrated Fuzhounese share the
common dialect. Once Fujian immigrants moved to the New York metropolitan area the
common use of local Chinese dialects changed (Keefe, 2009a, 2009b; Liang & Ye, 2001).

In 1982, Fujian represented less than 2% of China’s emigrant population. However, by
1990, their numbers quadrupled and rose to more than 234,000. This accounted for 13% of
China’s emigrant population, after Beijing and Shanghai. By 1995, Fujian topped the list of all
provinces and regions with 28% of China’s emigrant population. In 2000, Fujian accounted for 18% of China’s emigrant population (Liang & Morooka, 2004). Fujianese natives are flourishing in New York City, other US cities, and in some European countries.

The characteristics of migrants from Fuzhou have changed over time. In 1990, Fujianese emigrants were mostly from rural areas with low levels of education. They were more likely to be male (77%), married, and between ages of 20 and 29. By 1995, 74% of the emigrants were male and almost half only completed junior high school; more than one quarter only had an elementary school education in China. Only 2% were professionals. In 1990, young adults were the most likely age co-hort to migrate to the US. By 1995, emigration included a range of household members including household heads, spouses, and children. In 1990, almost 70% of emigrants were from cities; however, by 1995, Fuzhou emigrants were much more likely to come from rural areas. Most of these new migrants were previously engaged in service work, doing manual labor or agricultural activities (Liang & Moroke, 2004).

Immigration scholars ask if Fujianese migrants leave to escape poverty (Liang & Ye, 2001; Liu & Wu, 2008; Pieke, 2004). Undoubtedly, Fujianese natives are poor compared to standards of living in the US. However, they are not the poorest people in China (Liang & Ye, 2001). It is the sense of “relative deprivation” (Laing & Ye, 2001, p. 200) that caused desperate young Fujianese peasants to leave home and risk their lives to find a better life.

Since China’s economic reforms from the late 1970s, many Chinese have seized the opportunity to get rich quickly. However, the drastically increased income disparities make people at the bottom develop a sense of relative deprivation. Going to the US through either legal or illegal means is an alternative way to get rich (Liang & Ye, 2001). In Fuzhou, fewer than 10% of the people complete high school (Keefe, 2009a). Fuzhounese are mostly farmers and
fishermen. Because they are poorly educated and less skilled, they have barely benefitted from the booming economic development and growth in China over the last few decades.

This situation grew worse when China’s surplus labor from even poorer interior provinces flowed into Fujian and rendered Fujianese labor less competitive. As a result, many young adults in Fuzhou found themselves disadvantaged in labor competition (Liu & Wu, 2008). Finding a way to the US or European countries generated hope and promise for the future for these young Fuzhounese peasants and their families. Although they take on huge debts to come to the US and work in subhuman conditions after migration, they feel hope for the future. In New York, a dishwasher in a restaurant can make in a month what a Fuzhou farmer earns in a year (Keefe, 2009a, 2009b). A Fuzhounese entrepreneur commented that when the income difference between China and the US is 1:2 rather than 1:15 or 1:20, that is when Fuzhounese will stop emigrating and return home. In terms of income potential for the average worker, one year’s earnings in the US can equal that of 15 Chinese years (Hood, 1997).

Although many educated, wealthy, or professional Chinese travel abroad, it is still very difficult for the average Chinese citizen, such as the young Fuzhounese peasant, to get documents needed to leave China (Kung, 2000). The Chinese government does not issue passports to its citizens freely. At the same time, young Fuzhounese peasants view it as hopeless to obtain a visa to enter the US. Instead, in order to get to the US, they pay tens of thousands of dollars to human smugglers, or “snakeheads,” to arrange passage from China to the US (Miller, 2001). The snakeheads are much more sophisticated than the “coyotes” that help Mexicans cross the US-Mexican border. Human smuggling from China has attracted global mass media attention as reflected in the cases of the ill-fated Golden Venture fiasco in New York City in 1993 and the
tragic deaths of 58 Chinese immigrants in Denver, England in 2000. In both cases, most of these immigrants were from Fujian Province (Liang & Morooke, 2004).

Some Fuzhounese were smuggled to their destinations directly by air either from China or after exiting to Hong Kong. As customs monitored air routes more carefully, smugglers utilized sea routes as alternatives (Guest, 2003). These immigrants often pass through many ports, enduring arduous journeys hiding in cargo containers and ships. Once migrants reach the US, their debt collectors lock them up in safe houses until relatives or friends pay off their smuggling fees. Debt collectors use brutal tactics to ensure immediate and full payment (Chu, 2001). New arrivals must find work immediately to pay off enormous smuggling debts. Immigrants are under incredible pressure to repay these debts. Some may owe money to family or relatives. Others may have borrowed money from loan sharks with high interest rates, up to 25% annually. Even working long hours and living frugally, new immigrants are fortunate if they can pay off their debts within five years (Kwong 1997; Guest, 2003).

In the United States, New York City is the most favored destination for Fujianese (Liang & Morooke, 2004) and is the first stop in the United States (Keefe, 2009a) for new Fujianese immigrants. A decade ago, new migrants quickly obtained employment in sweatshops or restaurants in Chinatown, uptown Manhattan, or other boroughs of New York. As the garment industry retrenched in New York, newer arrivals had to move across the country and work outside of New York. Many acquired jobs through employment referral agencies situated along New York Chinatown’s East Broadway, Division, and Eldridge Streets. Most of these new immigrants are undocumented and owe money to people who brought them to the US. They do not speak English. In addition, they have to elude INS officials everywhere (Miller, 2001). They cannot bargain over their wages, know very little about workplace rights, and cannot report
exploitation to the authorities. Therefore, they generally work under poor conditions. Their jobs tend to be menial and grueling with sub-minimum pay and long hours (Kwong, 2002; Liu & Wu, 2008). One former client reported that he continued working over six months without one day-off and worked 14 hours a day when he first came to the US. Later, he broke down and needed mental health treatment.

Whatever state, city, or town Fuzhounese migrants go to work in, they maintain strong communal ties and networks in New York City. Due to cultural and language factors, New York is the place where Fuzhounese migrants can always return and get access to immigration services, information, medical care, and social support. Most settle in New York after sending for their families. Fuzhounese migrants and their families sometimes live in extremely overcrowded conditions. I have observed situations where three families consisting of over 10 people lived in a small two-bedroom apartment. One family slept in the living room. Everyone shared one bathroom and one kitchen.

Fujianese migrants send a large portion of their earnings to their families in China. Remittances are an important source of funds to reduce the relative income disparity between their families and more successful Chinese (Thuno & Pieke, 2005). Remittances change the consumption patterns of China’s families with emigrants working overseas. Most importantly, those in China can spend large sums of money to build new houses and improve their living conditions. Some overseas migrants also give donations to build ancestral halls and new schools in villages. These good deeds result in the restructuring of the social and cultural institutions and identities in their villages (Thuno & Pieke, 2005). The continuous flow of funds influences social and community environments to create a sense of relative deprivation for the remaining local peasants (Liu & Wu, 2008). Successful friends or relatives who have migrated provide further
impetus for more young adults to go abroad. Unfortunately, local Fujianese people only think about making money if they emigrate. What they do not envisage is how hard immigrants work to survive often under such harsh conditions in the receiving countries (Thuno & Pieke, 2005).

In the Fujianese context, migration affects many people, regardless of whether they themselves actually leave or stay in the home country. For many Fuzhounese, migration is an open-ended experience and process rather than a simple move from one country to another. Transnational, migratory, and localizing practices mutually condition each other in this process. In Fuzhou, if people are not part of a transnational family, they are likely to know an emigrant who is a relative or friend from the same village. In some villages, almost 90% of the young have migrated abroad (Guest, 2003). On the other hand, more and more Fujianese communities have emerged in the receiving countries (Liang & Ye, 2001). This further facilitates the process of migration of other family members from the same communities in Fujian. This is the cumulative causation of migration (Liang & Ye, 2001) or chain migration (Levitt, 2001).

Chain migration develops through social networks and long-term transnational ties. Social networks are sets of cross-border interpersonal ties connecting migrants, return migrants and non-migrants through kinship, friendship, and attachment to shared place of origin (Levitt, 2001). Once a network is in place, it becomes more likely that additional migration will occur. In Fuzhou, as more people from the same community go overseas, migration networks establish and migratory streams become self-perpetuating. Each act of migration expands overseas networks. Migration networks serve to bolster the institutional arrangements that enable migration, reinforce the demand for more labor within overseas ethnic economies, and produce safer conditions for new migrants upon arrival (Thuno & Pieke, 2005). The risks and costs of
movement for subsequent migrants are lower because well-established migrants already in the receiving countries will help new arrivals find jobs and housing (Levitt, 2001).

Young Fujianese migrants have children born as US citizens. However, because of the parent’s undocumented status, they cannot earn enough money to pay off their smuggling debts, provide for their families in the US and back home, and pay for childcare. They cannot stop working to raise their own children. Without many options, parents sometimes decide to send their infant children to their hometowns and have immediate relatives, such as grandparents, to care for their children for the formative years of their lives. Also, because of their undocumented status, these parents need someone to escort their children to China (Chen, 2006). Some enterprising Fujianese have seized on this opportunity as a business. Currently, carrying babies back to Fuzhou has become a flourishing industry in the Fuzhounese community (Keefe, 2009).

Many countryside villages in the Fuzhou region have become “widow’s villages”, since so many men have gone to America while their wives stay behind. Soon after, even wives rejoin their husbands in the US, leaving behind, as the only residents, their elderly relatives and a large number of children and the American-born babies that they care for (Keefe, 2009a, 2009b).

**Conclusion**

Chinese immigrants have a history of over 160 years in the US, and Chinese history in the US is inseparable from the development and changes of the US society. From the first Chinese who came as sojourned laborers to 21st century immigrant families, Chinese immigrants have practiced a pattern of transnational life. They have in the past and continue to maintain close contacts with their families in China. Through modern technology, contemporary Chinese migrants enjoy virtual proximity with their families living in their hometowns. Similar to transnational families around the world, the Chinese practice a model of cross-border division of
labor. Immigrants act as productive labor in the host country. They work hard and send their earnings to support their families in the home country. At the same time, families in the home country perform reproductive labor. The practice of transnational parenting and transnational mothering is an example of such a division of labor. More than that, transnational mothers (or parents) continue to perform their parenting roles from afar by sending remittances as well as other kinds of support to their children.

In the next chapter, I will examine the theories on mothering, motherhood, and mother-infant relationships. The focus will be on separation and reunification. I will begin with early motherhood and mothering experience. Then, I will examine the quality of infant-mother relationship. Finally, I will look at the issues of attachment, attachment and multiple caregivers, separation and reunification, and their cultural relevance for transnational Chinese families.
CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL CONCEPTS ON THE MATERNAL EXPERIENCE, SEPARATION, AND REUNIFICATION

Introduction

At least three parties are involved in transnational mothering: the mother, the child, and the “other mother.” In West African and African-American families, “othermothering” (p.45) is common (Bryant, 1999). It is important to the survival of the Black community (James, 1993). James (1993) defined the “othermothers” as those who assist blood mothers in the responsibilities of childcare for short- to long-term periods in informal or formal arrangements, particularly when their biological parents are unable or unwilling to discharge the obligations of childcare and parenting (p. 45).

In New York, Chinese immigrant mothers give birth to and nurse their infants for several months until they send their babies away to their families and the other mothers in China. What do motherhood and early mothering experiences mean to these mothers? How do mothers respond to separation? When the child is under the care of the “othermother” in China, will the child establish an attachment relationship with that person? Will bonding experiences with “other mothers” affect the child’s return and reunification with his or her own mother? To answer these questions, I will first examine the models and theories on motherhood, mother’s care-giving and mother-child relationships in this chapter.

The theories examined in this chapter serve as a guide to understand the issues of mothering, mother-child relationships, and child development. However, these theories primarily developed in the 20th century within the Western socio-cultural context. While applying these concepts and principles to study the phenomena of transnational mothering among Chinese immigrant mothers in this globalized world in the 21st century, I explored the extent to which
they apply among this group. Hence, I drew on these theories as sensitizing concepts in scrutinizing what actually occurs in the mother-child experiences in relation to Chinese satellite babies.

**From Maternal Role Attainment (MRA) to Becoming a Mother (BAM):**

**Theories on Maternal Role and Experience**

Mothers are presumed to be responsible for nurturing the children born to them. Rubin (1984), a pioneer in maternal research, challenged the assumption that mothering was instinctual (Barnard & Martell, 1995). She stated that there is nothing preprogrammed or predetermined in maternal behavior (Rubin, 1984, p.2). Instead, she proposed mothering was a product of the interaction between a mother’s past and her developing child (Barnard & Martell, 1995; Cowdery & Kundson-Martin, 2005). Consequently, maternal attitudes and behaviors vary in relation to the child’s biological, physical, and psychological development.

In 1967, Rubin introduced the concept of maternal role attainment (MRA); subsequently, Mercer (1985), Rubin’s student, defined MRA as a “process in which the mother achieves competence in the role and integrates the mothering behaviors into her established role set, so that she is comfortable with her identity as a mother” (p.198). Rubin (1967) categorized the mother’s role-taking operations into maternal attainment involving mimicry, role-play, fantasy, introjections-projection-rejection, identity, and grief work. Although these role-taking operations occur in progressive stages, the process of maternal attainment is not linear. Some tasks or behaviors may be more salient at different times during pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period (Bernard & Martell, 1995).

Rubin (1967) described mimicry and role-play as two early and tentative forms of role taking-behaviors. Mimicry is the “adoption of behavior associated with mothers or with what mothers seem like” (p.7). In mimicry, women assume the cultural stereotype of motherhood, as
shown by their clothing and behaviors. They may imitate their own mother and peers as models (Barnard & Martell, 1995; Mercer, 2004). Through role-play, women act out the role of mother for short, isolated situation-specific periods. They may search out subjects to try on the role, such as through baby-sitting friends’ children. They perform these role-play activities on a simple stimulus response level. For example, a child’s pleasurable response signifies success, while indifference or crying responses signify failure (Barnard & Martell, 1995; Rubin, 1967).

Rubin (1967) categorized fantasy and introjection-projection-rejection as two forms of role taking-in behaviors. Fantasy is a self-oriented process that does not involve acting out behaviors. Instead, a mother’s wishes, fears, daydreams, and dreams proliferate (Barnard & Martell, 1995, Mercer, 2004; Rubin, 1967). Fantasies about the child increase during pregnancy; the pregnant woman becomes aware that fetal movements are increasing (Rubin, 1967). The mother sees the child as an extension of herself, both the wished-for self and the dreaded-self (Rubin, 1967). In introjection-projection-rejection (I-P-R), a woman determines if any models of the mothers she knows fit her image. If a model is not satisfactory, she rejects the model. Through this process, a mother evaluates models of motherhood (Barnard & Martell, 1995).

A woman achieves maternal identity when she has successfully internalized the maternal role and gains a sense of comfort seeing herself as a mother. At the same time, she gradually lets go of her former identity in old roles that are not compatible with the assumption of her new role as a mother (Rubin, 1967). The process of “grief work” ends when the mother establishes her new identity (Barnard & Martell, 1995).

Since its inception, several studies have examined the theory of MRA (Copeland & Harbaugh, 2004; Josten, 1982; Mercer, 1980, 1981, 1985, 1986; Mercer & Ferketich, 1990,
Moreover, Rubin also continued to engage in empirical studies and furthered the conceptual development of maternal experiences.

Later, Rubin (1984) dropped the term MRA and re-defined the previous concept of maternal identity as an inseparable incorporation into the whole personality instead of as maternal role attainment. She asserted that transition to the mothering role began in pregnancy and continued following childbirth; it involved intensive emotional work. In this work, Rubin identified four major tasks in the mothering process. These included seeking safe passage for herself and her child through pregnancy, labor, and delivery; ensuring the acceptance by significant persons in her family of the child she bears; binding-in to her unknown child, i.e. seeking acceptance of herself in the maternal role to her unborn child (Ricci & Kyle, 2010, p.308); and learning to give of herself. Rubin saw these tasks during pregnancy as preparation for her continual maternal role (Rubin, 1984).

Among the four tasks, Rubin (1984) stressed that a woman’s binding-in to her child and formation of a maternal identity were interdependent coordinates of the same process. Binding-in is a process that begins in pregnancy, so that mother-child bonding already exists by childbirth. During the first trimester, binding-in begins with the acceptance and rejection process of pregnancy. She accepts the idea of pregnancy, but not of the infant (Ricci & Kyle, 2010). The woman learns to give of herself as she begins to weigh the demands that pregnancy entails. Changes in her body appearance, function, integrity, relationships, lifestyle, and life space represent both loss and change. In the second trimester, fetal movement evokes a special, private experience, when love and acceptance of the unborn child are very high. Physical changes associated with pregnancy, the growing fetus’s activity, and the sense of “life within her” makes the mother especially aware of the child. At this point, the mother’s identification shifts to the
child. In the third trimester, increasing conflict arises, because on one hand the mother wants the child, but hates the pregnancy. She becomes more conscious of her commitment required in giving birth, investing time, interest, companionship, and related concerns. In addition, the fear of danger during the delivery overwhelms the mother (Rubin, 1984). This conflict makes the mother feel miserable. Although she wants the birth, she still has fear about her own and the baby’s safety (Rubin, 1984; Mercer, 2004).

Rubin (1984) renamed two of the progressive stages in MRA in achieving maternal identity. She replaced the words mimicry and role-playing with “replication,” i.e., the pregnant woman identifies her mother as her strongest model. She also replaced introjections-projection-rejection with de-differentiation, during which the mother shifts from models of expert-mothering persons to herself in relation to her child (Mercer, 2004). In establishing maternal identity, a mother identifies her child in reality and her image of her child stabilizes; she knows and anticipates her child’s behaviors and needs. She has confidence to provide her infant in the right place at the right time the respectable form of care that will satisfy its physical and emotional needs (Rubin, 1984).

Mercer (2004) found that a woman establishes her maternal identity through her commitment and involvement in defining her new self. Maternal identity continues to evolve as the mother acquires new skills to regain her confidence in herself as new challenges arise. The transition to motherhood is a major developmental life event. Becoming a mother involves moving from a known current reality to an unknown new reality. This transition requires restructuring goals, behaviors, and responsibilities to achieve a new conception of self (Barba & Selder, 1995 as cited in Mercer, 2004). Mothers use many strategies to adapt to a new reality while maintaining their own personal integrity. Some strategies include, recognizing the
permanent of the required change, seeking information for construction of a new self-definition, seeking models for a new normalization, and competency in self-testing in the new role. Establishing a maternal identity as a mother contributes to a woman’s psychosocial development (Mercer, 2004). Mercer (2004) argues that the notion of “maternal role attainment” should be replaced by “becoming a mother” to connote the initial transformation and continuing growth of the mother identity (Mercer, 2004).

From MRA to BAM, Rubin and Mercer have provided this proposed study some sensitizing concepts for evaluating the meaning and experiences of early motherhood of Chinese immigrant mothers. Rubin’s theory of MRA emphasized the process through which a mother-to-be begins to take in her new maternal role, then integrates the mothering behaviors into her new role and finally achieves maternal identity. In her amended theory, Rubin emphasized maternal experiences and maternal identity as an inseparable part of the mother’s integrated personality. In the process of transition to motherhood, a woman re-defines her role and identity by restructuring her goals, behaviors, and responsibility in relation to another person. In this study, I explored Chinese immigrant mother’s experience of becoming a mother and the role of these experiences played in the decision and process of practicing transnational mothering.

**The Quality of Infant-Mother Relationships**

Donald Winnicott, an English pediatrician and psychoanalyst, studied the quality of infant-mother relationships. His theoretical concepts were influential in the development of the object relation theory (Flanagan, 2011). These included the good enough mother, primary maternal preoccupation, the holding environment, and transitional objects.

Winnicott (1960) once said, “There is no such thing as an infant” (p.39). In other words, if there was no maternal care, there would be no infant; whenever there is an infant, there is
maternal care. The infant and the maternal caregiver together form a unit. He posited that the development of a child must relate to its dependency upon a real and influential object, a mother or a good-enough mother. A “good enough mother” is someone who suffers the “normal illness” of “primary maternal preoccupation” (Winnicott, 1956, p. 302). He proposed that a mother of the newborn becomes preoccupied with her own infant in order to provide and meet its physiological and psychological needs. Flanagan (2011) interpreted this to mean that a healthy mother must allow herself to become completely lost in her baby. A good enough mother possesses a capacity for attunement to the baby’s changing developmental needs (Flanagan, 2011). Such preoccupation is normal and temporary. It lasts for a certain length of time after parturition and gradually loses as the baby develops (Winnicott, 1960). The primary infant-mother relationship always exerts a continuing influence on personality structure (Scharff & Scharff, 1995). Good-enough maternal care provides strong ego support and personality development (Winnicott, 1960).

Winnicott’s concept of good enough mother emphasized the birthmother’s primary preoccupation with her child. Contrasting with Chinese immigrant mother’s experience in my study, I explored how a birthmother experienced this preoccupation of the maternal care role with her American-born infant, before and after she sent it away. How does she feel getting lost in a child when she knows that she will be sending off her child to the other mother? Who will this other mother be during the absence of the birthmother? How “good enough” is the substitute mother in terms of providing maternal care?

An infant does not talk or verbally express its needs. It depends on the empathic maternal care of the primary caregiver (Winnicott, 1960). With such care, the infant is able to develop a sense of personal existence and then the continuity of being. Based on this continuity of being,
the infant develops into an individual. If maternal care (i.e. holding environment) is not good enough, the infant’s personality development builds on reactions to environmental failure or impingement (Winnicott, 1960). Environmental impingements are acts and events that may disrupt the child’s development (Akhtar, 2009). A child may benefit from a small amount of environmental failure, which leads to ego development. Excessive reactions to premature and intense impingement produce a threat of annihilation to personal self-existence (Akhtar, 2009; Winnicott, 1956).

A good enough mother creates the holding environment, or condition, in which the mother (or mother-substitute) takes care of the baby’s physical and emotional environment. She keeps the baby fed, clothed, warm, and safe. In such a holding environment, she also protects the infant from external events that threaten it with annihilation (Winnicott, 1960; Flanagan, 2011; Scharff & Scharff, 1995). Repetitively experiencing satisfactory instinctual gratifications through good-enough mothering enhances the infant’s psychological internal reality in a belief that the environment is benign (Winnicott, 1958). Such a safe environment facilitates a young child’s becoming increasingly autonomous, and the child gradually achieves the state of separateness from its mother (Shields 1964; Winnicott, 1960).

As an infant develops the capacity to act alone, it shows increasing signs of mature emotional development (Winnicott, 1958). Winnicott believed that the infant develops the ability to tolerate, enjoy, and make use of healthy solitude only in the presence of his mother or mother substitute. Aloneness and loneliness are not the same. The ability to be alone depends on the existence of a good comforting object in the psychic reality of the infant. It becomes unbearable if the infant experiences aloneness as feeling separate or being unattended to in its physical and psychological needs. Good internal relationships enable the individual to feel confident about the
present and future, so that a child can be content in the moment when the external object or stimuli are absent. Aloneness becomes painful and intolerable if the infant’s internal objects are threatening figures that are not able to offer safety, comfort, or peace (Winnicott, 1958; Flanagan, 2011).

In addition to the infant’s capacity to be alone, he or she gradually realizes they are separate from the mother. In terms of facilitating separation, Winnicott (1951) introduced a concept of transitional objects. These may include a worn scruffy teddy bear, a chewed-up piece of blanket, or his mother’s favorite humming tune (Flanagan, 2011). To an infant who does not have the capacity for internal representations, a separation or absence of an object represents disappearance as a permanent void. Transitional objects function as the internal representations of others so the absent person continues to exist (Flanagan, 2011).

On the other hand, a too good mother (Shields, 1964) may resist letting go of her identification with the infant. She tends to remain merged with her infant and delays separation (Winnicott, 1960). She cannot accept the idea that her child is a developing and differentiating organism. A failure to end her maternal identification can result in her infant never being able to separate out as an individual (Shields, 1964).

Winnicott’s theory of the good enough mother informed the mothering experiences of Chinese immigrant mothers before they decided to send their children to China. He stated that without maternal care, there would be no infant. His theory of primary maternal preoccupation is similar to Rubin’s concept of the mother learning to give of herself and becoming completely preoccupied with her infant. If their theories of maternal preoccupation were unassailable, I asked what these claims meant to the Chinese immigrant mothers. They may have planned to send their babies away before or after their birth. Was it that they were not preoccupied with
the impending separation? Or, did these mothers fear getting lost in a child that she would have to eventually send off to the other mother? Did they experience the separation in an entirely different way because of a differential socio-cultural context?

Winnicott asserted that a good enough mother (or substitute mother) provides good maternal care and a holding environment, which can support the infant’s personality and emotional development. A holding environment protects the infant from impingements and facilitates achievement of separateness. For the American-born Chinese satellite babies who were sent to China, who assumed this maternal care roles? The concept of “holding environment” provokes questions of the quality of the environment where the satellite babies grow up in China. Are there good enough mothers and/or a holding environment in which the child is well protected and well prepared enough to separate from their caregivers/caregiving environment and return to his birth mother? Did the child have a transitional object in facilitating his separation from his caregiver? On the other hand, was the caregiver in China a too good mother, which hindered the child from recognizing it individuality? Alternatively, it may be that both the natural and substitute mother compensate for the separation in a way that interrupts individuation. As the infant develops the capacity to be alone or to become separated, it matures in its emotional development.

**Attachment, Separation, and Secure Base**

My study investigated the bonding relationship, separation and reunification of Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born infants. Since there is no known theory in Chinese literature examining these concepts, I looked to Bowlby’s attachment theory on child-parent relationships. Propositions in attachment theory served as sensitizing concepts for scrutinizing
indigenous experiences between Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born returnee children in this study.

The British psychiatrist John Bowlby first introduced the concept of attachment in the 1940s. He perceived attachment as the most important facet to a child’s personality and psychosocial development (Reebye, Ross & Jamieson, 1999). He stressed that to grow up mentally healthy, a child should experience a “warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or a permanent mother figure) where both may find satisfaction and enjoyment” (Bowlby, 1952, p. 13). He described four aspects of attachment: the attachment system, attachment behaviors, attachment relationships, and attachment bonds (Reebye, et al. 1999).

The attachment system helps the infant seek proximity to its attachment figure and develop a sense of security. Attachment behaviors are the actions or signals of infants or toddlers, such as crying, smiling, vocalizing, or crawling and walking towards caregivers, which help bring their caregiver closer. Newborns actively participate in developing and maintaining the attachment relationship. Attachment bonding occurs within the warm, intuitive feelings the caregiver/parent expresses towards the child (Reebye et al., 1999). Consequently, Klaus and colleagues (1995) recommended that new parents and the baby should be alone together right after the birth to establish a strong bond (Klaus, Kennell, & Klaus, 1995).

Although the attachment feeling is considered the domain of the parent-child relationship, some theorists consider this a limited perspective. Mothers are mostly studied as facilitators in the child’s development (Reebye, et al., 1999), but not properly considered as a whole person (George & Solomon, 1999). Bertherton (1992) argued that scholars often overlooked Bowlby’s emphasis on the mutual enjoyment between mother and the child. Bowlby proposed that attachment security predicts aspects of a child’s development, such as social
competence or its ability in problem solving. Attachment security in a mother-infant relationship rests on her accessibility and appropriate responsiveness to the infant. Once established, the security of the mother/caregiver relationship is highly stable over time (Reebye, et al., 1999).

Ainsworth contributed the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world (Bretherton, 1992). In addition, she formulated the concept of maternal sensitivity to infant signals and its role in the development of infant-mother attachment patterns (Bretherton, 1992). In the 1970s, she developed the “strange situation” experiments to study young children’s behaviors towards maternal separation. She uncovered four types of attachment patterns based on separation and reunions, which are secure attachment; insecure attachment-avoidant; insecure attachment-resistant; and insecure attachment-anxious-disorganized-disoriented (Colin, 1996).

A securely attached child uses the caregiver as a stable base for exploration. The child communicates with its caregiver through gestures and affect during play and exhibits distress when separated from its mother. At reunion, the infant appears happy and actively seeks contact and interaction with its mother. An avoidant attachment child shows little or no distress during separations. The child exhibits more affiliation toward the stranger and conspicuous avoidance of proximity to or interaction with the mother. A resistant child appears ambivalent about his mother and is very distressed during separations. At union, the child exhibits mixed anger and attachment behaviors. It has difficulties settling down and shows maladaptive behaviors. Children with anxious-disorganized-disoriented attachment may exhibit various behavior patterns. These include disordered sequences of approach and dazed avoidance; simultaneous contradictory approach-aversive behaviors; inappropriate, stereotyped, repetitive gestures or motions; freezing or stilling; brief open fear of stranger caregivers; attachment behaviors directed
to the stranger when its mother returns; high avoidance with high resistance at the same time; and depressed, dazed disoriented, or affectless facial expressions (Colin, 1999).

The theoretical basis of most attachment research is that secure attachment in infancy will predict good psychosocial outcomes in later years. However, many other factors can modify the impact of secure attachment on later functioning, including cultural variations of attachment, psychosocial circumstances, and factors within the child. These may include the child’s temperament, and intergenerational transmission of values and beliefs (Reeby, et al., 1999).

**Continuity of Attachment versus Separation**

In the previous discussion, attachment occurs when a mother or caregiver regularly engages the child in active social interactions and understands and responds to the child’s signals and cues, and fulfills the child’s physical and emotional needs. Hess (1982) argued that three conditions must be present for optimal parent-child attachment to occur: continuity, stability, and mutuality. Continuity involves the caregiver’s constancy and repetition of parent-child interactions. Stability requires a safe environment where the parent and child can engage in the bonding process. Mutuality refers to the interactions between parent and child that reinforce their importance to each other (Randolph, 1997, p. 1-2).

Bowlby believed that if for any reason the child were removed from its mother’s care during the first three years of its life, the child would experience maternal deprivation (Galtry & Gallister, 2005). The adverse impact could be dreadful, and unwanted separation from the attachment figure could rise to emotional distress (Reeby, et al., 1999). Furthermore, this theory proposed that repeated separations interfered with the development of healthy attachments and a child’s ability and willingness to enter into intimate relationships in the future. Children who have suffered traumatic separations from their parents may also display low self-esteem, a
general distrust of others, mood disorders (including depression and anxiety), socio-moral immaturity, and inadequate social skills. Regressive behavior, such as bedwetting, is a common response to separation. In addition, a child’s cognitive and language delays are highly correlated with early traumatic separation (Randolph, 1997).

**Loss and Grief**

At the core of attachment and separation theory are issues of loss and grief (Bowlby, 1980; Nelson, 2010). Bowlby acknowledged that infants and younger children’s reactions to separation from their caregivers change over time. He classified these reactions into phases of protest, despair, and detachment (Bowlby, 1961, 1980; Nelson, 2010). When an infant was removed from its attached mother figure and placed with strangers in a strange place, it reacted with protesting behaviors such as crying, shaking its bed or throwing itself about. It might look eagerly towards any sight or sound to prove the possible presence of its mother in hope that the mother will re-appear immediately. This may continue for short or long periods. If the yearning for its mother’s return does not diminish, despair may set in. Often, the phases of protest and despair alternate. That is, hope turns to despair and despair to renewed hope (Bowlby, 1961a).

Bowlby (1980) found that detachment or the almost complete absence of attachment behaviors occurred in children between the ages of about six months and three years. These children are those who have been out of their mothers’ care for a week or more and without being cared for by a specially assigned mother figure during separation. As the situation of reunification occurs, the child seems to forget its mother. It remains curiously uninterested in the mother or may seem even not recognize her upon reunion. According to Bowlby (1961), in each of these phases, the child is prone to tantrums and episodes of destructive behavior. How the child behaves at reunion depends on the phase reached during the period of separation. Usually,
the child is unresponsive and undemanding; to what degree and for how long depends on the length of the separation and the frequency of visit.

**Attachment and Mother’s Response to Separation**

Not only do children suffer the effects of separation from their mother, but it also has effects on the mother’s attachment behavior (Schen, 2005). Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973) felt that mother’s instinctual inclination to protect their child results in anxiety. Maternal attachment behaviors were studied on the effects of infant development, but few studies (Hock, McBride & Gnezda, 1989; Nystrom & Axelsson, 2002; Scher, Hershkovitz & Harel, 1998) have examined various themes on maternal separation anxiety.

Hock and colleagues (1989) first defined maternal separation anxiety as “an unpleasant emotional state tied to the separation experience…evidenced by expression of worry, sadness or guilt” (p. 794). Based on this definition, the researchers developed the Maternal Separation Anxiety Scale to study mother’s attachment behavior and emotions. Six hundred and twenty first time mothers who participated in the study showed different levels of maternal separation anxiety. Fifty-three percent of the respondents showed moderate maternal separation anxiety while 22% displayed high separation anxiety.

Using the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, Nystrom and Axelesson (2001) interviewed eight women who separated from full-term newborns for two to ten days postpartum while their infants received light treatment for jaundice. The study found that these mothers developed symptoms of depression and despair when separated from their infants. They described wanting to be with their babies and expressed feelings of loss, grief, and distress. They cried a great deal, had difficulty sleeping, and did not want to eat. They described feelings of powerlessness and lack of control that caused guilt, insecurity, loneliness, and a tendency to be
suspicious of the hospital staff. These mothers also demonstrated signs of caring, love, maternal anxiety, and trust that promoted a healthy attachment and counteracted the symptoms of loss following reunion with the infant. This study suggested that separating a mother and the newborn during the first week of the child’s life produced emotional strain for the mother, even though the newborn was not seriously ill (Nystrom & Axelesson, 2001).

Scher and colleagues (1998) studied 58 low risk mother-infant dyads in a longitudinal investigation. Using the Emotional Status Index, Interpersonal Relations Questionnaire, and the Strange Situation Procedure to collect quantitative data, the study found that the mother’s perceived relationships with her own mother significantly predicted her infant’s attachment to her. Maternal separation anxiety was characteristic of both secure and insecure mothers at early infancy. By the end of the first year, insecure mothers reported higher levels of maternal anxiety and separation concerns compared to the secure mothers (Scher et al., 1998).

These studies attempted to show that mothers suffered from different levels of maternal anxiety during separation from their infants. Mothers could develop maternal attachment behaviors and emotions, which might include depression, despair, and feelings of loss, grief and distress. None of these studies addressed themes on how these mothers retain connection with their infants and avoid anxiety during their babies’ absence. These themes were crucial in studying the experiences of transnational mothering among Chinese immigrant mothers. Does retaining connection with their infants and caregivers ameliorate maternal separation anxiety? Among Chinese immigrant mothers, particularly, does the socio-cultural expectations reconcile the mother and the child’s tolerance for separation?
**Multiple Caregivers**

Proponents of attachment theory believe that attachment is intuitive. They also believe that multiple or selective attachments occur to a number of persons. Van Ijzendoorn and colleagues (1992) suggested that caregivers such as fathers, grandmothers, or professional caregivers could also serve as attachment figures (van Ijzendoorn, Sagi & Lambermon, 1992). Thus, if the child is part of a network of attachment figures, separation from one attachment figure, such as the mother, may not mean separation from every base of security. On the contrary, a separation from the mother during part of the day may imply the presence of the father or a professional caregiver to fulfill the role of attachment figure. At the same time, a multiple caretaker arrangement does not necessarily mean that children relate to more than one figure in a way that is attachment. If children integrate their attachment experiences with different caretakers, late socio-emotional development may be better predicted because of the quality of the attachment network than through the quality of the infant-mother attachment alone. Using data from studies conducted in Holland and Israel, the researchers (Van Ijzendoorn et al., 1992) concluded that the infant-caregiver relationship really is an attachment relationship. In a multiple caretaker environment, non-parental caregivers can be important attachment figures with considerable impact on a child’s later socio-emotional development (van Ijzendoorn, et al., 1992).

In many cultures and societies, it is possible for infants to display attachment behavior to more than one caregiver. The child can be raised in a network of attachment relationships and show attachment to three or four different figures and still primarily be attached to one attachment figure. In Asian cultures, the extended family is very involved with childrearing. In Mainland China, the mother’s mother typically handles the daily care of the young infant
(Barnard & Martell, 1995) and the maternal grandmother plays a key role as substitute caregiver (Hu & Meng, 1996 as cited in Reeby, et al., 1999). Consequently, although these theories informed general understanding of the mother-child relationship, the study of separation and attachment among Chinese families exhibited particular cultural patterns and norms.

Attachment theory provided a foil for this research, because it emphasizes separation and reunifications, maternal anxiety and multiple caregivers. All three were present in the experiences of satellite babies, their mothers, and the “other mothers.” Bowlby and Ainsworth’s attachment theory denotes that attachment may predict aspects of a child’s development. The attachment figure as a secure base built on the caregiver’s sensibility, accessibility, and responsiveness to the signals of the infant. In their theory, the development of infant-mother attachment patterns affects separation and reunification. This study explored the reactions and behaviors towards separation, first the viewpoint of its birth mother and then its caregiver in China, and the extent to which these theories represented the responses of the three actors in this relationship.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

Although these general theories on motherhood, mothering, and mother-child relationships were their application in the proposed study required caution. These theories are rooted in the Western traditions and societal values formed in the early to end of the 20th century. The caregiving style of White middle class mothers has dominated research in the development of these theories (Woodhead, 2006). Biases exist in these Western culturally based theories in terms of temporal and spatial factors. Counter to universality, specific socio-cultural norms and parenting practices actually affect attachment relationships (Reebye et al., 1999). All cultures are
dynamic; there is no uniformity of attitude, beliefs, and practices. There is always an influx of new ideas (Reebye et al., 1999).

This raises the question of whether the social and cultural assumptions of these theories on motherhood and child development are consistent compared to circumstances in a global economy where mothers and children often separate for economic reasons. This has the potential to challenge the universality of childhood development theories (Burke, 2008). The increased global movement between countries has increased the diversity of societies (Reebye et al., 1999). The unique experiences of people of different class, ethnicity, gender, culture, disability, health, and place of residence, rather than one common experience of childhood has been noted (Burke, 2008). There is no consistent and uniform pattern of parenting and attachment even in countries of origin where certain cultural practices are dominant. Many complex attachment behaviors and styles have surfaced (Reebye et al., 1999).

Moreover, traditional theories on childhood development have emphasized the infant’s innocence and dependency on adults (Winnicott, 1958). Having access to new forms of social media and technology are assumptions that are open to question (Burke, 2008). Today, young children are exposed to and engage in a wide range of settings, relationships, activities, and skills through which they acquire culturally located competencies and identities (Woodhead, 2006). This adds another dimension to the relationship between parents and young children that may have particular salience in the context of global distance among families.
CHAPTER IV: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Researchers have explored the practice of transnational parenting or mothering among immigrants from different countries. Studies include the factors involved in making the decision to leave children in their home country or sending children to home countries after immigration. In addition, the research covers emotional struggles and coping strategies of transnational mothers; emotional and substantive effects on children about separation and reunification; and caregiver’s involvement in the process of separation (Best-Cummings, 2008; Boehm, 2008; Chen, 2006; Dreby, 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Erel, 2002; Fresnoz-Flot, 2009; Gaytan, Xue, Yoshikawa, & Tamis-Lemonda, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Horton, 2009; Landolt & Da, 2005; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009; Miranda, Siddique, Der-Martirosian, & Belin, 2005; Nicholson, 2006; Orellana, et al. 2001; Parrenas, 2001, 2005; Schmalzbruer, 2004; Smith, Lalone, & Johnson, 2004). The transnational parent, the child, and the caregiver in the home country are all involved in studies of transnational mothering.

Recently, researchers have shown more interest in transnational parenting. However, only a few of these studies focus on Chinese families (Bohr & Tse, 2009, Da, 2003, Kwong, et al., 2009, Wang, 2009). Because of this, I reviewed studies of other groups that include the experiences of transnational mothers, their children, and caregivers. Finally, I examined the limited studies, which included a pilot study I conducted in 2010, on Chinese immigrant mothers.

The Experience of Children

Several qualitative studies (Dreby, 2007; Fresnoz-Flot, 2009; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009; Parrenas, 2001, 2005), mixed method studies (Gindling & Poggio, 2009; Suarez-Orazco & Suarez-Orazco, 2001; Suarez-Orozo, Todorava, & Louie, 2002), and one quantitative study
(Smith, Lalonde, & Johnson, 2004) have addressed the experiences of children separated from their parents during migration and resettlement. Most emphasize problems children experience when their mothers are absent. These include feelings of abandonment and powerlessness, a lack of intimacy, and poor school performance. Some researchers found that children had a tendency to be jealous of children whose mothers were physically present at home (Dreby, 2007; Fresnoz-Flot, 2009; Parrenas, 2005; Suarez-Orozo, et al., 2002). Moreover, prolonged separations often resulted in greater emotional insecurity and lack of discipline in the children. Several studies reported that immigrant children separated from their parents were more prone to depression, poor self-esteem, and behavioral problems (Suarez-Orozo & Suarez-Orozo, 2001; Smith, et al., 2004).

Researchers report that immigrant mothers’ geographical distance from their children makes it nearly impossible to meet the children’s care expectations. Consequently, many children have feelings of abandonment. They suffer emotional costs with feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and vulnerability (Parrenas, 2001). Some qualitative studies report the experiences of separation from the child’s point of view. Children in the Philippines (Parrenas, 2001) and Central America (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009) reported feeling “abandoned” by their parents. Although these children obtained material support from parents and physical care from other family members, they still felt hurt and yearned for an emotional bond with their parents (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009; Parrenas, 2001).

A young male respondent who was half-Salvadoran and half-Guatemalan felt robbed of a sense of family because he had been sent back home from the US to be raised by his maternal grandmother in El Salvador. Even though he had everything he wanted materially, he was without his parents. When he returned to his parents in the US, he had a difficult time
accommodating to his family. He reproached his parents for having “abandoned” him, and he felt very hurt (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009).

Although Filipina mothers sent monthly remittances and called home once a week, their children also reported that they felt abandoned. Even though their aunts helped them with homework every night, they reported receiving inadequate guardianship. Moreover, they insisted that the work of extended kin was not an adequate substitute for the nurturing acts performed by biological mothers. These included feeding, clothing, and providing them with security. Children longed for emotional bonds, such as love, support, attention, affection, and intimacy on a daily basis. One girl expressed that she wanted touching, kissing and hugging from her mother (Parrenas, 2001, 2005).

Some researchers have studied the psycho-emotional functioning of transnational children separated from their parents. For example, Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2002) studied the experience of separation and reunification among 385 early adolescents originating from China, Central America, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico in the Boston and San Francisco greater metropolitan areas. In the first part of this mixed quantitative-qualitative study, the researchers conducted both student and parent structured interviews. Quantitative analysis of the data indicated that children separated from their parents were more likely to report depressive symptoms than children who remained with their parents. Children separated from both parents had a higher level of reported symptoms compared to children who were not separated. Girls separated from their parents were particularly likely to report depressive symptoms. Chinese children reported the fewest depressive symptoms, while Haitian children reported the highest number of psychological symptoms as a whole (Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2002).
In later qualitative interviews from the same study, themes of the relationship between maternal separation on bonding and reunification emerged. Children often talked emotionally about separating from their loved ones. This related to either separation from their parents or the caretaker who cared for them in their home countries (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). In their home country, their caretakers functioned as attachment figures for many years.

Smith and colleagues (2004) surveyed the effects of serial migration on parent-child relationships. Using a convenience sample, forty-eight Caribbean youth migrants separated from their parents due to parents’ migration to North America participated in the survey. From the analysis of open-ended responses provided by thirty of the forty-eight respondents (62%), the theme of caregiver-child relationships emerged. Eleven reported that they had developed a positive bond with their caregiver in the home country. They reported a strong attachment and respect for caregivers, and appreciated their caregivers for taking care of them and for instilling values of hard work, faith, honesty, and respect for others (Smith et al., 2004).

For most children, the departure from their caregiver was a time of mixed feelings; in addition, reunification with biological mothers always produced conflicted emotions. On one hand, these children had to separate from the caretakers who took care of them for many years. On the other hand, they felt excited about reunification with their parents and a new life abroad. However, some children reported feeling disoriented and ambivalent. In some cases, children did not recognize their parents and felt as if they were meeting strangers. They reported forging and developing a new relationship with the sense of distance and unfamiliarity. Such experiences were more prevalent in families in which the children separated from parents at a very young age and for lengthy periods of time (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).
In contrast, Smith and colleagues (2004) reported that eight Caribbean separated-reunited children in Toronto developed a positive bonding experience with their parents after their reunion. One factor that attributed to positive reunion and adjustment was the frequent visits by parents prior to reunion. Some participants acknowledged the hard work and sacrifices their parents made to establish a life for them in a new country; children expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to achieve what would have been difficult for other children in their home country. However, some reported estrangement from their parents, while others recounted experiences with parents who were emotionally and physically unavailable. These felt unloved, unaccepted, and felt no nurturing (Smith et al., 2004).

From their quantitative analysis, Smith and colleagues (2004) also found that serial migration could disrupt parent-child bonding, which had a negative effect on children’s self-esteem and behavior. The passage of time did not appear to repair rifts that developed in the parent-child relationship (Smith et al., 2004). These findings suggested that children’s self-esteem suffered when children reunited with their parents. Uncertainties associated with the new cultural and familial environment likely affected the child’s sense of self. Lengthier separations made it even more difficult for the child to identify with their parents or to conform to their expectations. Estrangement of children from their parents was a common occurrence in serial migration. The longer they lived apart from their biological parents, the more tenuous was the child’s connection to them. The age at which the child reunited with the parents was another important factor in the success of reunion. Older children were not as likely to conform to the parents’ wishes and directions as were younger ones when reunited, but they also were less likely to obey the desire and wishes of their caregivers (Smith et al., 2004).
The findings of these studies (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2004) suggest that most children missed their parents and caretakers during separations, even though they did not manifest measurable psychological symptoms. Separations from loved ones led to at least transient feelings of loss and sadness in both adults and children. Separations might also lead to temporary disruptions in family homeostasis when family members left and later reunited (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

On the other hand, reunification could be complicated for children that had to adapt to a new family constellation. Jealousy of new siblings or a new partner was frequently noted. These characteristics of the separation could lead to increased tension between the siblings and differential relationships of the parent toward different children (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Researchers also focused on the behavior and school performance of children. Smith and colleagues (2004) found that lower levels of identification with parents and caregivers and lower family cohesion were associated with higher deviancy rates of separated-reunited children. The most frequent deviant behavior reported was school truancy, with 63% skipping school at least once (Smith et al., 2004). Gindling and Poggio (2009) argued that family separation during migration had a negative effect on the educational success of immigrant children in US schools, and that children separated from parents during migration were more likely to fall behind academically. Among the academic challenges facing immigrant children who had experienced transnational parenting, were the lack of English proficiency, culture shock, and problems attributed to the low socioeconomic status of their immigrant parents. In addition, they had difficulty adapting to the school culture in the US (Gindling & Poggio, 2009).

In the home country, separated children’s schoolwork was particularly affected, possibly because of the emotional turmoil accompanying the separation. Children who were waiting to
migrate and reunite with their parents especially lost focus on their schoolwork (Pottinger & Brown, 2006; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

The Experience of Transnational Motherhood

Researchers have studied the experiences of transnational mothers among different ethnic groups extensively. These studies are mostly qualitative (Erel, 2002; Fresnoz-Flot, 2009; Hondagneu-Soleta & Avila, 1997; Horton, 2009; Nicholson, 2006; Parrenas, 2001). Almost all studies employed a purposive non-random sampling method - particularly snowball referrals (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009; Hondaneu-Soleta & Avila, 1997; Parrenas, 2001) in recruiting participants. Some researchers recruited their samples from ESL programs in local colleges (Nicholson, 2006) or social service agencies (Horton, 2009). Menjivar recruited children of transmigrant families from high schools and colleges in San Salvador (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009). Both Menjivar and Abrego recruited transmigrants parents from business, churches, union halls, day labor sites, public parks, restaurants, neighborhood shops, and community-based organizations.

Methods of Data Collection

The sample size of these studies varied, ranging between 12 (Horton, 2009) and 130 (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009). The methods of data collection in these studies were mainly through in depth single or multiple interviews. Some might also perform observation (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009) or review ethnographic data (Hongdaneu-Soleta & Avila, 2006). Although some of these qualitative studies have small sample sizes, they generated rich narratives from intensive interviews and identified the essence of the experiences of transnational mothers. Erel (2002) did not specify her sampling method.

Both Parrenas (2001) and Fresnoz-Flot (2009) studied the mothering from afar experiences of Filipina transmigrant mothers. All participants had experiences separating from
their children. Parrenas (2001) interviewed 46 respondents in Rome and 26 in Los Angeles between 1995 and 1996. Her study focused on emotions, gender, and intergenerational relations in transnational families. Fresnoz-Flot (2009) interviewed 35 migrant mothers working in and around Paris. She conducted semi-structured interviews and observations of the participants on pre- and post-migration life, and future planning. The purpose of her study was to explore how migration status of the migrant mothers’ diversified transnational mothering practices (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009).

Erel (2002) conducted life story interviews with 15 highly educated or professional women of Turkish ancestry living in a large German city. Nine interviews were conducted in 1996 and 6 interviews in 1999. Each interview lasted two to six hours and focused on the experiences of mothering and family relations.

Both Hongdaneu-Soleta and Avila (1997) and Nicholson (2006) conducted intensive interviews of Latina migrant mothers. Based on 26 in depth interviews of domestic workers in Riverside country near LA and ethnographic materials gathered in Los Angeles, Hongdaneu-Soleta and Avila examined how Latina immigrant mothers transform the meanings of motherhood to accommodate these spatial and temporal separations. The researchers examined the emergent meanings of motherhood and alternative child-rearing arrangement. Nicholson (2006) interviewed 13 Latina migrant mothers from an ESL service-learning project at Bard College in Upstate New York. The researcher attempted to understand the factors that contributed to their decision to emigrate, their participation in the decision-making process, their personal immigrant situation and the situation of their children in the country of origin, and the psychological and emotional effects of this dual home situation (Nicholson, 2006).
Horton (2009) studied recent immigrant’s experiences of separation from their children and its role in their mental health history. She recruited 12 Salvadoran immigrant mothers from English classes at a local social service agency in a Northeast state and conducted multiple intensive interviews with them over the course of six months. Menjivar and Abrego (2009) analyzed family separation and reunification of Guatemalan and Salvadoran transmigrant families based on several research projects they conducted between 1998 and 2006. Between 2004 and 2006, Abrego conducted 130 in depth interviews with Salvadoran families in the midst of long-term separation. Respondents included 83 children of migrants in El Salvador, 25 migrant mothers, and 22 migrant fathers in the US. Among parents, the average length of separation from their children was 11 years. Among the children in El Salvador, the average length of separation from their parents was 9 years. Menjivar conducted a series of studies between 1998 and 2004 in the Phoenix metropolitan area. The sample included 14 Guatemalans and 22 Salvadorans who were interviewed one or more times.

Schmalzbauer (2004) conducted a multi-method study over two years in the US and Honduras. It included 157 informants (Schmalzbauer, 2004). Using the grounded theory approach, the researcher aimed at exploring the survival strategies, which include transnational mothering, of poor Honduran transnational families. The researcher collected data via observation, time diaries, interviews, and interpretive focus groups. She started as a participant observer and a member in a participatory research in a Honduran community organization in Chelsea, Massachusetts. Throughout the process of participatory observation, she observed 50 mothers and fathers separated from their children; she talked with them about their life stories. In addition, she recruited 34 Honduran transmigrants (18 women and 16 men) in Massachusetts to maintain weekly time diary and to do in depth semi-structured interviews. Then, she traveled to
the north coast of Honduras, where she interviewed 18 respondents from transmigrant families. Twelve were family members of her Massachusetts respondents. She also spent unstructured and informal time with 30 family members during her visit in Hondurans. One of the families hosted the researcher in their home for a week. In the final phase of the study, she recruited 25 Honduran transmigrants to participate in two interpretive focus groups.

Only one quantitative study was found that focused on mental status of immigrant Latina mothers separated from their children (Miranda, et al., 2005). This study examined whether immigrant Latina mothers separated from their children differed in rates of probable major depression from those who lived with their children and from those who did not have any children. The researchers obtained data from the infant-child wellness programs and family planning clinics in Maryland and Virginia between March 1997 and May 2002. A total of 5,122 low-income pregnant and postpartum Latina women were screened for major depressive disorders with the Primary Care Evaluation of Mental Disorder. Findings of these studies are discussed below.

**Meaning of Transnational Motherhood to Transmigrant Mothers**

Various themes emerged in studies of transnational mothers, which included the meaning of transnational motherhood to these mothers, emotional struggles from transnational motherhood, coping with separations, and immigration status and transnational motherhood. Mothers who decide on transnational parenting for their children make a complex decision that takes them from the role of immigrant mother to that of transnational mother. This transition has important meaning for these women, because transnational motherhood operates in a particular framework that is different from the ideal and normative form of motherhood dominant within a Western, White middle-class perspective (Nicholson, 2006).
Two studies addressed the meaning and definition of motherhood in the context of transnational mothering. Hondagneu-Soleta and Avila (1997) interviewed 26 domestic workers in the Riverside Country near Los Angeles. The study found that these domestic workers held a core belief that they could best fulfill traditional care giving responsibilities through earning money in the US, while their children remained in their native countries. However, some of these mothers believed that motherhood also involved making an effort to spend time with their children. Unable to be with their children, these mothers felt the absence of domestic family life was a deep personal loss. They identified the loss of daily family contacts as a sacrifice necessary for the financial support of the children. They tended to redefine and expand their definitions of motherhood to encompass, instead of replacing, the meaning of breadwinning that might require long-term separations (Hondagneu-Soleta & Avila, 1997).

Similarly, Nicholson (2006) interviewed thirteen transmigrant mothers in upstate New York. These transmigrant mothers invariably accepted the concept of “sharing the children” (Nicholson, 2006, p.16). Because of difficult economic conditions, transnational mothers strove to share child-rearing responsibilities with others, preferably family members. In addition to separating with their children and working in low-paying jobs, these mothers experienced a relative degree of social isolation (Nicholson, 2006).

By sharing child-rearing responsibilities, respondents saw their children belonging to a family that extended beyond the nuclear unit, the ideal and normative form of motherhood in middle-class Western society. They also felt primarily responsible for the care and nurturing of their children from afar. Similar to the Latina mothers in Riverside, these mothers considered their participation in the family economy and personal sacrifice as a contribution to the well-being of the household (Hondagneu-Soleta & Avila, 1997; Nicholson, 2006).
In both these qualitative studies, mothers told stories of financial hardship in their home country. They came to America to work and send money home for the purpose of paying health and educational expenses and building modest homes. Mothers were literally providing food for their children, but were also constructing visions of their children’s futures. They saw the present separation from their children as a sacrifice that would lead to an improved standard of living for the family as a whole, particularly for their children, in both the present and the future. The respondents assured the researcher that their children were safe and happy, cared for, and being well brought up back home. Transnational parents generally chose maternal grandparents as alternative caregivers. In fact, many of these children had already been living in an extended family situation prior to the mothers’ migrations abroad (Nicholson, 2006).

**Emotional Struggles from Transnational Motherhood**


Miranda and colleagues (2005) documented the mental health status of immigrant Latina mothers separated from their children. Their sample of 5,122 women from the infant-child wellness programs and family planning clinics in Maryland and Virginia were screened for
major depressive disorders. The findings indicated that mothers separated from their children were 1.52 times more likely to experience depression than those living with their children. This suggested that immigrant women separated from their children should receive a screening for depression and receive treatment as the need arose. The study found a correlation but not a causal relationship between depression and separation other mental health symptoms (Miranda, et al., 2005).

In other studies, transnational mothers reported suffering emotions of sadness, guilt, regret and self-blame for the negative consequences of being absence from their children (Parrenas, 2001; Fresnoz-Flot, 2009; Erel, 2002). Some reported anxiety and worry about their children’s health condition (Nicholson, 2006) and not being able to be present when their children were ill (Horton, 2009).

In studies of Filipina (Parrenas, 2001, 2005; Fresnoz-Flot, 2009) immigrant mothers working in the US, Italy or France, informants reported feeling emotional pain, because they were mothering from a far distance. Informants in Horton’s (2009) multiple intensive interviews with 12 Salvadoran mothers also expressed feelings of pain. One mother reported that each weekend when she spoke with her son on the phone, she felt an ache in her chest where her infant baby used to fit. His absence hurt as if it throbbed in her heart. When she lost her job, she felt an acute sense of failure. She recounted her everyday struggles to make good on her promise to send her son money and eventually reunite. Her narrative vividly evokes the embodied distress of transnational mothers and the relational nature of their suffering (Horton, 2009).

Other than emotional pain, some immigrant mothers reported suffering frequent headaches and generally being in poor health, which they attributed to the separation from their children. Work allowed them to think about something else for a few hours a day. One mother
said that she became overly anxious if she let herself dwell too much on her young daughter (Nicholson, 2006).

Although some women explicitly denied the emotional strains imposed by separation from their children, most admitted emotional difficulties. They experienced loss of intimacy and the absence of familiarity; they missed the growing years of their children over a prolonged separation. Migrant mothers’ emotional difficulties included suppressed feelings and, over time, the loss of maternal love (Parrenas, 2001). When a respondent in Fresnoz-Flot’s (2009) study went home in Philippines for the first time after living seven years in France, her children felt awkward, and her youngest child did not want to approach her. The child considered her aunts and grandaunt as her mothers. Another two respondents regretted their decision to migrate and blamed themselves for the negative consequences of their physical absence from home, as their children would encounter academic failure, teenage marriage, alcoholism, or even drug usage. For these mothers, the economic benefits of migration did not compensate for these losses and consequences. They emphasized the importance of a mother’s physical presence at home to guide their children. However, their failure to witness their children growing up was the main reason for their sadness (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009).

One salient factor transnational mothers shared were intense feelings of guilt. Erel (2002) conducted life story interviews with 15 highly educated or professional women of Turkish ancestry living in a large German city. One respondent had to send her son to Turkey, because her job required her to travel on a regular basis. Because of that, she had difficulties arranged childcare for her son who was four years old at the time. Her parents in Turkey took care of him until he was 11 years old. Her son finally rejoined the mother in Germany after finishing primary school in Turkey. She missed him a lot and felt very guilty. Such feelings lasted a long time
(Erel, 2002). Another transmigrant mother in the same study felt deep regrets about her mothering role. For her whole life, she strongly felt that she was not able to fulfill her own idea of good mothering. While the children were young, they did not live with her. Even when the children returned to live with her, she was working from noon until midnight, so that she spent limited time with them (Erel, 2002).

**Bonding**

Lacking time for parent-child interaction or prolonged separation affected the development of parent-child bonding. Some researchers have addressed parent-child bonding concerns in their studies. Schmalzbaur (2004) studied Honduran migrant parents in Chelsea, Massachusetts; they expressed great distress about trying to maintain connections with children who were very young when they left home and came to the US. Young children had more difficulty understanding why their parents left, and they often did not remember their parents well. One grandmother decorated every room of the house with photos of the child’s father, but her young grandson could not understand where or who his father was (Schmalzbauer, 2004). Mexican parents in upstate New York felt challenged when their children inquired about when they would be coming home, or when the rest of the family could come to the US. Nicholson (2006) reported that many parents answered the children’s questions untruthfully but lovingly, with a version of “soon” or “we will be together soon.” The truth teller bore the burden of their children’s disappointment and sadness. Going back to the home country to visit children was a difficult proposition because of their illegal US immigration status. Mothers and caregivers, such as grandmothers or aunts, described wanting and encouraging the children to bond with the visiting parent, knowing that this bonding would make it all the more difficult when the parents left (Nicholson, 2006).
Some parents expressed concern about the loss of authority over their children (Schmalzbauer, 2004; Nicholson, 2006). Transnational structures are barriers that can challenge the development of the authority of both the direct and long-distance parents over their children (Levitt, 2001). When a respondent in Nicholson’s (2006) study visited her children at home, they treated their parents as if they were total strangers. This proved both heartbreaking and disruptive to the household. During the visit, the grandmother tried to step back from her regular parental role. However, the child ignored his parents when they tried to instruct or order the child. The visit resulted in hurt feelings all around and a disoriented child (Nicholson, 2006). Children who lacked a clear authority figure could receive conflicting instructions on how to behave. In addition, children could take advantage of this ambiguity. In some cases, these children learned manipulative strategies to negotiate the boundaries between parents’ and grandparents’ care giving (Levitt, 2001). Respondents in Nicholson’s (2006) study admitted dissonance stemming from what they saw as the grandparents’ tendency to spoil or overindulge the children. Transnational mothers also worried whether their children would transfer their allegiances to the non-biological “other mother” (Hondagneu-Soleta & Avila, 1997; Schmalzbauer, 2004; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009), who was a woman in the migrant mother’s extended family raising the children while the mother was left behind (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009, p.225).

Coping with Separations

Transnational mothers experienced conflicting emotions. On the one hand, they had to stay in the host country to obtain perceived economic gains; on the other hand, they wished they could go home to be with their children. In Parrenas’s (2001) study of Filipina migrant mothers discussed earlier, the researcher suggested that Filipina transnational mothers negotiated their
emotional strains with the parental-child roles in three crucial ways: repressing emotional strains, rationalizing distance, and expressing love.

Many migrant mothers coped with separation by repressing the emotional tensions that arose in transnational family homes. Some strategically coped with physical distance by completely denying emotional costs (Parrenas, 2005). Other respondents explicitly denied the emotional strains imposed by separation on them and their children (Parrenas, 2001).

By rationalizing transnational distance, Filipina migrant mothers self-reassured that separation was manageable and did not mean the loss of intimacy (Parrenas, 2001, 2005). To fulfill their mothering role from afar, they compressed time and space and attempted to counter the physical distance in the family by telephone and letter writing. Immigrant mothers tended to personalize their ties through regular phone calls to their children. Converging on the phone became an important part of the weekly routine of transnational mothers’ lives. Some Filipina mother in Paris reported calling a few times a week (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009). In doing so, they kept abreast of their children’s activities and at the same time achieved a certain level of familiarity and intimacy (Parneras, 2001, 2005; Fresnoz-Flot, 2009). The exchange of letters and photos also helped to sustain their connections to children (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).

Families reported paying a reasonable fee for a few minutes of video conferencing with family in their home country (Nicholson, 2006). This was one-way motherhood realigned across transnational borders. Mothers spoke to both their children and the children’s caregivers regularly, usually weekly, but sometimes as often as two to three times per week, and never less frequently than two to three times per month. In these conversations, mothers and caregivers discussed issues ranging from the purchase of school clothes, to the children’s health, to the need
to discipline unruly behavior; the mother felt assured in virtually every instance that they were involved in decision-making regarding their children’s welfare (Nicholson, 2006).

Mexican, El Salvadoran and Guatemalan transnational mothers living in Los Angeles distinguished their versions of motherhood regarding estrangement, child abandonment, or disowning (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). Mothers believed that their physical absence did not signify emotional absence from their children. Like Filipino mothers, Mexican, El Salvadoran, and Guatemalan transnational mothers attempted to uphold family connections and emotional ties through letters, phone calls, and remittances. They tried to travel home to visit their children as finances allowed. They maintained their mothering responsibilities not only by earning money for their children but also by communicating and advising across national boundaries, and across the boundaries that separates their children’s place of residence from their own places of employment and residence (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).

Almost all mothers in these studies (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Horton, 2009; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009; Parrenas, 2001, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2004) tended to rationalize their decision to leave their children behind and expressed their love by highlighting the economic prosperity for the family. Parrenas (2001) described Filipina transnational mothers cope with the emotional tensions of mothering from a distance by “commodifying love” (p. 372). They had the urge to overcompensate for their absence by sending home material goods, such as, money remittances, clothing, and other goods (Parrenas, 2001, 2005; Fresnoz-Flot, 2009). They relied on commodities to establish concrete ties of familial dependency (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009).

When parents are able to remit large and consistent sums of money, their children experience improved living conditions, greater access to education and sometimes, upward
mobility in socio-economic status. On occasion, immigrant parents may face obstacles in the labor market and cannot send money home. At such times, children have nothing to show for their parents’ absence. Hence, the prolonged separation becomes unjustified. Moreover, the unchanged impoverished conditions of the family in El Salvador or Guatemala become evidence of the parents’ failed commitment to the family (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009).

Filipina, Mexican, El Salvadoran, and Guatemalan transnational mothers maintained their ties and financial obligations to their children by regularly sending remittances. They believed that care giving was a definite feature of their mothering experiences. In terms of care giving, they wished to provide their children with better nutrition, clothing, and education. Most were able to purchase these items with the money they earned in the US. Researchers described these mothers meshing care giving and guidance with breadwinning (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).

Similarly, Honduran transnational families saw material and economic remittances rooted in the values of “motherwork” (Schmalzbauer, 2004, p.1320). Parents felt that it was their responsibility to give what they can to their families to secure family survival. This strong commitment to family often meant giving up the chance to save money or to live a dignified life in the US. Parents kept just enough to pay their own bills (Schmalzbauer, 2004).

Menjivar and Abrego (2009) found that when Salvadoran and Guatemalan parents and children remained separated, parents were more likely to remit to the home country. When they remitted, they sent more than if the children were with them in the US. Remittances represented tangible forms of care for the children back home and were associated with love (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009).
Correspondingly, Horton (2009) found Salvadoran migrant mothers recounted their assurances to their children of their continuing love by sending gifts. These gifts served to bridge national borders. Bonds remained here and there between mother and her child. Such gifts were not only of material significance, but carried the emotions and compassions of the child’s mother. They represented the promise of the continuity of parental love. One mother added a photo of herself and her husband accompanied by a dollar bill. These gifts served as substitutes for parental presence; the very logic of exchange converted parental emotion, both love and guilt, into material support (Horton, 2009).

Children were more likely to adjust to their transnational family life if they perceived that their mothers were suffering and grieving in the process of mothering from afar (Panerras, 2005, p.103). Salvadoran children were likely to appreciate their parents’ sacrifices and maintain strong positive contacts with their parents. Those who received regular sums, whose improvements in quality of life were visible and tangible through luxury items in the home or accessing to education, had proof that their parents continued to be committed to the family.

However, presentation of love in terms of gifts and money was not always convincing. Children who received few gifts or no remittances expressed an intense sense of abandonment and resentment. Some children refused to accept that parental presence was substantiated with material goods (Horton, 2009). One daughter said to her mother on the phone, “You send me things, but you don’t visit and you barely call. How can I know you love me?” Thus, if material goods were an attempt to substitute parental presence, a child’s acceptance was often conditional – accepting the goods while refusing the transubstantiation (Horton, 2009, p.34). In another study of Salvadoran families, an 18-year old son in El Salvador, who suffered emotional distress from the absence of both parents, expressed his anger and resentment toward his mother. His
mother felt hurt since she had made many sacrifices, all in the name of her child who was so hostile toward her (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009).

In general, individual women used all three coping mechanisms: repressing emotional strains, rationalizing distance, and expressing love. Immigrant mothers not only reconstituted mothering by providing acts of care from afar, they also did so by overcompensating for their physical absence and performing a transnational version of “intensive mothering” (Hay, 1996 cited in Parrenas, 2005, p.103). Adopting these strategies, migrant mothers redefined motherhood and found meaning in the contradictions they experienced through migration (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009). Filipina migrant mothers especially use those strategies to help them counter adverse public opinion regarding the perceived abandonment of their children (Parrenas, 2005). Under constant pressure to conform to the image of the good mother, migrant mothers are expected to perform care work for their family and to maintain intimacy. Their maternal obligations now included their new role as a breadwinner (Fresnoz-Flot, 2006). They were in fact responsible for ensuring the security, both economic and emotional, of their children (Parrenas, 2005).

**Immigration Status and Transnational Motherhood**

The migration status of mothers is an essential dimension in transnational mothering practices. Fresnoz-Flot (2009) found that transnational family life appeared more complicated and difficult to manage for undocumented migrant mothers. In her study, thirty-five Filipina migrant mothers working in France were unable to visit their families back home. Because of strict immigration policies in the receiving country, mothers were compelled to prolong their separations from their children and resort to various family caring strategies. Undocumented migrant mothers bore the pain of missing important family events and the childhood years of
their infant children; this pain persisted even after regularization of their status (Fresnoz-Flot, 2009).

Salvadoran undocumented transnational mothers suffered the same feelings as the Filipina mothers. Horton (2009) described Salvadoran respondents in her study who endured a compartmentalized citizenship; they served as physical laborers “here” and mothers “there” (Horton, 2009, p.22). Work and maternal responsibilities were unevenly distributed across national spaces. They endured the absence of their children. The undocumented status of the mothers in the US not only produced their own embodied distress, but also produced a continuous feedback loop between their children’s grief and their own. Suffering was not merely individual but rather shared and intersubjective (Horton, 2009). One mother expressed how she struggled while waiting for her son to recover when he was ill in the mother’s home country. He cried and asked for her, but she could not go home. She stayed up nights worrying about him, frustrated that her main goal in the US, to earn money, was failing. She felt powerless and ineffective. The most difficult part was not being able to return to be with her child, feeling stuck and not being able to work (Horton, 2009).

Transnational Mothering among Chinese Immigrants

There are no formal statistics indicating the prevalence of transnational mothering among Chinese immigrants. In China, Chen (2006) conducted a field study on the little Americans in Tingjiang, a famous overseas Chinese hometown in Fuzhou region. The researcher visited and carried out direct observations in four villages in the town of Tingjiang. She collected data through direct and personal interviews with local officials and families of the little Americans. She also reviewed the official statistics on foreign-born children provided by the local officials. The little Americans were born in the US with American citizenship to their new Chinese
immigrant parents. From early 1990s to 2004, over 1,100 little Americans were sent to Tingjiang and raised by their Chinese clan members soon after their birth (Chen, 2006). Most of these children were between three to eight months old. Primary caregivers were grandparents, uncles and aunts, then cousins. Some families hired live-in babysitters to help take care of the infants. Monthly expenses on childcare are around ¥1,000 to ¥2,000 ($150 to $300). Grandparents sent the children to the best preschool in Tingjiang. In each of the two best preschools in Tingjiang, about 50% of the enrollees were little Americans (Chen, 2006).

In New York, a survey (Gaytan, et al., 2009) conducted by the Center for Research on Culture, Development, and Education found different patterns of transnational mothering among different groups. The study sampled 113 Dominicans, 93 Mexicans and 54 Chinese immigrant mothers in New York City. Eighty-two percent of the mothers had already planned to send their children to their native country during childbirth. The combined Latino group was significantly more likely to plan child travel than the Chinese group, but the average age for child travel varied significantly by ethnic group. For Chinese, it was seven months old, 12 months old for Dominicans, and 55 months old for Mexican children. Reasons for child travel also varied by ethnic group. A higher percentage of Chinese mothers mentioned financial constraints and the lack of childcare were the major reasons for the children’s travel, compared to almost none of the Latina mothers. More Latina mothers than Chinese mothers were motivated to plan their children’s travel in order to meet family members. Similarly, high percentages of mothers across groups considered the needs of grandparents as a reason for their children’s trips. Latina mothers reported the travel plans with the intention of introducing the culture and home country to their children. During the first six months after birth, 72% of the Chinese mothers did send their babies back to visit or live in China. In contrast, no Latino children traveled to the mothers’
home countries within the first year (Gaytan, et al., 2009). Compared to other ethnic groups in the study, these findings indicated that Chinese immigrant mothers had a very high tendency to send their infant babies to their home country for childcare needs due to financial reasons.

Consistent with the findings of this survey, Kwong and colleagues (2009) also found that 57% of 219 Chinese migrant mothers recruited in a community health clinic in New York had practiced or planned to practice “reverse migration” or sending babies to China.

Despite the high percentage of Chinese immigrant mothers sending their babies to China, very few studies have addressed this phenomenon of satellite babies (Bohr & Tse, 2009; Waters, 2002), reverse migration (Kwong, et al., 2009, p.348) or transnational parenting among this group (Da, 2003; Wang, 2009). Existing studies mainly focus on the practice of transnational parenting and/or grandparenting and the decision making process for sending babies to China. Only one small study (Bohr, 2009) looked at the variables of child behaviors, attachment, and parenting stress of 10 separated-reunited families in Canada. Researchers have barely explored the meaning of transnational motherhood among Chinese transnational mothers and minimally addressed the long- or short-term psychological impacts on the mother-child separations.

**Decision-making Process**

prenatal care in a community health center in New York City. Moreover, I conducted a pilot study in which I interviewed seven Fujianese transmigrant mothers in New York City (Wong, 2015).

Respondents expressed ambivalence in the decision making process (Bohr, 2009; Da, 2003; Kwong et al., 2009). Some parents made decisions to send their babies to China during pregnancy and before the babies were born. Some planned to keep their babies, but eventually sent the babies away due to postnatal physical weakness or financial difficulties (Wong, 2015). Many respondents reported that financial considerations largely drove them to decide to separate from their infants (Chen, 2006; Kwong, et al., 2009; Wong, 2015), in addition to goals for career or higher education advancement (Bohr, 2009; Wang, 2009). In New York, transmigrant mothers reported that they had to pay debts for their migration (Wong, 2015). Da (2003) stated that grandparents’ involvement in childcare was significant in the family’s domestic arrangement and the economic opportunities of the mother. In my study, respondents emphasized that grandparents were ‘more experienced in providing care for young children’ than they were (Wong, 2015). With grandparent’s assistance, a migrant mother could return to work or study soon after giving birth (Chen, 2006; Da, 2003, Kwong et al., 2009, Wong, 2015). Thus, she could send money home to support her families and to stand on their own feet in the new country. Respondents in my study also expressed their desire to prepare a better future for their children when they return to the US (Wong, 2015). In addition, Chinese parents in two studies expressed a desire to preserve cultural traditions of their county and to ground the children in their heritage through involving extended family ties in child rearing (Bohr & Tse, 2009; Kwong, 2009). Other factors include parents’ immigration status (Da, 2003; Kwong et al., 2009; Wang, 2009), factors for entering the country, the mother’s age and marital status (Da, 2003; Landolt &
Da, 2005), the spouse’s attitude to child separation (Wang, 2009) and mother’s inexperience with childrearing (Kwong et al., 2009). Immigrant mothers in New York stated friends and family encouraged their decisions (Kwong et al., 2009; Wong, 2015). Very few mothers initiated the plan to send their infants to China (Wong, 2015).

Moreover, parents expressed a lack of adequate childcare possibilities in their communities. Kwong and colleagues (2009) found immigrant mothers unable to afford expensive childcare costs. Respondents expressed that they would likely keep their children in the US if they had access to affordable and reliable childcare or if parents or parents-in-law could assist with childcare in New York (Kwong, 2009). Chen (2006) emphasized the discrepancies on childcare expenses between Fuzhou and the US. If a child’s mother stopped working to care for the baby, the family income would be at least $1,000 lower. One month of childcare expenses in the US was enough to pay for a babysitter for a year in Tingjiang (Chen, 2006).

Chinese immigrants in Canada, Australia, and California are likely to be more economically stable and more educated than immigrant parents in New York are. Many recent immigrant mothers are from Fujian-Fuzhou, and they enter the US undocumented. Immigrant mothers in New York have more financial constraints and have to return to work very soon after childbirth (Chen, 2006). Most of them have to work 12 to 14 hours a day and consequently do not have a family life (Wong, 2015). Compared to participants in other studies, career advancement or pursuing higher education did not appear to be a major reason for New York mothers to send their children to China.

**Socio-Cultural Factors and the Practice of Transnational Parenting and Grandparenting**

The studies of Chinese transnational parenting (Bohr, 2009; Chen, 2006; Da, 2003; Kwong, 2009; Wang, 2009; Wong, 2015) found that grandparents were involved in the course of
transnational parenting. In most cases, grandparents would raise the children and planned for returning children to their birthparents in time to begin schooling. Studies (Chen, 2006; Da, 2003; Wang, 2009) that explored grandparental involvement in raising infant children in Chinese families found grandparental involvement enriched perspectives on transnational parenting.

Da (2003) labeled a childcare pattern as “transnational grandparenting” (p. 96). She found that the role of grandparents in childcare was highly significant in the family’s domestic arrangements in the parents’ migration. Three immigrant parents had children under the age of three at the time of migration, and they left their children with grandparents in China. Parents would bring them to the receiving country when they had settled. One respondent sent her baby son to grandparents in China; both maternal and paternal grandparents took turns caring for the children in the home country. In Australia, grandparents visited from China and stayed to help for as long as their visas permitted. The length of their stay ranged from six months to a year. When the grandparents left, they were likely to take the grandchild with them to China. Whether the children were sent to join grandparents or left in the custody of their grandparents, they returned to their parents to start schooling (Da, 2003; Landolt & Da, 2005).

Da (2003) interpreted these patterns of grandparenting as relating to gender ideology and gender role practices that migrants bought from the home country (Da, 2003; Landolt & Da, 2005). For example, during the Chinese Communist Party rule, China had enforced women’s participation in the workforce through various social policies. This was a critical indicator of women’s emancipation. In the 1990’s, 90% of women between the ages of 16 and 55 in the urban areas of China were employed (Lu, Bellas & Maume, 2000 as cited in Da, 2003). Dual-career families have been common since the 1950s. Women usually returned to work after maternity leave. Sending children to childcare centers was common among families in urban
China (Da, 2003). Finally, childcare arrangements were consistent with Chinese cultural values and attitudes toward family life. This pattern of childcare arrangement suggests that kinship assistance with childcare is acceptable in Chinese families (Da, 2003). Kinship relations are central to Chinese family life, and interactions among them are intense. The need for kinship assistance is taken for granted.

During the years of China’s communist political movements and centralized reassignment of work commitments (usually, the *xiafang* movement), urbanites were assigned to work in remote and rural provinces for years. During this time, it was common for parents to send their children to grandparents for care in parents’ hometowns. The life stories of several respondents in the sample offered evidentiary support of this. A father interviewed in the study reported not being very close to his parents. His grandparents reared him until he was a teenager. Each time he visited China, he was obliged to visit his grandparents (Da, 2003).

Chen (2006) stated that traditionally Chinese grandparents are accustomed to taking care of their grandchildren and younger generations. In Tingjiang, when most of the young people migrate to the US, their parents stay in the hometown. Most of these parents are middle-aged. Because the children are far away, parents miss them very much and feel very lonely. These parents feel guilty for not being able to help their children who live and work hard overseas. They may feel they owe children something. Therefore, when their children sent their babies to them, these grandparents believed it was their responsibility to care for their grandchildren. By caring for their young grandchildren, they no longer felt lonely or guilty. In fact, they enjoyed being with their grandchildren (Chen, 2006).

Transnational grandparenting is a strategy to deal with work-family conflicts in immigrant families (Wang, 2009). The practice of transnational grandparenting is a way to
resolve problems and difficulties that first-generation immigrants encounter in the host country, because they possessed low levels of social capital (Wang, 2009).

Wang (2009) had a different interpretation of transnational parenting and grandparenting. She viewed grandparental involvement in transnational parenting from a more practical standpoint. In her study, migrant mothers identified with the intensive mothering ideal. Because they were unable to perform this mothering role due to migration, parents tended to view transnational parenting as a workable and efficient solution. Immigrant mothers felt grandparents who were retired and had plenty of time could act as surrogate parents for their grandchildren. Moreover, sending their young children to their grandparents in China was a very important way to reconnect with the extended family left behind and to re-involve the grandparents in the lives of a younger generation (Wang, 2009).

**Emotional Struggles**

Among the four studies of Chinese transnational parenting reviewed, only two explored the emotional struggles of the transnational mothers. However, I explored the issues of emotional struggles of Chinese immigrant mothers in my pilot study. Immigrant mothers in Canada mentioned that their underlying emotional backdrop for sending the baby away was feeling sorrow and guilty. They were concerned about issues of attachment. They had to accept the reality as they lacked control. These parents attempted to negotiate their dilemmas by using rational and cognitive schemes. They emphasized self-sacrifice for the good of the family, which required accepting child-parent separation for a certain time (Bohr & Tse, 2009).

In New York, migrant mothers also felt they lacked options because of their working conditions and unavailable affordable childcare. Regarding separation, mothers expressed that
they missed their children. On the other hand, they were relieved that their children were under their relatives’ care than with babysitters (Kwong, et al., 2009).

Respondents in my study reported that they felt forced to separate from their children and isolated from family life. They had to accept shared mothering and shared motherhood with the other mother in China. One mother stated that she grasped every chance to hold and embrace her baby before it was sent away. One cried incessantly staring at her baby’s empty bed after she came home from the airport. Conversely, another one refused to go to the airport and hand her baby to the courier. Mostly striking to me was that a mother woke up in the middle of the night; she arose thinking of feeding her baby. However, her husband reminded her that her baby was sent away. She burst out crying when she woke to her baby’s absence (Wong, 2015).

In relation to childhood behaviors, only one study (Bohr, 2009) addressed child behaviors, attachment, and parenting stress of separated-reunited families. This study compared 10 separated-reunited families with a group of 10 non-separated families. Findings showed that there was significantly higher than average levels of problematic functioning in the separation-reunification families than non-separated families. Difficult child, parent-child dysfunctional interaction and parental stress, and defensive responding stress were noted (Bohr, 2009). However, the findings also illustrated that negative parental perceptions of the child and the child’s socio-emotional functioning, weakened parent-child relationship and parental grief. These families expressed negative appraisal of the experiences of separation. Non-separated family indicated positive parental perceptions of child, child’s socio-emotional functioning and parenting challenges; they have close parent-child relationships. Overall, the latter group had positive appraisals of their experience for keeping children with them (Bohr, 2009).
Conclusion

Transnational parenting is practiced all over the world. Various studies show that separation can create emotional distress risks to both mothers and children and threaten child-parent attachment (Bohr & Tse, 2009). Most transnational mothers struggle to redefine the meaning of motherhood when mothering from afar. Moreover, the migration status of transnational mothers can make it more difficult for mothers to manage relationships with and care for their children. Transnational mothers use different strategies to reduce their emotional distress and help justify their absence from their children’s lives. However, material compensation did not appear to satisfy a child’s need for intimacy and desire for emotional bonds at all times.

Although some studies explore the practice of transnational mothering, most of these studies conducted in the US focus on migrant mothers/parents from the Philippines, Mexico, Latin America and Caribbean countries. Few, if any, studies focus on the practice of transnational parenting of Chinese immigrants in the US. Two additional studies were conducted in Commonwealth countries, Australia and Canada. Three of the four studies on transnational parenting among Chinese had samples that were highly educated immigrant families with comfortable incomes. This author found no studies that addressed the meaning of transnational motherhood, and short and long-term psychological impacts on transnational immigrant Chinese mothers and their children from low-income families. Moreover, there appear to be no studies focusing on transnational parenting among recent immigrants who come under very brutal and difficult circumstances.
The gaps in the literature raise the following questions for inquiry:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of transnational parenting among Chinese low-income immigrant mothers?
2. How do Chinese transnational mothers make decisions to send babies to China to care for by family, especially grandparents?
3. What kinds of emotional distress do Chinese transnational mothers endure during the separations with their infant babies?
4. What occurs during separation from their infant babies?
5. How do these mothers react, recognize, and manage their emotional distress during separations from their infants?
6. How do they present their love and care for their babies during their absence? What are the birth mothers’ perceptions of their children’s lives with their distant caregivers?
7. How do they acquire this knowledge and develop such perceptions?
8. How do parents explain their absence to their “reunited” children?
9. How do children react when their parents present this information?
10. What are the long- and short-term impacts of separation and reunification on the child?
CHAPTER V: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study was about the practice of transnational mothering among Fujianese immigrants in New York City. Using a qualitative design, I examined Chinese immigrant mother’s early maternal experiences and infant-mother relationships, making decisions on sending her child to China, transmigrant mother and her child’s experiences on separation.

Complex situations demand complex understanding (Anderson, 2010). The immigrant mother’s knowledge, perception, and experience of sending away her baby are complex and dynamic. Issues concerning migration, motherhood, and separation are subject to change over time and space. Whether one has previous experience or not, her current and lived experience of transnational motherhood offers her opportunities to develop, increase or later construct her knowledge and perception. Moreover, the immigration experience involves changes in one’s socioeconomic status, level of acculturation, and knowledge of community resources that may support or limit her experience during separation and reunification.

Qualitative inquiry allows a researcher to obtain powerful and compelling information by capturing the voices of people being studied (Patton, 2002). Chinese immigrant mothers’ narratives conveyed multi-layers of information, which included their knowledge, values and beliefs on the practice of transnational mothering. In this study, I conducted individual face-to-face interviews with 16 Chinese immigrant mothers. I explored in detail and in depth experiences of immigrant mothers such as: how their life situations changed, whether the dynamics of these changes influenced their perception of parenting and enabled them to send their infants away, how they negotiated the mother-child separation and return of their child. Of particular interest to this inquiry were the following questions: What generated changes and what were the flows of
these changes? What were the effects in this dynamic process that changed the perception and strategy of transnational mothering practice? Qualitative inquiry produced rich and detailed information to illustrate these dynamics through immigrant mothers’ stories, narratives and anecdotes (Patton, 2002).

This study aimed to discover and build knowledge concerning experiences of transmigrant mothers. Such knowledge will help to develop strategies and services to address transnational mother’s psychological needs and prepare for the return of their Chinese raised American-born children.

**Qualitative Research Design**

Although social science research has used quantitative inquiry extensively, it is not always an ideal approach in all types of social research inquiries. Because of the complexity of the study purpose, quantitative inquiry was not the appropriate approach for this research. First, obtaining rich and in depth qualitative data was important to my study. The study did not intend to test a cause-and-effect relationship or an association between Chinese transnational mothers’ experiences and outcomes of transnational parenting. Instead, it had explored transnational mothering among Chinese immigrant mothers as a phenomenon, through which concepts important to the informants emerged. The mothers’ experiences were subjective and socially constructed realities that could only be known through the voices of the informants (Creswell, 1998).

My study aimed to discover and build knowledge concerning the Chinese immigrant mothers’ experience and perceptions of parenting from afar. The study asked several *how* and *what* questions stated in the purpose. This required design flexibility that would yield narratives associated with qualitative inquiry. Consequently, I conducted my study in the
phenomenological tradition of qualitative research, which provided the best guidance for learning about the complex, contextual experiences these mothers experienced from their decision to send home their babies, through their separation, and ultimately, their return to their birth country.

**A Phenomenological Approach to “Transnational Mothering”**

Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition first developed by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) for use in philosophy and the human sciences (Wertz, 2011). In terms of human inquiry, Husserl emphasized several aspects, which include essential essences or the central underlying meaning of the experience. In addition, he also emphasized the intentionality of consciousness based on memory, image and meaning (Creswell, 1998). Consciousness is a major theme in Husserl’s work. A phenomenon is based on how the reality of an object is perceived, interpreted, and presented in consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). To Husserl, reality is an object; it is inextricably related to one’s consciousness of it. The reality of an object depends on how an individual perceives or senses it within the meaning of his or her experience (Creswell, 1998). Thus, to make one’s experience known, this experience must be described, explicated, and interpreted. Attending to perceptions and meanings of these experiences awakens conscious awareness (Patton, 2002).

Built on Husserl’s work, Schutz articulates the essence of phenomenology for studying social acts, which further contributed to the development of phenomenological tradition of social research (Wertz, 2011; Wilson, 2002). Schutz was interested in how ordinary members of society constitute the world of everyday life, especially how individuals consciously develop meaning out of social interactions (Creswell, 1998).
Phenomenology as a theoretical orientation in qualitative inquiry asks, what is the essence of a shared living experience for a group of people? (Patton, 2002). Applying this to my study, the focus of a phenomenological orientation was to explicate the essence of the meaning of transnational mothers’ shared living experiences in relation to immigration, motherhood and separation from their children. The essences had core meanings understood by the Chinese immigrant mothers through their shared experiences in transnational mothering practice. More concretely, those were the young mothers’ experiences and how they interpreted their experiences regarding migration, pregnancy, mother-child bonding, mothering from afar and the strategies used in coping with separation that framed this inquiry.

The strategies that immigrant mothers used to negotiate specific situations in separation were essential elements of this study. The strategies a transnational mother used to maintain contact with her child might include regular phone contacts, Internet video network, sending gifts, sharing photos and videos, etc. These strategies and actions negotiating separation were part of the essences representing the “core meanings mutually understood” by all involved mothers (Patton, 2002, p.106).

Through a phenomenological methodology, the researcher listened to and heard the transmigrant mother’s own points of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983). This occurred through in depth face-to-face field interviews. This orienting approach enabled respondents the chance to verbalize and articulate subjective parts of their experience (Bogden & Biklen, 1983) through their own senses (Patton, 2002). Immigrant mothers’ interpretations of the meaning of their subjective feelings that emerge were central to the phenomena being studied (Patton, 2002). Only transnational mothers knew what they experienced from perceptions and meanings that aroused their conscious awareness (Patton, 2002). From their stories, I was able to understand
their unique and subjectively experienced reality. Using the phenomenological approach, I studied how these transnational mothers interpreted and transformed their experiences and actions.

There is a major concern in using the phenomenological approach in qualitative inquiry. Essentially, the researcher had to set aside all biases, prejudgments, or preoccupations of the personal experience and values of the phenomena under study through bracketing or *epoche*. The principle of *epoche* is the return to a natural science, and to discover meanings as they are to those people who experience them (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher had to rely on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain the essences of the experience (Creswell, 1998) and understand the social construction the mothers made of the absence and return of their children.

Bracketing occurs through the procedure of phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2011). The researcher abstains from the natural attitudes and the biases of everyday knowledge as the basis for truth and reality (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, I, as the researcher, had to focus on the existence of objects independent from my own experience. This allowed things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness (Wertz, 2011) freshly and naively from the vantage point of a pure transcendental ego (Moustakas, 1994). Although the procedure enabled me to closely examine how situations presented themselves through experiences, the goal of setting aside one’s pre-existing experiences and values was not easy to achieve.

The quality of qualitative research is easily influenced by the investigator’s personal experiences. Even though I am not an immigrant mother who had the experience of sending a child to China, my professional experience had provided me contacts with hundreds of transnational mothers and returned children. My previous experiences and perception on the
phenomenon and practice of transnational mothering might have influenced me in data collection and analysis. Although it was a difficult task, I made efforts to bracket and set aside my preoccupation and personal experiences with transnational mothers and their children. This was done so I could better understand the practice of transnational mothering as experienced by the participants. I was very cautious during interviews with immigrant mothers and during the process of qualitative data analysis. A good maxim might be valuable to remind me: be able to forget what I know and listen to what I do not know.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the transnational mothering practices of immigrant Chinese in New York City. The specific questions for this study were:

1. What were the perceptions and experience of early motherhood among Chinese low-income immigrant mothers?
2. What made the Chinese transnational mothers decide to send babies to China where family members, especially grandparents, cared for them?
3. What occurred during separation from their infant babies?
4. How did these mothers react, recognize, and manage their emotional distress during separations from their infants?
5. How did these mothers assess the benefits and losses because of the separation?
6. How did they present their love and care for their babies during their absence?
7. What were the birth mothers’ perceptions of their children’s lives with their distant caregivers?
8. How did they acquire this knowledge and develop such perceptions?
9. What were the long and short-term impacts of separation on the transnational mothers?
In this exploratory, qualitative study, these research questions were interrelated. All of these linked questions enabled me to fill gaps in the overall phenomenon of transnational mothering in the Chinese immigrant community. In addition, increased knowledge of immigrant mothers’ perceptions and experiences in motherhood and separation would help develop strategies and services for mothers to prepare for their children’s return; and smooth mother-child reunification, ameliorate adjustment problems and preclude psychological damage (Bernstein, 2009).

**Sampling Criteria and Sampling Strategies**

The purpose of my research was to explore the phenomena of Chinese immigrant mothers’ experiences in relation to transnational mothering and separation from their young children. Thus, the collective case study of multiple individuals appeared most promising in relationship to my research interest (Creswell, 1998). Multiple instrumental case studies were more compelling and robust (Yin, 2003) than single case studies while studying transnational mothers’ experience. An individual mother’s experiences in sending child to China, mothering from afar and strategies to cope with separation could be similar or different from those of another mother’s. Collective case studies offered the researcher greater opportunity to gain insights on these similar and contrasting experiences, which led to better understanding of the transnational mothers’ experience.

This study aimed at maximizing information that offered a richness of detail and depth regarding the experiences of transnational mothering. Consequently, a non-probability purposeful sample of information rich cases was appropriate to this inquiry. With this purpose in mind, I intended to excavate layers in Chinese immigrant mothers’ experiences of sending their babies to be cared for in China. Therefore, I had recruited a small sample of information-rich cases. In my research proposal, I had proposed a sample of no more than 25 respondents.
However, I terminated the sampling, when saturation was reached and no additional information was forthcoming from additional informants. According to Patton (2002), once such saturation is reached, additional informants may only produce redundancy.

In this study, a combination of homogeneous and criterion sampling was selected. The purpose of using a homogenous sample was to describe some particular subgroup in depth. Of particular interest to this inquiry were immigrant mothers whose American born infants were sent to families for care in China. In order to assure quality analysis, some predetermined criteria were also identified for sampling (Patton, 2002). The predetermined criteria for inclusion were that the respondent immigrant mothers came from the Fujian-Fuzhou region of China and spoke Mandarin. More specifically, respondents had to be between the ages of 18 and 45. Additionally, respondents should have at least one child whom they sent to China as an infant and returned to New York in the last six years.

I recruited 16 Chinese immigrant mothers for the study. Each participated in an in depth face-to-face interview. Three respondents were between the ages of 25 to 29. Twelve were between the ages of 30 and 39. One was above age 40. Three respondents had only one child and twelve had two children. One mother had three children. Eight respondents sent one child and seven sent two children to China. One respondent sent all her three children to China. Demographic characteristics of the respondents were summarized and listed in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

In order to identify and recruit informants, I distributed recruitment fliers with information about the study and my contact information to key members of the New York City Chinese community; they helped me identify women who might be eligible for this study (See Attachment A: Recruitment Flier). Women interested in participating in the study contacted me by cell phone since most members of the Chinese community use cell phones for
communication. When a potential informant contacted me about the study, I screened her for eligibility (See Attachment B: Eligibility Questions), described what was involved in participation, and answered any questions about what their participation involved. If they agreed to participate, we arranged an interview at a mutually agreed upon time and place. I had informed participants that when they were selecting the location for the interview, they should think about the possible emotions that might arise during interview.

Using a snowball sampling strategy, I asked the respondents if they knew other people who could be interested in the study. I offered them fliers about the research to pass out to acquaintances. In this instance, I had instructed the informant to tell their friend to call me directly. Eventually, I conducted seven interviews in the respondents’ homes. In addition, I conducted five interviews in two local churches in Chinatown of Manhattan and Sunset Park of Brooklyn. I interviewed three respondents in a community service center in Chinatown of Manhattan. I also conducted one interview in a private facility and a partial interview in a respondent’s workplace.

**Data Collection: Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview**

The first objective of the qualitative interview was to allow respondents to tell their own story in their own terms (McCracken, 1988). Another objective was to capture how respondents view their world, to learn the language they used to communicate their experiences and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences. The interview served as a framework within which respondents could express their own understandings on their own terms (Patton, 2002). Qualitative interviewing began with the assumption that the perspective of each individual was meaningful, knowable, and able to be
made explicit (Patton, 2002). The type of interview used depended on the purpose of the study and available resources.

Within the framework of phenomenology, the inquiry sought to collect in depth and first-hand data of the complex layers of human experiences (Grbich, 2007). For my study, it was important to extract genuine meanings of the complex layers of transnational mothers’ experiences especially regarding their migration experience, decision-making for sending their child to China, early motherhood and mother-child bonding, separation, parenting from afar and strategies used to cope with separation. Therefore, a certain degree of focus or structure for the interview was required in order to gather systematic information, which is comparable across the respondents interviewed. However, I had to maintain enough openness and flexibility in order to explicate the complex layers of the participants’ experiences. For these reasons, semi-structured interviewing was the approach that I had used for this study.

I developed a semi-structured interview guide to collect narratives for this study. The guide included an outline of the topics I would cover under the phenomenon being studied (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview focused on Chinese transnational mothers’ experience and perceptions concerning their infant child who was cared for in China. From my practical experience, transnational mothers expressed their emotional reactions during informal conversations. These affective responses would, of course, be supplemented and amplified by the details of specific stories of their migration and work experiences, personal and structural barriers, such as financial hardship and inadequate childcare services, the strategies they used, and actions they took to cope with far away parenting and separation.

The social stigma of sending babies away from parents was a serious issue in the Chinese community. In some circumstances, migrant mothers received criticism for sending their infants
away. Therefore, I was especially sensitive when conducting interviews and communicated to
the respondents that their knowledge, experiences, perceptions, and feelings were very
important. My posture had to be nonjudgmental.

Each informant participated for an average of 90-minutes in person interview. Individual
informants provided detailed information of their experiences might engage in longer time
interviews. I had used a semi-structured interview guide (See Attachment C: Interview Guide) to
gather information. The interview guide was constructed based on the sensitizing concepts
including Chinese immigrant mothers’ experience on transnational mothering, early maternal
care experience, separation and reunification outlined in the literature review and theory
chapters. Questions covered participant’s background, profile, and history of transnational
parenting and Chinese immigrant mothers’ experiences and perception of early motherhood. In
addition, questions explored the mother’s experience during pregnancy, childbirth, and nurturing
in the first few months after the baby was born. I explored the mother’s decision-making process
that led to sending the baby to immediate family for childcare in China; the mother’s experiences
during her baby’s absence, including her perceptions of the child’s life in China and how their
perceptions developed; and mother-child communication and interaction during separation.

The researcher sought approval from the Hunter College Human Research Protection
Program (HRPP) Office. Informed consent (Attachment D: Informed Consent Form) was
obtained from participants prior to interviews. Each participant received nominal compensation
for her participation whether the informant completed the entire interview or not.

Because some participants might be undocumented, I did not include questions about a
participant’s immigration status. However, the issue of undocumented status emerged in several
interviews, because it was a significant concern for immigrant families in considering sending
their children to China. Proper recording of interview data was another concern. It is unlikely that note taking could capture the full content of the interview (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I tape recorded the interview with the informant’s consent (Attachment E: Audio Tape Recording Consent Form) and had used a transcription software transcribed the recorded interviews. Because Mandarin was a dialect that both birthmothers and interviewer understand and speak, I had conducted the interviews in that dialect. After the interviews, I had translated the transcribed interviews into English. During the interview, I wrote down the key phrases and developed a list of major points and non-verbal cues made by respondents. I developed codes indicating respondent’s interpretations, questions, thoughts or ideas emerging during the interview. This interpretive information and the verbatim transcripts had given insights to subsequent interviews and data analysis (Patton, 2002).

**Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data**

Patton (2002) stated, “Concepts are never a substitute for direct experience with the descriptive data” (p.457). Data analysis is the process helping the researcher to organize and explicate meanings from the qualitative data.

The focus in phenomenological study is people’s lived experience of a phenomenon. To study the lived experience means to investigate the totality of lived experiences that belong to a single person (Giorgi, 1997). This qualitative phenomenological study aims to study the Chinese immigrant mothers’ lived experience of sending their children to home in China for childcare. The unit of analysis was the Chinese immigrant mother who sent her American-born infants to China. The focus of the analysis was the totality of their experiences on early maternal bonding with her baby, decision-making process for sending away her child and separation.
The aim of a phenomenological study is to arrive at meanings (Whiting, 2002). That is, in this study, what the experience of sending away their children and the subsequent separation is like for the mothers. In describing how such experience is like for the mothers, the researcher attempted to unfold the aspects of the meaning of their experiences. Simultaneously, in arriving at the essence of the phenomenon, the mothers also disclosed the meaning of their experiences to them (Giorgi, 1971). Giorgi (1971) argued that the power of analytical techniques is more compatible with the quantitative research that is dealing with inanimate objects, but not well suited to phenomenological research that focuses on the meaning of a phenomenon.

Hycner (1999) defined the term analysis as “breaking into parts” (p.161) and therefore it means “a loss of the whole phenomenon” (p. 161). Giorgi (1971) suggested that in order to have the meaning to be understood, a process he termed as, “explicitation” (p.21), would do better than analysis. Explicitation is the process of making explicit or “thematizing the locus of any given phenomenon within its context” (p. 21). In the course of explicitation, certain implicit but experiential, essential and relevant variables emerged. Explicitation is to investigate the constituents of a phenomenon and simultaneously to keep the context of the whole (Hycner, 1999).

According to Giorgi (1997), the explicitation process has five steps: 1) collecting of verbal data, 2) the reading of the data, 3) the dividing of the data into meaning units, 4) organization and expression of raw data into disciplinary language, and 5) expressing the structure of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). When I conducted the phenomenological analysis of the interview data for this study, I adapted Giorgi’s framework of explicitation.
Reading and Re-reading to Retain a Global Sense of the Data

Phenomenology begins its explicitation of interview data with phenomenological reduction or bracketing (Giorgi, 1997), where the researcher has to bracket his/her past knowledge about a phenomenon, in order to encounter it freshly and describe it precisely as it is intuited or experienced. Moreover, the researcher had to only consider what is given precisely as it is given, as presence or phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). In the process of explicitation, I had bracketed myself out of my previous experience and knowledge on the phenomenon of transnational mothering. I only engaged with the existing text transcribed from the interview with immigrant mothers.

Since the phenomenological approach is holistic, the researcher had to read all the data in order to retain a global sense of the data (Giorgi, 1997). The global sense was important to determine how the parts were constituted. Therefore, I listened to the entire tapes of all interviews and read the transcription a number of times (Hycner, 1985). I had reflected on the descriptions and articulations of the Chinese immigrant mothers’ experiences through reading and rereading of the text. I wrote down memos concerning my thoughts, questions and responses to the data and any emergent assumptions (Grbich, 2007). This provided me a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and themes. When I listened to the tapes, I especially listened to the non-verbal and para-linguistic levels of communication, that is, the intonations, the emphases, and the pauses (Hycner, 1985). In this stage, I did not thematize any aspect of the description based upon the global reading.
Dividing the Data into Meaning Units

In this stage, I divided the data into meaning units through the process of meaning discrimination (Giorgi, 1997). The process is iterative (Whiting, 2002). The meaning discrimination presupposes the prior assumption of a disciplinary perspective, such as a psychological perspective for a psychological analysis or a sociological perspective for a sociological analysis. The set of perspective suppositions is sensitive to the phenomenon being investigated (Giorgi, 1997). In my study, the meaning discrimination suppositions were based on the sensitizing concepts that I drew from the literature review on immigration studies, mothering and attachment theories.

Also, in this stage, I had to re-read the transcriptions more slowly. I went through every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, and the non-verbal communication transcripts in order to elicit the participant’s meanings (Hycner, 1985). I identified and constituted parts known as meaning units. They are the natural meaning units expressed in everyday languages by the participants (Giorgi, 1975). At this point, all the general meanings are included, even the redundant ones (Hycner, 1985). These meaning units are separate entities, which together form the whole meaning of the experience (Whiting, 2002).

I also adopted the concept of *emic* analysis and *in vivo* coding in the process of meaning discrimination (Patton, 2002, p. 545). Emic analysis and in vivo coding allowed the research to uncover the indigenous terms, such as *fengsu* (social norms) and *mei-banfa* (nothing I can do), particularly created and used by the respondents in the interviews. These indigenous terms helped to make sense and meaning of the immigrant mothers’ world (Patton, 2002). Only these mothers understood their worldview as it related to their experience of transnational mothering.
The indigenous categories and terms emerged and were created by participants to capture some essences of their experiences (Patton, 2002).

After I identified all the meaning units in the transcriptions, I turned to the research questions. I attempted to determine what informants had said in response to the research questions. Then, I attempted to delineate the meaning units relevant to my research questions. After that, I looked over the list of relevant meaning units and eliminated the redundancies (Hycner, 1985). In the process of meaning discrimination, it is very important that the researcher maintain maximum openness (Giorgi, 1975). As the phenomenological approach is discover-oriented (Hycner, 1985), the adoption of unspecified attitude is unique in the process of data explicitation. The researcher needs an attitude open enough to let undiscovered meanings emerge (Giorgi, 2011).

**Organizing and Expressing Raw Data into Disciplinary Language**

This stage is to determine if any of the relevant meaning units naturally cluster together (Hycner, 1985). In this stage, I examined all the relevant meaning units to see if there were one or more central themes that expressed the essence of the experiences of the Chinese immigrant mothers. Finally, I determined the themes from the clusters of meaning.

Based on the themes identified, I conducted a “validity check” (Hycner, 1999, p. 154). This was done by returning to the transcriptions of each informant in order to ensure that the essence of the interviews were accurately captured (Hycner, 1999). I summarized each interview that incorporated all the themes elicited from the data. This gave me a sense of the holistic in context. I interrogated all the clusters of meanings with the interview summaries and modified the themes as necessary.
Other than that, I also examined the clusters of meanings based on the sensitizing concepts derived from the review of existing research studies and theoretical propositions. These sensitizing concepts involved the transmigrant mother’s experiences on the practice of transnational mothering. They also involved the interactions and attachment relationship between the child and the birth mother. Sensitizing concepts provided me references and directions for the themes and ideas to look at. Using the sensitizing concepts, I examined whether these concepts manifested in a similar or different pattern posited in the existing theories, and how they gave meanings to Chinese immigrant mothers who practice transnational parenting.

Expressing the Structure of the Phenomenon

The purpose of this study was to uncover the essence of the Chinese immigrant mother’s experience with transnational mothering. Each interview with a mother consisted of multiple layers of meanings and interpretations of her experience. After these meanings and essences were explicated, I began to composite and present the structure of the phenomenon in an organized manner. This composite report described the essences of transnational mothering as experienced by the Chinese immigrant mothers participated in the interviews.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two prominent issues concerning the rigor of empirical research study. Reliability suggests that the same data would have been collected each time in repeated observations of the same phenomenon (Babbie, 2011, p. 157). Validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration (Babbie, 2011, p. 159).

Many qualitative and phenomenological researchers believed that validity and reliability are values related to the measurement instruments used to obtain quantitative data, and they
underlie the logical empirical philosophy of science (Giorgi, 1987). However, the understanding of validity and reliability in the logical empirical framework are not compatible with phenomenological theory (Giorgi, 1987). Giorgi (1987) stated that validity and reliability has to be understood in the indigenous context.

To insure the validity and reliability of phenomenological research, two issues have to be considered – phenomenological reduction and the concern for essences (Giorgi, 1987). Phenomenological reduction concerns bracketing. In this study, I had consciously bracketed myself out, in both the data collection and explicitation processes, from what I knew about the phenomenon experienced by the Chinese immigrant mothers. I looked into the raw data, as they were unusual and fresh to me. Giorgi (1987) contends that if the investigator read the participants’ descriptions without prejudice and thematized the transcripts from the participant’s perspective, the quality of the findings would not be contaminated.

Phenomenological reduction prevents the researcher from making unsupported empirical claims. Phenomenology emphasizes the content of experience to the eidetic level through essential description (Giorgi, 1987). In my study, what the Chinese immigrant mothers said were the essence of my qualitative inquiry. The data I collected revealed perspectives of the Chinese immigrant mother I interviewed; and those data displayed the intricacies of the phenomenon of transnational parenting among Chinese families studied. Giorgi (1987) concluded on reliability and validity in phenomenological research:

If the essential description truly captures the intuited essence, one has validity in a phenomenological sense. This means that one adequately describes the general essence that is given to the consciousness of the researcher. If one can use this essential description consistently, one has reliability. Phenomenological statements have implications for empirical phenomena, but only as possibilities. Eidetic statements as pure descriptions are valid. If used consistently, they are also reliable. (p. 173)
There are a number of levels of validation in order of increasing sophistication (Hycner, 1985). Therefore, the study sample was logically and purposefully drawn, and rigor emerged from the type of participants chosen and their ability to fully describe the experience being researched (Hycner, 1985). In the data explicitation process, I also conducted a validity check by referring to the original transcriptions of the interviews. Moreover, I checked the themes against the sensitizing concepts in the literature. I verified the themes if they fit in or did not fit with the essences respondents expressed in the interview and the sensitizing concepts derived in the literature.

**Issues on Human Subject Protection**

There were no direct benefits to informants for participating in this research. No known risks or harms to participation in this study existed, other than those experienced in everyday life. However, some mothers experienced emotional distress when discussing separation from their children. In the event a problem arose, I had provided a list of resources (See Attachment E: List of Resources) that participants might use for seeking assistance should they need them. Participants were informed that their participation might contribute to knowledge on transnational parenting practice among Chinese immigrants, which might further develop future strategies and services for mothers and the returned children. Participation in this study was voluntary; informants could refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time.

As a researcher, I was obliged to protect the confidentiality of all participants. I took necessary steps to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. However, as a mandated reporter, I explained I would have to break confidentiality if an informant indicated she was at risk to herself or others. No personal identifiers were linked to the data. No one but the researcher had
listened to the interview tapes or translated and described them. I immediately assigned codes and pseudonyms to the informants, and eliminated any identifiers when transcribing the tapes. All materials and tapes were kept in a locked cabinet in my home office. Only my dissertation chair and I had access to the transcriptions of the tapes and interview notes. The researcher destroyed the tapes after they were transcribed.
CHAPTER VI: THE “FENGSU” AND
SENDING AMERICAN-BORN BABIES TO HOME IN CHINA

Introduction

This study explored the phenomenon of transnational mothering among Chinese immigrant mothers in the US. Immigrant mothers around the world are practicing transnational mothering. However, the satellite-baby (Borh & Tse, 2009) phenomenon appears unique to Chinese immigrant mothers, particularly those from the Fujian-Fuzhou region of China. Previous studies about Chinese trans-migrant mothers examined the decision making process for sending their American-born children to their parents’ hometown in China (Da, 2003; Chen, 2006; Bohr, 2009a; Kwong et al., 2009; Wang, 2009; Wong, 2015). These studies found several factors that affected the parents’ decisions. These included financial difficulties, lack of childcare opportunities, grandparents’ desires to see the babies, and parents’ undocumented status. However, these were only the practical reasons Fujianese mothers sent their infants to China. The present study sought to understand the satellite baby phenomenon in more depth from the perspective of the mothers themselves.

The Chinese immigrant mothers interviewed for this study revealed the hidden power of fengsu that drove them to send their infants to China. The notion of fengsu had distinctive implications for the informants for this study, all of whom were immigrant mothers from Fujian-Fuzhou region. In Chinese, fengsu means social customs, social norms, or social traditions. Fengsu determined numerous aspects of the informants at all stages, beginning with migration, marriage, childbearing, and ultimately sending their infants to China with the expectation that the children would return to them in the US once they were old enough to enter grade school. Migration, marriage, childbearing, and sending away their babies were not separate aspects of
these women’s lives. They were interlocking gears set in motion by the invisible power of fengsu.

The women used the term fengsu early in the interviews when they described their experiences migrating to the US. They continued to refer to fengsu throughout the interviews as informants continued their narratives; themes linked to fengsu expanded as their narratives unfolded. They spoke of fengsu as a custom, a blast of wind, a tendency and the wave, revealing the influence of fengsu had penetrated deep into these mother’s minds; it was a strong determinant of the behaviors of people from the Fujian-Fuzhou region. Specifically, fengsu governed them to think and act according to particular cultural expectations. It drove their decisions and the paths they took in migration, post-migration work-life, financial management, marriage, childbearing, and childcare arrangements. Consequently, all the informants in this study used of the term fengsu in describing why they had song (sent) their children huiqu (back home) to Zhong-guo (China).

The informants tied fengsu to the arc of their lives, beginning with their migration to the US. Lei Min stated, “The fengsu in the area I lived, the custom in the place. Everybody tended to go overseas. Everybody went overseas. Then, everybody wanted to go overseas.” Similarly, Cai Lan stated, “It could be our fengsu. At my age, around 17 or 18, all young people came to the US. Then, my parents sent me here, too.” Another mother, Oi Jie said, “…because people in my region mostly came to the US, it was like yízhènfēng (a blast of wind) …” that brought people to this country. This statement implied that fengsu was a powerful force that determined her actions. Sue Qing used the metaphor of the sea when she described the influence fengsu had on her migration:
Because so many people around had gone overseas, such kind of fengsu in the society had infiltrated in your mind. Your heart seemed to follow this lang (wave); you also want to go overseas...Like that, people around would be infected. All go overseas. Then, slowly and slowly, you would have such idea – the idea of going overseas.

However, emigration was only the first in a series of actions where fengsu drove the destinies of young women in Fuzhou. Even after they left China, fengsu continued to dominate their post-migration lives including work, marriage, and motherhood. This chapter reveals how fengsu perpetually governed the lives of these immigrant mothers.

The Fengsu of Migration

Fengsu was an active catalyst for young Fuzhounese to leave home and set out on their arduous journeys to the US. Their decision to go overseas was not spontaneous; it fermented in their minds from a very young age. In the interviews, half of the respondents had family members who had migrated to the US before them. All but one had relatives in the US before their own migration. Lei Min, Pei Jin, and Ta Fu grew up in single-parent families in their villages. Their fathers had left home and come to the US when they were still young children. Consequently, their fathers did not live with them when they were children in China.

Both Pei Jin’s and Ta Fu’s father had left home when they were under age 10. They reunited with their fathers when they themselves migrated to the US in their 20s. Originally, Ta Fu’s father did not want to leave home. However, Ta Fu reported that many people worked to convince him that he should leave China to go to the US. They told him he could earn a lot of money if he went to America. She explained, “My father had not been home for years. He had gone through a long journey. Overall, he was not home. I had asked my mama several times where papa was. She told me that he was on his way, on a far journey – a far, far journey....”
In Lei Min’s case, she was the only family member still at home when she planned to come to the US. All her family members had left China by the time she was 18 years old:

When my mom left, I was 17. Then, my di (younger brother) also left. My situation was that I was in the countryside at 24 years old. My papa, mama, and di-di were in the US. I was the only one left… left me alone behind. Then, I also came.

Our region is the hometown of many overseas Chinese. In the countryside, all children thought they would go overseas in future…. All my friends and schoolmates had family members gone overseas…. They just hanged around. All had not worked.

Several respondents explained that young people in their area were expected to leave for the US soon. They did not go to work because there were very limited job opportunities in their hometowns.

Ai Yan did not have any family members in the US, but she did have distant relatives living in America. She had told herself that she would not come to the US like other fellow villagers from the town of Tingjiang. However, eventually she did:

I am Fuzhounese. Many Fuzhounese had parents in the US. Young people there mostly chose to come to the US. They migrated overseas or many people had tōudù (human smuggling)… In the past, when I went to school, I thought I would not zouxian (run the route) to the US, but later, in reality I still compromised. I also zou-na-tiao-xian (ran that route)…

Ai Yan came to the US via zouxian, following the routes of her village fellows. Gao Fen’s mother also sent her young daughter to zouxian (run the route). She explained,

That was called zouxian. Zouxian, do you know? That is tōudù. At that time, I did not take it seriously. I said, ‘Well, do as what you said.’ At that time, I did not have clear perception what it was… I was in the first year in high school. My mama told me to go to zouxian. Then, I came here.

The fengsu of migration was so influential among the Fuzhounese that “everybody” wanted to go overseas, regardless of their socio-economic status, career accomplishments, or educational backgrounds. Several informants came from well-educated or well-to-do families.
Nonetheless, the power of fengsu was strong. Some of the women had received special career training in Fuzhou. Because of this training, they were able to obtain highly desirable job assignments in production work units. Xi Lian was one of them. However, because of her family’s strong history of family members going overseas, she gave up the job she worked so hard to acquire and came to the US. Although her hometown was in the countryside in Langqi, her family had already moved in the Capital City of Fuzhou by the time she left China. She came from a family of high socio-economic status:

My father thought that people around us, our folks, had gone overseas. In each family, each household, there was a kind of qīngxiàng (tendency) – if you did not have someone gone overseas, you felt losing face while going out in the street or shopping. That was, you were not keeping up with other people. He thought we should have at least one family member chūguó (going overseas)...So, I saw so many people had gone overseas, I thought of coming too.

Bei Le was also well educated and had attended college in the Capital City of Fuzhou. She received an offer of a position as an electronic engineer even before she graduated from college. However, because her relatives pressed her to come to the US, her parents selected her to migrate to the US. Consequently, she gave up her college education and professional opportunities in China:

I came to the US, mainly because I had relatives in the US. These relatives spoke to my family, ‘... aye... you should come to the US. There are opportunities... such such...’ At that time, the US comparatively was much stronger than other countries in the world. They thought I had to come to the US and I would earn more money. At that time, the US currency was US $1 to RMB ¥10. There was much different comparing to the present time. In that kind of relatives’ incitement, my family had elected me to come here. Then I was hūlihūdū (in a haze) and mǐmǐhúhú (in a daze)...and came here...

From their narratives, these respondents painted a picture of how the powerful force of the fengsu of migration had influenced them since they were young. Some of their fathers were absent from home because they had migrated. Even if they did not have a parent who went
overseas, other family members might have migrated. In their hometowns, enthusiastic relatives or villagers would come to their houses to convince them to leave home and go overseas. As teenagers, they already knew about *zouxian* and *tōudù* (human smuggling). Some families felt sending their young daughters away would help them to save face because of the strong cultural expectation for a family member to immigrate to the US. Otherwise, they felt they would fall behind other fellow townsmen and villagers.

In this study, thirteen out of the sixteen informants came to the US through human smuggling, *zouxian* or *tōudù*. Some were fortunate enough to fly into the US, passing through customs using false identities. Others spent months traveling from country to country in the hands of smugglers before they landed on American soil. Those informants reported that they had “visited” several cities and countries before finally arriving in the US. These included places as distant as Canton, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Switzerland, Bolivia, Mexico, and numerous other countries in South America before their arrival in the US. One informant had a stopover on her route to the US in the Republic of Congo, where she suffered from a mosquito-borne disease. She was very afraid and asked her smugglers to return her home to China, which they did not allow. Two informants in the study had climbed the mountains to cross Mexico and the US border with Mexican “coyotes” as their guides. Two of these women ended up in prison. One respondent took almost a year to arrive at the US border after she left home in Changle, Fuzhou. Respondents who had gone through *zouxian* said that these arduous and dangerous experiences in coming to the US were entirely unexpected.
Economic Grounded Formation of Fengsu-Migration

_Fengsu_ drove young Fuzhounese men and women to leave home and go overseas. They experienced considerable hardship coming to a strange land and establishing new lives in the US. This raises the question of what created such a strong culture of _fengsu_-migration. Lei Min gave her opinion about how the _fengsu_-migration developed:

In the past, people went overseas, like my father, was that they were not able to manage living at home. More people ran away and went overseas, and then it became a _fengsu_. Everybody left home and went overseas… In the past, those people left home had difficulties managed their living… One’s name was infamous at home. Those people would leave and ran away overseas. In the beginning, it was that people wanted to have a better life in future…

Ta Fu’s father left home before she was 10 years old. In her hometown, she heard people extolling the virtues of the US when they spoke about it. They came to the US seeking opportunities and to earn money. This left her feeling that life at home and the living conditions were not good enough. Unlike Xi Lian and Bei Le, Gao Fen reported that her family was very poor, and poverty was an important motivation for migration. Consequently, her mother sent her to zouxian, and she came to the US hoping that she could contribute money that would improve her family’s circumstances. As more people left home and went overseas, they saw how the people who had immigrated to the US improved the lives of the families in China.

Some classmates, their families were poor. Then, they came here and visited home later. During their visits, they appeared having become rich. At girls’ time, I saw that. I thought it was so good to go overseas. I thought I could earn a lot of money for coming here. It seemed like what other people said, ‘… to mine gold and found gold.’ It was like that… (Sue Qing)

When Lei Min and her boyfriend considered whether they would give in to the _fengsu_ of migration, her boyfriend’s mother encouraged them to leave. According to the elder, “Everybody had gone overseas. You stay home…stay home and work for a small amount of money. Working for a month in the US, the money someone earns equals to an annual income in China.”
Eventually, her boyfriend came to the US in 1999, and Lei Min joined him a year later. After he left, his mother and now Lei Min’s mother-in-law played an active role searching for “routes” and helped her make arrangements to come to the US. Families from lower socio-economic groups expected and reinforced young people’s overseas emigration, because they dreamed of the economic promises ahead. They would initiate the arrangements for their sons and daughters to *chūguó* (go overseas). Young girls saw how their peers’ lives had improved after they migrated; they longed for their own bright future. Before they had a clear concept what human smuggling and undocumented immigrant life meant, they left home and came to the US.

**Fengsu Governed Post-Migration Work Life**

Fuzhounese maintain strong communal ties and networks that connect hometown fellows nationwide in the US and non-migrants at home in China. Families, relatives, and friends maintain close with frequent contacts through telephone calls and Internet social networks. Almost all Fuzhounese immigrants own personal cell phones. Once a newcomer flew in from one’s hometown, all involved in the network were aware of the person’s presence in the US. On many occasions, relatives of the new Fuzhounese immigrants were involved in *composing* and *structuring* the newcomer’s early immigrant work-life. For example, Xi Lian’s relative who helped her to come to the US ran a restaurant in West Virginia. The day after she arrived in New York, her relative came to pick her up; when she arrived in West Virginia, she immediately started working for them as a busgirl. She worked for them over a year until she was married and moved to New York.

Because of language barriers and in most cases undocumented immigrant status, the new migrants had to work in arduous and low paying jobs. Following the custom of *fengsu*, many new Fuzhounese migrants to the US started working in restaurants operated by their relatives or
other people from their hometowns. In some cases, the new migrants worked for the relatives who had lent money for them to come to the US. For example, Fei Yan worked in her uncle’s take-out restaurant in Flatbush for a year, because she owed him money for coming to the US.

When new immigrants did not have relatives operating restaurants, their relatives would assist them in finding jobs in other Chinese-owned restaurants. For newcomers who had no close relatives in New York, the first points of access for work were the employment agencies near East Broadway in Chinatown. Few jobs were available in New York City for newcomers unless their relatives owned a restaurant in the City. In these circumstances, they had to travel on their own to find places to work located in unfamiliar towns in states all over the country. On the third day after she arrived in the US, Yiu Qin found a job through an employment agency in Chinatown. She traveled to Ohio from New York on her own:

I was really so scared. I rode on the bus. I was afraid of getting lost. I had to transfer to another bus… When I saw the driver took out my luggage, I thought it should be there. I got off. If I had not seen that, I passed my destination. Then, I finished off. I got off; I showed that address to people because I did not speak English. Then, I called the employer and he came to pick me up… I was so frightened, but I was no choice. I had to go to work. Otherwise, I would not have the money to pay my debts. (Yiu Qin)

In this study, fifteen out of sixteen informants started their US work life in Chinese restaurants as newcomers. Two worked in their relatives’ take-out restaurants in Brooklyn. The others found their first jobs in states outside of New York. These women knew nothing about the US, and they did not speak English. Yet, they bravely rode long-distance buses and traveled to workplaces hundreds of miles away from the center of the Fujianese community in New York. Only one informant came to the US with a working visa that enabled her to take a job in the meatpacking industry when she arrived.
Even the women who had higher education or special occupational training in China had no chance to develop the careers they had hoped for in their new host country. Consequently, their post-migration work life resulted in the deskilling of these Chinese immigrant women (Man, 2004). Among the sixteen informants, one had attended junior college in New York. One had attended college and three had attended vocational schools in China. Four informants were high school graduates. De Gui completed high school in the Capital City of Fuzhou. Before she came to the US, she had worked in the accounting department of a foreign-owned company in Fuzhou. She dreamed of coming to the US to study and learn English. Upon arrival, she thought she would be able to find a job similar to the one she held in China. Finally, she gave up.

Due to language barrier, it was impossible to take the same job as Americans did. I could only take jobs that I was able to do or could handle. First, I did not understand English. I certainly could only take the jobs that everybody did in the beginning. That was, restaurant work. (De Gui)

Bei Le was attending college when her family decided to send her to the US. Her college major was in electronic engineering. Upon arriving in New York, she started working in her relative’s take-out restaurant in Brooklyn. Throughout her immigrant life, she did not have the opportunity to develop the career she originally studied for at home:

When I just came, all my relatives worked in restaurants. I could not find anybody around that worked in higher level of occupations. Thus, I had no chance to enter the field associated with my previous training. I just followed the trend and entered the industry of restaurant... (Bei Le)

Describing themselves as unskilled and inexperienced, many informants expressed that they had mo-banfa (no choice or no option). They began working as busgirls in dine-in or buffet restaurants earning a small amount of money because of their poor spoken and written English skills. A few worked in take-out restaurants. They reported that they routinely worked six days a week over 12 hours daily. Many left their first jobs, which were often their relatives’ restaurants,
after they felt they were equipped with skills, experiences, and adequate restaurant-English to locate better positions. In these cases, the better position was as a waitress. A waitress could earn twice as much as a busgirl. The starting salary for a busgirl was around $1,200 per month. In contrast, a waitress could earn from $2,200 to $2,400 each month. Gao Fen’s story illustrated the work life trajectory of newcomers:

When I first came to the US, my relatives told me that we, Fuzhounese, almost all work in restaurants. They told me to go working in the restaurant… They said people could earn more for working in the eat-in restaurant, but earned less in the buffet restaurant. Moreover, working in eat-in restaurants was less busy. My relative said that I had to start working as a busgirl. That was to collect the plates and clean up the tables. Then, my relative helped me to find a busgirl job in a dine-in restaurant. The first job, I was paid $1,200. Wages was paid every half month… my first half-month pay was $600. I worked as the busgirl for two months. Then, I became a waitress.

Informants described themselves as very tired from their experiences working in Chinese restaurants. Moreover, more experienced workers might have bullied the new comers. Ta Fu reported:

I was a busgirl working in the restaurant in NJ. The waitresses there…those girls seemed very proud. They looked themselves superior and in the higher positions. You had just come – was a country bumpkin (spoken in English). They abused you and played tricks on you. I was there for half a year. I felt I was not able to learn much. Some waitresses did not want to teach you. Even though I ran over and attempted to help, they would not let you. They said, ‘no…no…do not need your help.’ They were afraid that after you learned the skills, you would seize her rice bowl.

It might seem that relatives would be protective of their relative immigrant workers. However, some informants felt that being related to their employer could make a woman’s situation even more unpleasant. Yiu Qin worked for a relative who did not protect her from other worker’s bullying. Both Fei Yan and Pei Jin reported their relatives treated them as modern-day slaves in the workplace. Fei Yan had not taken a full day off in more than a year; her uncle only gave her half-day off on Sunday. Pei Jin described working in her relative’s restaurant as zuo-si
(working to death). After she insisted on quitting the job in his restaurant, he took revenge on her by discrediting her reputation within the extended family network.

I was zuo-si when I worked in my relative’s restaurant. I was extremely tired… We had to work from early morning to late night. I worked for him for a year and four months. He paid me less than other workers had. He also delayed paying my wages up to four or five days each month. At last, I quitted. He did not let me go… After I left, he spread the rumor to my relatives that I ran away with a man…

Post-migration work-life resulted in the deskilling of new Chinese immigrant women. Fengsu derived post-migration work life made it difficult for them to act on their own behalf; it interfered with their agency, or their ability to act on their own wishes. A relative persuaded Bei Le to give up her college education and her aspirations to be an engineer and come to the US. Upon arrival, she worked in her relatives’ take-out restaurants in Brooklyn. Fei Yin had skills as a beautician and as a hairdresser. When she arrived in the US, she planned to look for jobs working in this field. However, her relatives discouraged her. Her san-jiu-jiu (the third maternal uncle) came to pick her up in Chinatown, and she took a job working in his take-out restaurant in Flatbush. In the take-out restaurants, both Fei Yan and Bei Le had to learn to do everything in the restaurant from the front desk to the back kitchen. Both informants had to answer phone calls and take orders. They were cashiers as well as packers. They had to fry rice and deep fry ingredients. Bei Le never would have imagined that she would be holding knives to cut up chicken wings when she was in college in Fuzhou. She reported that her legs trembled continuously after standing 10 hours a day at work. She was also allergic to the greasy and smoky smells in the kitchen. Sores appeared on her skin.

The narratives explicated the early life of new Fuzhounese woman immigrants. Whether as a busgirl, a waitress, or a take-out restaurant worker, the women had to work long hours under subservient and brutal conditions. Employers provided food and shelter, typically simple food
and single beds. Usually, they lived near the restaurants where they worked. They might only have to walk to the workplace. Otherwise, their employers provided transportations between residences and the restaurants. Because of their limited skills in English and the remote location of the workplaces, they could not get around much on their few days off. They could only stay home doing laundry or other chores. Getting a ride to go for shopping was difficult. For years, they might not have engaged in any social life.

**Work-Life and Personal Life**

In this study, almost all respondents stressed that work was their life and their life was work. After they finished one day’s work, there was only more work waiting for them the following day. Informants described work in the US as “tough”, “laboriously hard” and “zou-si” (works to death), and “shasi-ren” (kills people). They worked long hours. In restaurants, workers usually started working at 9:30 am and finished as late as at 11 pm. Oi Jie referred her workday as “only stayed inside the restaurant going around and around…” Generally, they worked six days a week. Some women worked seven days:

> When I worked in Indiana, I worked 7 days a week. After work at 11 pm, I put my clothes into the machine and washed them right away. I had to prepare the clothes for the next day… At that time, I stayed at the place provided by my employer. It was not a very good place, but I just had to put up with it. As I could sleep in a bed, I was fine. When I came home at late night, I had no time to look around. Whether I felt comfortable or not, I was very tired the moment I came home. I went to bed; I slept and got up the next morning. Again, I went to work. I did not have any leisure time. (Bei Le)

These women workers had virtually no leisure or social life. They were captives who could only stay in the workplace and home. When Pei Jin worked in suburban towns outside New York, she had one day off each week. Since her co-workers had different schedules, she was the only one in the residence on her days off.
I woke up in the morning. After 11 am, I cooked something to eat. Then, I sat outside the house and relaxed in the wind. Then, I took the cell phone out and made some calls to home in China. I might also listen to some music. That was it. A day passed by easily. Then, I went to bed again. I had to return to work in the next morning. I did not have much feeling. Time went by so fast. A week’s time passed so quickly, but I felt the work hours went by so slowly… (Laughing bitterly)… When people went out shopping, I asked them to get me some eggs. I ate them in the off days. I bought some eggs, cooked them and ate them in the off days.

Pei Jin had to ask other people to help her buy groceries when she worked outside of New York City. If working in suburban areas, one needed a ride to go shopping in a supermarket or in the mall. These Chinese-owned restaurants were located in states all over the country. Bei Li worked in more than ten restaurants in Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Allenton, Chicago, and Washington DC. She described her life as piaobo (vagrantly), and she was unhappy with her unsettled life. However, she did not know how she could get out of this fengsu-driven work-life tradition. Bei Li’s experience was not exceptional. All the informants had worked in cities and suburban towns all over the country. In the interviews, respondents reported that they had been in Kansas, Iowa, Missouri, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, Connecticut, Ohio, N. Carolina, Chicago, Seattle and more. Most of the time, they did not know the exact location of the places where they worked. After they left one job for another, they might forget the name of the city or the town where they had worked before. It was as if they existed somewhere; but they were nowhere.

**Migration, Debts and Earnings**

The fengsu of migration brought these Fuzhounese women to work in the US. The fengsu-migration not only continued governing their post-migration work-life, but also controlled their hard-earned wages. All informants earned very little when they first came to the US. Their incomes varied from $1,200 to $2,100 per month, depending on whether
they worked as busgirls or waitresses. Following the fengsu-practice of migration-work tradition, all informants sent the major portion of their earnings home to China. They only kept a very small amount of money for groceries and everyday necessities, such as laundry detergent and skin lotion:

The first time I was paid for my work (laughing), I counted the money. Woa! While I was counting the money, my tears came down at the same time. I felt sour in my heart. The money was not easy because work made me feel very tired. The employer always gave us jingshen-yali (mental stresses)… Each month, after I was paid, I only kept $20 and sent the rest to home in China. I did not spend money and I did not eat outside. I lived at the employer’s place. I ate in the restaurant where I worked. (Mei Ho)

Yiu Qin was ambivalent when she received her first payment. On one hand, she was very excited the first time she received her pay in US currency. However, she was unable to keep the money for herself. She said, “I earned the US dollars, but the money only stayed in my hands for a short moment. Like the other Fuzhounese, I sent the money back home right away. Whatever I earned, I had to pay the [migration] debts.”

Other than Mei Hoe and Yiu Qin, respondents handled their earnings in the same way. Some kept as little as $20 for themselves. Ta Fu kept $50 and Yiu Qin kept $100. Ta Fu said, “I dare not to buy clothes.” Xi Lian compared the currency exchange rate, which at that time was $1 to ¥8. Based on the exchange rate, she felt that things were much more expensive in the US than those in her hometown. She did not want to spend a penny buying anything in the US.

The fengsu of migration, which brought them to the US, continued to govern their post-migration work-life. Some of these newcomers might have dreams to develop their own careers, but they eventually gave up after having received relatives “advice.” Like their hometown fellows, they threw themselves into the fengsu to start the immigrant work-life in restaurant jobs. Year after year, they spent every working hour in their workplace “going around and around.”
As Bei Le said, it was “difficult to take good step” or to “find a way out.” They had very limited choices for job opportunities. They had no social life or social exposure. They described their life as “work to death” and “work kills people,” but they continued working hard day and night earning a small amount of money. They only kept their hard-earned money for a brief moment, because they sent almost all to home in China. In the course of their post-migration life, fengsu continued to control their paths in marriage and family life.

Fengsu, Migration and Marriage

The women in this study had migrated to the US at a young age. The previous section described their arduous, low-paying jobs, and their isolated social lives. They stayed inside the restaurants all day. Work was life and life was work. They experienced limited social life and social exposure.

Fuzhounese has a fengsu for getting married at young age, generally at age 18, and the expectation was that girls eventually have to get married. These young immigrant women started working and continued working for years once they arrived in the US. As indicated in the last section, they had spent all of their time in the workplace. Unless they had been married or engaged in their hometown, they would have no chance to meet a husband, except in the workplace. Families began to worry and put pressure on these women once they were beyond their expected marriageable age, which was between ages 18 and 24. Among the fourteen informants who were married in the US, 12 were married at age 24 and above. Relatives, family, friends, and peers became very aggressive matchmakers referring marriage partners to the women. Among the sixteen respondents, two were married in China. Four informants had been engaged or had boyfriends prior to their migration. The other 10 respondents who were married in the US either met their husbands in the workplace or were referred a marriage partner by other
people. Some respondents admitted that they had no expectations about the qualities of their marriage partner, because eventually they had to get married.

Some informants stated that they did not want to get married. Nonetheless, they got married under family and peer pressure. Peers always were enthusiastic referring marriage partners:

My husband! That was xiangqin (blind dating). Blind dated. Somebody introduced. Xiangqin was to go out just for the first time and meet in the teahouse. If you wanted to go steady, you could chat on the phone or go out again. It was that…but I did not want blind dates. I felt blind dates were not good customs, but the people in our area got married at young age. All girls got married at age 18 and onward. When I was married, I was 24. (Ai Yan)

Ai Yan was referred marriage partners twice. She did not have a good impression of the first man, and she was not particularly in favor of her current husband. However, she had married him. “Eventually, I had to marry a man.” Similarly, Bei Le only attended one xiangqin date. She thought that all men from her region were the same. She did not want to waste much time with xiangqin dating. She said, “In the US, we connect to the same network. We are all same kind of people. There were not many choices. I let go and just got married to a person.”

Bei Le and Mei Ho did not want to get married so soon. They had been by themselves and worked in the US for a very long time. They were afraid that they would lose their freedom after they got married. However, their families put them under considerable pressures to marry. Bei Le’s mother was sick. She wanted to see her daughter married and having children before she died. Bei Le felt that she had to fulfill her responsibility, which is the general philosophy of the Chinese culture. Mei Ho’s parents always stressed that she was getting older and older. They were afraid that she would not be able to marry. Eventually, she was married at age 28 to a man referred by church members.
Other than Ai Yan, Bei-Le and Mei Ho, three other informants Xi Lian, Yiu Qin and Pei Jin married to their husbands through xiangqin or referrals. These young women only had brief social contacts with their husbands before they married. Pei Jin and Yiu Qin spoke to the men on the telephone and scheduled meetings a few times before they agreed to get married. Xi Lian only spoke to her husband on the phone a few times. Then, she decided to come to New York and married him. “We worked in different states; there were no chance to meet. It was like shan-hun (flash marriage). There was no dating. That was it. We got married just in haste. We came here. In a few days, we confirmed and were married.”

Different from Bei Le and Mei Ho, Sue Qing’s sick mother and her family had not pressured her to get married. She married because of her own belief in the fengsu practice of marriage. She married her boyfriend from Fuzhou two years after she came to the US. She reunited with him in New York. She had not seen him for eight years after he left home in Fuzhou. At last, she married him at age 30. She described her marriage as mama-huhu (getting something done in a slapdash manner):

When I came, he worked in Albany. I had not had much chance seeing him. At that time, I felt the ways we thought were different from before. I told him we were not very suitable to each other anymore. We were hanging over and going around. Finally, I still married him… Honestly speaking, from my heart, to get married, I was to palter with it. It was because we had a fengsu in our hometown. If I did not get married in the first 100th days after my mama passed away, I had to wait for three years. We had such a fengsu. It was because of that custom, I married him… If I did not get married at that time, I would have to marry three years later. Three years later, I go to find another person… to marry a stranger. That, I felt so tired. Then, I lowered my expectation to the zero point. I chose somebody I knew…
**The Fengsu of Li-Jin**

Whether a respondent married her boyfriend from China or somebody she met in the US, her fiancé had to pay *li-jin* (the betrothal gift money) at the time the couple engaged. *Li-Jin* is a very important *fengsu* among Fuzhounese, particularly in the immigrant community in the US. That is because *li-jin* helps the bride to pay all or part of her debts owed upon migration. This also explains why many Fuzhounese families elected to send their daughters rather than sons to *zouxian* and go overseas. Both Goa Fen and Xi Lian’s family intended to send them to America first. According to Gao Fen, “My family was quite poor. We Fuzhounese had a *fengsu*. Girls went overseas would be better, because girls would receive money… That is, when girls were married, the bride’s family would receive money – the *li-jin*. In the past, the customary standard was $33,000. Now is $53,000.” Xi Lian added:

Girls might not need to pay debts. When she was married, her husband would pay her debts. She might still pay a little bit… Men went overseas; he had to pay his debts. After he paid off his own debts, he had to pay for his wife’s debts. Is it right? So, my family thought that way. I thought Fuzhounese felt that way, too.

Bei Le said that a Fuzhounese man from the countryside had to spend $70,000 to $80,000 to marry a wife. He had to earn a lot of money to get a wife.

**Engagement and the Wedding Banquet**

Marrying between 18 and 24 is a *fengsu* in the Fuzhounese community. It is considered the appropriate age for marriage. When informants talked about marrying, I became confused and had to clarify with the informants repeatedly before I could understand the specific meaning of the “*fengsu* of marriage” in this immigrant community. The conventional understanding of marrying and wedding was different from the *fengsu* constructed practice of marriage among Fuzhounese. Within the Fuzhounese community, marrying and wedding is a process. Once a person thought about getting married or forming a family, the first step was to confirm a
marriage partner. The marriage partner might be her fiancé who came from her hometown, someone she met at work, or a referred xiangqin marriage partner.

As soon as the two marriage partners confirmed their relationship, the man had to pay the girl’s family li-jin, which the woman would use primarily to pay off her debts. Because of that, the couple would not have enough money for a wedding banquet. Consequently, they usually dinghun (became engaged) first and moved in together before being married. In their community, dinghun (engagement) meant living together. Even though they did not go to claim their marriage certificate or had a wedding banquet, they were already a couple and began to start a new family. Fuzhounese perceived that dinghun was a promise and a commitment between the two. Once engaged, the relationship would not change. The meaning of dinghun was more significant than an actual marriage certificate.

Since both the man and the woman had spent all their earnings paying off debts, the new couple had to go to work right after dinghun. On some occasions, they would look for fuqi-gong (congenial or husband-wife employment) in the same workplace. In that situation, the employer might provide a small room for the couple near the workplace. On other occasions, the new couple might work in different states a hundred miles away from each other. Some couples would rent and keep a small room in the Chinese community in New York. They visited this home together and met with each other periodically. For couples, those who did not have a rented place in New York, they scheduled to visit New York at the same time and then rented a small hotel room to stay together for a few days. New York was their perceived home-city, but they were homeless in this perceived home city.

A marriage was not considered complete without a wedding banquet. The fengsu of the wedding banquet was to have hometown fellows get together and witness their marriage. In
some circumstances, the couple planned the wedding ahead and before the date arrived, the woman had become pregnant. Consequently, some women found themselves pregnant without a wedding date. When this occurred, the couple would immediately organize the wedding banquet.

Ta Fu gave an account of this situation:

My father saw that I had gone steady. He suggested we engaged first because of my marriageable age… Engagement meant living together. Anyway, once engaged, there would not have problems. We were in reality a married couple. The idea of engagement was just like got married. Once engaged, we would not change… Having engaged, I went to work outside New York. Jobs outside New York paid higher wages. Not long after, I found myself pregnant. I was bearing a child. Then, I quit. I returned to New York and we went to register…

Yiu Qin and Pei Jin reported similar experiences. Yiu Qin stated, “We Fuzhounese generally had just gotten together. We just had lived together. It was normal. It was almost just like we were married.” Pei Jin said, “Once confirmed, we decided a date and began to live together.” Ai Yan and her husband registered their US marriage certificate when they moved in together. She said, “In fact, I had lived with my husband in 2007. We had registered and had the US marriage certificate, but we had the wedding banquet in April 2008. I had registered and was officially married in August 2007.”

Gao Fen married the boyfriend with whom she had gone steady with in her hometown. Upon their migration, she had moved in with him:

After my boyfriend came to the US and reunited with me, we engaged and then lived together. We co-habited for about a year. More than a year, we prepared to get married. After gotten married, we planned to have a baby… We…people from our region almost got married in New York. Our relatives were almost all in NY. Therefore, we come here to have the wedding banquet.
Marriage and Child Bearing

Marriage and childbearing were inseparable *fengsu*-practices among the Fuzhounese. In many circumstances, after the couples confirmed their relationship, the husband urged the wife to bear a child. In fact, some informants said they did not want to have children so soon. Eventually, they agreed to the expected practice and the woman became pregnant immediately, because they felt bearing children for their husband was a family responsibility.

Both Bei Le and Mei Ho went to work outside New York after their engagements and wedding banquets. Their husbands were unhappy that the wives were unavailable to bear children for them. Although Mei Ho did not want a child at that time, she felt *mo-banfa* and eventually gave in. She said, “My husband continued pushing me. Then, I got pregnant and quitted my job.” Bei Le’s husband went to her relatives and complained. “He went over to my relatives and complained that I went to work outside New York. He complained that the two people engaged and were not living together. Two people got married but could not have children. Then, I came back. I had come back and sooner began pregnant.”

After having her first son, Mei Ho’s husband continued pushing her to have more children. His excuse was that their young son was lonely because he did not have companions playing with him. He compared his family with his friends’ that had more than one child. She said, “He always chattered repeatedly and gave me pressure. He stated that other people gave birth to two or three. Then, I gave up and bore my younger daughter.”

On the other hand, some women thought having children was a natural process after the couple joined together. Only a few respondents reported that they had used contraceptives. Pei Jin found she was pregnant when she was preparing for her wedding. She said, “The date we had our wedding banquet, I had been pregnant for over 4 months…Anyway, to get married, I wanted
to have children.” Ai Yan also expressed the same. She said, “Once got married, getting pregnant was expected.”

**Fengsu and Sending Babies to China**

In the interviews, informants repeatedly used these specific terms: *Song* (send), *dai* (carry), *bao* (hold in arms), *xiaohai* (child or children), *huiqu* (going back) or *song Zhong-guo* (send to China) to families for care. They recognized that their practice of sending children to China was *fengsu*-driven. Gao Fen, Yiu Qin, Oi Jie, Pei Jin, and Lei Min emphasized that many Fuzhounese followed this *fengsu* for sending away their young children. Narratives of the informants revealed that *fengsu* had a strong influence on the thoughts and behaviors of Fuzhounese immigrant families. Some might have thought about alternatives to these traditions. However, when they referred to the behavior of other hometown fellows as *xiguan* (habits), they easily justified or took for granted their decisions and behaviors. They were drawn into the *xuanwo* (whirlpool) that everybody else had fallen into.

We Fuzhounese, almost at the time when we found pregnant, had planned to send the baby home. Particularly the first child, almost all had such plan. That meant the moment a woman found herself pregnant, she almost had decided… It seemed like a *xiguan* – a formed habit. In fact, I was so reluctant to send my baby home. It seemed like – when so many people did that, you were also drawn into that *xuanwo*. I was so reluctant to send my child home… (Gao Fen)

Gao Fen had further expounded the meaning of *xuanwo*: “When so many people had followed – most of the people had followed the others, you seemed if you did not follow, you felt you were out. If you were out, you felt you were left alone.”

Hui Yue came to the US as a teen-ager and was the only informant who attended college in New York. She also fell into this *xuanwo*. At that time, she thought she just went through what other Fuzhounese mothers had endured:
Before my child was born, I had known that I would song huiqu… That time, I thought, “Alright, send it.” I treated it this way. So many people had gone through that… Although I felt hurt for letting go of my little child… Whatever other mothers endured, I would be able to live through the same way… (Hui Yue)

Whether a mother considered sending her child to China or not, her family had a strong influence on her decision or decided for her. Bei Le’s husband, who grew up in the countryside, was a faithful follower of the fengsu-practice for sending away his children. Bei Le said, “He saw his village fellows sending away their children to home. He felt that it was a natural and right decision.” Lei Min’s family assumed that she would send her child to home in China:

My mother-in-law had said, ‘You have children, you have to send back here.’ She thought that my papa mama were here in New York, I would not send the child back to home in China… In fact, my husband and my parents all thought that I should send my baby. I had prepared to send because of the fengsu… Everybody ah! After birth, all sent the babies to home in China. Your mother-in-law asked you to send, you would send. It was before the childbirth, I had considered song huiqu (sending back).

On the other hand, families in China were very willing to take the responsibility for caring for the children. They would rather have the parents leave the child rearing responsibilities to them, so that the parents could go back to work. Sue Qing explained, “Back in Fuzhou, so many people thought caring for children were so burdensome to the birthparents. They thought, ‘Not a problem… that’s fine. Send the children home was good. Then, the parents could go back to work.’”

Whether the pregnant woman had thought about sending or not sending her child to China, people in her community would have repeatedly reminded her about the concern. They did not ask the pregnant women if she would send away the infant child. Instead, they asked when the mother would send away the baby to home in China. Mei Hoe had kept her baby boy for a year after birth. Following her pastor’s preaching, she did not plan to send her baby to China even though her financial situation was precarious. However, she was under family
pressures as well as peer pressure to send her son away to China for childcare. Finally, at 11 months, she finally sent her child home. She recalled:

I always heard our pastor in the church said, “as far as possible, with the best effort, do not send the child home.” I originally did not plan to send my son away. I was very persistent. However, my husband’s mother asked for it. My mother also asked for it. My friends also tried to convince me. They said, “Sending him home and taking advantages of young age to earn more money. Later, your life would be better and you would not be so stressful…” Anyway, many people gave me pressures. In fact, I did not want to…

**Conclusion**

*Fengsu* dominated the lives of Fuzhounese, whether a person still lived in the Fujian-Fuzhou region or had migrated to the US. Many young Fuzhounese were imbued with the culture of *fengsu-migration* when they grew up in their hometowns and villages. In this study, almost all informants had family members or relatives who had emigrated overseas at the time they planned to come to the US. The informants had witnessed and appreciated the economic prospects that emigrants brought back to their families. Imperceptibly, the idea of *chūguó* [going overseas] was imprinted in their minds. Many relatives and family elders played an active role in encouraging or arranging the informants to *zouxian* to enter the US. When these young women left home, they had fantasized about their bright futures. They never imagined that they would drift along a path to their destinies that tightly tied them to *fengsu*.

*Fengsu-migration* drove the young Fuzhounese to come to the US. Informants realized that they had to continue drifting along the *fengsu-constructed* path in their post-migration life. Following other hometown fellows’ path, they had to commit their lives to working in restaurants. They could not choose their imagined career or education, and consequently, they became deskillled. They had to endure long-distance travels all over the country, workplace bullying, exploitations by relatives, separation from one’s own family and loneliness. They sent
all except for small amounts of their earnings home to China. They did not spend any money on their own and had no social life. They were captives who had lost their own agency; they were not able to act according to their own will.

Fuzhounese also have a *fengsu* of getting married at a young age. Young migrants had spent years committing to work because they had to pay their migration debts. Except those who were married or engaged prior to the migration, informants either married a coworker whom they met in the workplace or a referred *xiangqin* marriage partner. Fuzhounese saw marriage and childbearing as inseparable *fengsu* events. Many informants bore their first child immediately after being engaged. Before their child was born, many informants were aware that they would send their baby away to home in China, because this was a formed *habit*. Many people were drawn into the *xuanwo*. If there were no *fengsu-driven* migration, the specific custom of marriage arrangement and family structure would not occur. If such a special form of *fengsu-driven* migrant work-life, migrant-marriage and family patterns could not have existed then sending babies to China might have not become a customary practice.

In this study, informants recognized that the practice of sending their children to China was *fengsu-driven*. Individual informants might have chosen different ways to navigating the tide of this *fengsu-driven* practice of transnational mothering. However, the employment of preferred approaches was conditional. The following chapter will present how the informants experienced the tide of *fengsu* practice of transnational mothering and how different conditions altered how informants navigated the tide of such *fengsu* practices.
CHAPTER VII: MEI-BANFA – IMMIGRANT MOTHERS LACK WOMEN’S AGENCY

Overview

The previous chapter explored the hidden force of fengsu and its impact on the perceptions and behaviors of people from the Fujian-Fuzhou region. It strongly influenced their migration, marriage, childbearing, and childcare. Informants agreed that the practice of sending young children to their homes in China was fengsu-driven. Previous immigrants to the US had set the example that everybody sent their infants to families in China for childcare. In this study, some informants assumed the custom, drifted with the tide of fengsu, and sent away their newborns. However, others who conceded to fengsu when they sent away their babies also reported mei-banfa.

In Chinese, mei-banfa means no choice, no way out, cannot be helped or, nothing can be done. In this study, informants’ mei-banfa were the practical circumstances they faced, which amplified their fengsu-driven immigration. Informants reported mei-banfa as problems they confronted as immigrants to the US. These included financial problems, the need to save money for the future, lack of childcare support, and their own mental health. These issues shaped individual experiences that led them to send their children to China. The fengsu-practice of sending babies to China was an established scheme widely practiced by other Fuzhounese mothers to allay their mei-banfa concerns. Not all the mothers followed the fengsu-driven practice without reservation. Some followed the fengsu practice because of the realities of méi-bànfǎ. Mei-banfa, or the realities they faced as immigrants, led them to act against their will. Some lacked agency and do not make the choices they desired (World Bank, 2012).
Drifting with the Tide

Three respondents adopted the *fengsu* of sending their infants to China, because it was the culturally acceptable norm. For example, Ai Yan said, “Children of Fuzhounese people, all the same. At two or three months, they were *song Zhong-guo* (sent to China). The children were there for a few years and at age four or five, they would return to the States. At that time, I felt *life was just that…* I observed other people did that.” Similarly, Cai Lan stated it was not necessary to discuss plans to send her child home, because it was understood that this was the normal practice. Even when these mothers had concerns about the conditions in their Chinese families, they sent their infants home without question. For example, Fei Yin did not hesitate about sending her first-born to China, even though the child’s grandmother was very old. This reflected the Chinese tradition that grandparents assumed the care for their grandchildren.

Conceding to *Méi-bànfa*

In contrast to those women who simply conformed to cultural norms, many informants struggled with the decision to send their babies away, even though they eventually conceded to *fengsu*. Some spoke about the conditions that ultimately contributed to their concession to the *fengsu* practice of transnational mothering. These included birthparents’ financial, working, familial, environmental, and mental health circumstances. Challenged by these conditions, many informants stressed that they were *mei-banfa*. By sending their babies home, they were able to fulfill the role expectations of married women.

Marital Expectations for Women

Marriage and childbirth were inseparable *fengsu*-practices among the Fuzhounese. Married women were expected to give birth to children to carry on the bloodline of their husband’s family. In Fuzhounese immigrant families, women were expected to play dual roles.
They were responsible for reproduction and economic production. Bei Le captured this dual role and voiced a critical perspective about role expectations for women in the Fuzhounese community:

Fuzhounese men had a bad habit. When a man married a woman, he felt he bought you. He spent a lot of money to marry a wife, about $70,000 to $80,000. He felt like purchasing something back. He thought, ‘I had spent so much money on you. You had to bear children for me and you had to go earning money.’ After giving birth to a child, they want to send the baby to home in China right away. Therefore, the wife would go back to work and earn money. The wife had to pay back the cost. Children were sent home, love was much lessened.

When the women became engaged and married, their reproductive roles dominated. Even though the women may not have wanted to have children immediately, their husbands and their in-laws urged them to bear children in order to fulfill their responsibility to the family. Many informants had thought they would wait to have children until they paid off their debts. However, they often became pregnant shortly after they were married. Some informants were extremely distressed when they learned they were pregnant. Ta Fu considered an abortion, but her mother-in-law forbade her. Gao Fen was so upset she cried heavily, but her husband did not want to lose the baby.

Husbands did not discuss family planning with the women, and none of them talked openly about contraception. Several informants said they followed the rule of “shun-qi-siren [let nature take its course].” Both Bei Le and Mei Ho went to work outside of New York after their engagement and wedding banquet. Their husbands were unhappy that the wives were unavailable to bear children for them. In Bei Le’s case, her husband went to her relatives and complained:

He went over to my relatives and complained that I went to work outside New York. He complained that the two people engaged and were not living together. Two people got married but could not have children. I was mei-banfa and I came back. I had come back and soon began pregnant.
Although Mei Ho did not want a child so soon, she felt *mei-banfa* and eventually gave in. She said, “My husband continued pushing me. Then, I got pregnant and quit my job.” After her first child was born, she wanted to keep her son and care for him in New York. However, her husband and mother in-law persuaded her to send her child to China. Her mother-in-law told her to go to work and earn more money. Soon after, her husband continued pushing her to have more children. His excuse was that their young son was lonely with no companions to play with him. He compared his family with his friends’ that had more than one child. She said, “He always chattered repeatedly and gave me pressure. He stated that his friends’ wives gave birth to two or three. *Mei-banfa*, I gave in and bore my younger daughter.”

Rui Na came to the US at age 36. Her mother-in-law arranged for her to be *zouxian* and hoped she would bear a grandson for the family, because her husband was an only son. Her husband had paid $70,000 for her *zouxian* trip. She had left her 10-year-old daughter at home and reunited with her husband in the US after a decade of separation. A year later, she gave birth to the wished-for younger son. She was very upset that she had left her daughter in China and would have to send her newborn son away. She kept him with her until he was 7 months. She sighed, “I was *méi-bànfā*. First, the elders wanted to see their grandson. Then, I had to pay the migration debts, which I owed for coming here to give birth to the US-born son they wished for.”

After the women had fulfilled their reproductive roles, economic production took priority over other concerns including childcare and mothering. Their need to earn explained why their husbands and family elders were enthusiastic about sending their children to China for childcare. In these cases, women’s capacity to act on their will was constrained, ignored, and undermined by the dominant male and the female other of the Chinese family (Charrad, 2010). Consequently,
the mothers would return to work once the children were safely in China. Particularly, when a family owned a restaurant, the mother had to focus her time and energy on the family business.

At the eighth month of my pregnancy, my husband bought a restaurant. I had to go there to work. Even when I had to go for examination, I had to hurry back… I returned to work immediately after the first month of confinement… My in-laws presumed the childcare role… My husband let my children go to China with them. When they took my children to China, my husband drove them to the airport. I had to stay in the restaurant. My family expected my role to be in the family restaurant… to spend my time and energy there… Finally, we sold the restaurant when my daughter was five. I wanted to stayed home and care for my daughter and my younger son, but my in-laws wanted me to go looking for a job. (Ai Yan)

Financial Circumstances

For several women, financial concerns were the primary driver for them to conform to the fengsu practice of transnational mothering. Almost all the women interviewed had debts after they came to the US. Some had taken loans from a mutual aid loan syndicate to pay their zouxiang fees. Few had paid off their debts when they had their first child, and they did not have any savings. When they found they were pregnant, almost all had stopped working for over a year until their children went home to China. During that time, the husband was the sole breadwinner. After the birth of the baby, their financial resources were depleted leaving them penniless.

Paying debts and the mutual loan syndicate

Many informants described their concerns over migration-related debts when they began to have children. Typically, these debts ranged from $40,000 to $100,000. With the huge amount of debts, informants felt mei-banfa and had to follow the fengsu path for sending away their children. Yiu Qin had large debts after she arrived in the US. She had once questioned herself, “Not having debts and keeping my child?” She had never imagined that, because there was “no such case”. She explained, “Méi-bànfǎ, we, Fuzhounese, have to send our child to home…”
Lei Min and her husband were married during their first year in the US. They had their first child the following year. At that time, they had not paid any of their migration debts, which totaled over $100,000. These debts accrued interests and took eight years to pay off. Her young daughter was not able to return to the US until age six, after Lei Min and her husband paid off their debts.

Ta Fu’s decision to stop working when she became pregnant was typical; when women found they were pregnant, they stopped working and returned to New York. Their restaurant work outside New York was usually extremely laborious. Many reported that they could not work the usual workday of over 10 hours whilst pregnant. The work required them to stand and walk nonstop all day. Several rented small rooms in Sunset Park in Brooklyn or in Chinatown, waiting to give birth. Only their husbands worked during the pregnancy, which led to more financial difficulties. As one mother explained,

One person worked and earned about $2,000. Then, we had to pay for shelter, about $400 to $500. We had to buy food, pay for the phone bills and other expenses. With the baby here, we would not have money left on the monthly earnings. We have to pay debts… Not sending? I still had to send. I must work. In the US, husband and wife must both work. (Pei Jin)

When Gao Fen came to the US, she had to pay $70,000 for the zouxian fee. She borrowed money from neighbors and relatives who charged an annual interest rate of 10%.

For example, the interests for a loan of $10,000, I had to pay about $100 every month for interests. In a year, only interests would be about $1,200. When I had just come, particularly the first year, it was very hard for me. I came at the end of the year, the time that usually the lender collected the annual interest money. At that time, I had only worked for 1.5 months. I earned about $2,000 or $3,000. I paid all my money for the interests. I had no money left.

Subsequently, Gao Fen and her husband had zou-hui (participated in the mutual loan syndicate) in order to resolve their financial difficulties. Zou-hui is very common among Fuzhouhese and other Chinese immigrants including Wenzhouhese. The mutual loan syndicate is a group of
people who voluntarily participates in a unique form of loan sharing activities. In the group, there is a syndicate head and several syndicate members. All members pay a starting fee to the syndicate head. Then, each member participated in a monthly bid. If the members need money, they have to outbid the other members. With the highest interest rate a bidder is willing to pay back, one will then be able to utilize the funds contributed by all members for the month. Then, s/he has to repay the loan each month until all members collected their shares of the fund.

Eventually, Gao Fen and her husband owed money to the mutual loan syndicate too. Other informants also borrowed from the mutual loan syndicate. Rui Na’s husband used syndicate money to pay Rui Na’s zouxian fee to come to the US. In order to pay off the hui-yin (syndicate loan money) and return her son to the US as soon as she could, Rui Na and her husband had to work separately in two different states:

My husband bided $70,000 from Chinese mutual loan syndicates to bring me here. In order to earn more money, we could only work separately in different states. We worked very hard and paid off the mutual loan syndicate loans in two years. I told myself that I had to bring my son back. I spent the minimal. I paid all money on the debts.

Sue Qing had not borrowed money to come to the US. Her father paid the processing and traveling fees for her to enter the US with a working visa. However, he blamed her for not contacting home after migration. She felt aggrieved and decided to pay her debt to her father. In order to do this, she also borrowed from the mutual loan syndicate.

When I first came, I was depressed. I had not called home very much. My papa had once said to my di-di (younger brother), ‘Finished! Your jie-jie (older sister) had not called home. She would not pay me back the money. She vanished. Too bad, I lost both my girl and my money.’ Thus, I thought I had to go home and pay my ‘debts’… When I visited home for the first time, I bided over $50,000 from the mutual loan syndicate. I wanted to give back the money to my father… After I returned to the US, I had to pay back the loan for years, $1,000 each month.
When Xi Lian came to New York to await childbirth, she had just paid off her debts. However, she had no money left after her child was born. She also saw that her family would encounter a financial burden if only her husband worked; consequently, she felt she had to return to work. She said, “We had already spent all money, we had to earn and save some… Therefore, we had to hurriedly save some money and bring my son back. We need to save money for the future.” These financial burdens made keeping their babies unrealistic. These mothers had to work, usually 10 hour plus workdays, if they wanted to resolve their debts. Therefore, they followed the fengsu and modeled for the other Fuzhounese mothers of the sending their babies home to China.

**Limited income versus expenses**

In some cases, the informants did not have debts, so owing money was not the reason for sending their babies home to China. Nonetheless, finances could still be a motivating force. Hui Yue’s aunt had sponsored her migration to the US when she was 14 years old. Her husband also migrated to the US with his family when he was still a young child. Therefore, they did not have migration debts. However, she had to let go of her two children when her mother carried them to China, because they did not earn enough money. They were ineligible for public benefits, such as insurance, housing, and food costs were too great. Consequently, Hui Yue had to work. She could not care for her young children in the US. She explains, “It was impossible for me to quit the job and provide care for my own children. Moreover, I could not ask my husband to stay home caring for the child. Therefore, my son had to go with my mom.”

**Filial piety and support of family elders**

Similar to the other informants in this study, Hui Yue and her husband were committed to the Chinese philosophy of filial piety, which included providing financial support for family
elders in China or in the US. Her husband paid for his parents’ monthly utility bills and transportation. Hui Yue paid for her mother’s flight tickets and gave her pocket money whenever she flew home to China. Hui Yue also gave money to her parents for the Lunar New Year and other seasonal holidays.

Supporting elders was a typical practice for these informants. Pin Jin and Gao Fen supported both sets of grandparents in China. Lei Min supported both her parents in New York and her in-laws in China. Some informants offered limited support within their ability. Some only sent money for the New Year and seasonal holidays. Lei Min and her husband sent money to China to ye-ye and nai-nai:

In the past, we sent more than $10,000 for the expenses of the two children and ye-ye nai-nai. Whether the money was for paying debts or just for daily living, I did not know. If nai-nai did not have enough money, she would tell us and we would have to send more. After my children returned, we continued sending some money for their daily living expenses. We still sent about $4,000 to $5,000 to ye-ye and nai-nai every year.

Even though her family had not asked Bei Le to send money, she had sent money to pay for her mother’s medications. This was because she adhered strictly to the Chinese philosophy of filial piety. To a greater or lesser extent, informants scrupulously followed the Chinese tradition of filial piety and regional fengsu of respecting the family’s elders. Regardless of their financial difficulties, informants never gave up their responsibility to provide financial support for their parents and in-laws, wherever the elders were.

Childcare in the Host Country

Another mei-banfa these families encountered was the lack of childcare, which left these new mothers without choice, even if they wished to keep their children in the US. One of the mothers reported,
I was *mei-banfa*. Really, I had no choice. I was young, and I had no family here. I was not very patient. I took care of him for four months. I really loved him so much, but I had problems with his feeding. He did not suck in any milk… If something happened, I really did not know how I could resolve the problem. I really did not know…. (De Gui)

Even if the women had family members living in the US, they would not have provided childcare without payment, because they required support. Lei Min had to give her parents some pocket money because they would occasionally take care of their children, since they were retired.

If an infant required special care, the situation was even more difficult. Xi Lian’s baby was born at 24 weeks of gestation and weighed less than two pounds. He remained in the hospital for four month. When she finally brought the baby home, he weighed six pounds. She experienced considerable stress caring for him alone. She said, “My husband worked outside New York. He was not near me. I thought, ‘I care for the baby alone…if there was any *fengchui-caodong* (*wind blows and grass moves*, i.e. problems), I would be *xia-si* (terrified to death).’ I had nobody helping me.” She believed that the baby would have better care in China, where there were more family members overseeing the care of a child with health problems. Finally, after the doctors confirmed that the child would be able to travel safely, she sent her son to his paternal grandparents in China, when he was almost a year old and weighed eighteen pounds. What she thought should have been the joy of bearing a child brought her considerable suffering.

**Frequent Flyers**

In this study, children of three informants Lei Min, Ai Yan and Hui Yue were *frequent flyers*. Their young children traveled repeatedly between their homes in Fuzhou and New York. Some informants had family elders who resided in New York and assumed the Chinese traditional childcare role after their babies were born. Since Fuzhoupeople are typically closely knit
within their hometown, these elderly people continued maintaining multiple social and familial relationships in China. In fact, many elderly had trouble acculturating to the American life style after migration. They habitually visited their home and stayed in China for a few months every year. Therefore, they could enjoy their cultural and social life. Ai Yan’s in-laws kept a home in Fuzhou. They usually stayed for six months in the US and another six months in China every year. When they traveled and visited China, their grandchildren accompanied them.

Hui Yue’s mother, a US resident, helped her to care for her babies after they were born. Since her father was unable to migrate to the US, due to restricted immigration laws, her mother had to travel back and forth to visit her father. Moreover, her father always wanted to see his grandsons. She said,

My pa kept asking to have him go back to China very soon. I gave him excuses that the child had to get immunizations. The child needed this and that. I kept extending the time that my child stayed here.

Hui Yue felt “miserable and so intolerable” each time she had to say farewell to her children. In total, her first child traveled to China three times. His younger son went twice and would leave again a few weeks after the interview. Hui Yue stated, “Lou-da was coming and going. Luo-erh [the second child] was also coming and going. Both of them were coming and going.”

‘I Cannot Afford a Better Living Environment to Raise My Child’

Many informants perceived that their living environment was a significant mei-banfa condition and had to send their child to China. None of the women lived alone in a house or apartment when they were pregnant with the first child. All rented a single room and shared an apartment with at least one other family. In such conditions, they lacked privacy and a true family experience. Many informants stated that living in Fuzhou was comparatively much better than their housing conditions in New York. In Fuzhou, the American-born babies mostly lived
with families in spacious independent houses in the suburban villages or single apartment units in the city. In China, none of these sent-away children shared their house or apartment with another family.

The housing situations in the US were undesirable. For example, Ai Yan and her family lived in a small room when her first child was born. She said, “After my child was born, the apartment became crowded. My mother-in-law and I had to squeeze in one bed. It was very difficult to sleep.” Similarly, De Gui and her husband shared a small one-bedroom apartment with another family when her baby was born. She and her husband slept in the living room of the apartment. In the beginning, she and her husband planned to keep their son in New York. However, she felt she did not provide a good place to raise her son in New York. She was meibanfa and sent her son away. Yiu Qin reflected on the general circumstances of these families. “Many people resided in poor living environments. Bad living conditions were not good for the growth of my children. Therefore, we had to send the children back home in China.” Few of these women ever enjoyed good living conditions in the US, and they did not want these conditions for their children. As one mother reported,

My mom’s place – there was only one room. We shared the kitchen with the others. There were many people in the apartment. Six families accommodated in six large bedrooms. Each family had a room. I lived there when my two children were born. It was crowded…my pa, my ma and my di…my husband and me. Five persons in one room… (Laughing) It was like a chicken cage or a doghouse. We were squeezed together. We had two double beds. On my side of the room had a double bed. My papa mama’s side had another double bed. My papa was a carpenter; he put a wooden wall in the middle. We put up a curtain to divide the room. (Lei Min)

Their living conditions in China stood in stark contrast to their experiences in the US. In China, Sue Qing lived in her father’s house in the County Capital of Lianjiang. She had her own room with a private bathroom. After she migrated and married, she lived in a rented single room
in Chinatown. Her husband worked in Long Island and came home once a week. There were occupants that would smoke inside the apartment. When she was pregnant, she could not stop thinking that she would have to live with her son in that apartment for four or five more years. Nevertheless, Sue Qing suffered postpartum depression and insomnia after giving birth to her son. Her husband had suggested hiring someone to babysit the child. However, she thought the rented single room was too small and inconvenient to accommodate a stranger with her and the newborn. She stated, “Our living condition was below standard. If he stayed with me and lived in that small room, it was meaningless…Our living condition did not allow us to keep the child here…” She compared her living condition now with her home in China. “Honestly, housing was better at home in China… much better than where I reside in New York. There was so much laughter back home with the family… In New York, I was alone with the baby every day…”

Informants did not want to send away their newborn babies. However, because they were not able to afford a better or up-to-standard living environment to raise their children in New York, they eventually compromised, followed the path of fengsu, and bid the farewell to their children. After their children flew to their hometowns in Fuzhou, many informants gave up their tiny rooms in the Chinese-inhibited neighborhoods and went to work outside of New York.

Mental Status of Birth Mother

Bei Li reported suffering depression after her second daughter was born. At that time, her mother had just passed away. She felt something very important was missing in her life. She described her psychological status as poor. Moreover, her unpleasant living environment had worsened her mental health status. She was teary when she talked about her experiences in the interview:
I was not familiar with the people around in the apartment. I felt scared. I thought people living there were abnormal. They were not “morally” good. I found they habitually smudged my belongings. I felt very disturbed while living there. My child was there. I was worried that my child would not be safe in such environment…

When she was in crisis, she was unable to care for her children, eventually sending them to China.

Sue Qing’s first child had suffered postnatal complications. He received intensive care during his first few months, causing Sue Qing to develop mental health problems. She suffered from depression and insomnia. She once wanted to kill herself. She had briefly hired a babysitter to care for her son. However, she could not settle for having a stranger care for her son. Her husband was afraid that if she kept taking care of the child at home, she would become mentally ill. Eventually, she brought the baby to her hometown in the County of Lianjiang, Fuzhou. In China, her ah-yi [maternal aunt] provided care for her son until he returned with her at the age of four:

Because I was unable to sleep, many things could happen… If I kept my son here and I cared for him all day, I could not sleep… If my mental health were in trouble, the children I raised would not be mentally healthy. Thus, I decided to send him home in China… That time, I strived through until the fifth month. Then, I reserved the tickets and brought him home…

Sue Qing carried her son to China and stayed home in Lianjiang for two months. With her aunt’s support to care for the baby, she rested and spent time with her old friends. She felt more relaxed and was able to sleep better. Her mental health improved and the “bad ideas” in her mind had gone.
**Conclusion**

Bei Le believed, “all mamas love their children.” However, informants in this study encountered numerous *in situ* mei-banfa conditions as they struggled to send their children home. Informants specified their mei-banfa, nothing else can be done, in unique and personal predicaments that compelled them to act against their wills to send away their babies. *Fengsu* intensified by mei-banfa, constrained these immigrant mothers’ agency.

Their mei-banfa conditions stemmed from personal, cultural, financial, and environmental complications. All the informants conformed to the dual roles of reproduction and production that their families expected from married women. They fulfilled their familial responsibility to bear a child that would carry on the family line. Most had huge debts and faced an increase in immediate financial burdens upon the birth of the child. Their husbands pushed them to send the baby away, because they wanted their wives to return to work for financial stability and to fulfill their responsibility for economic production. Many of the informants did not have access childcare support in the US. In addition, some informants suffered mental health problems, which limited their ability to provide proper care for their babies. Most importantly, many informants resided in poor living condition. Many informants stressed that they would like their children to grow up in a better and healthier environment. However, this proved impossible in New York, because they could only afford shared rented apartments with at least one or more other families. Informants described their living places as chicken cages, doghouses, crowded, lacking privacy, conflictual, and dirty with heaps of roaches and ants. In China, all the sent-home children lived in private houses in villages or spacious apartments in urban and suburban towns in the Fuzhou region. Informants hoped that their children could grow up in better environments than the ones they could provide if they remained in the US.
Fengsu drove the young Fuzhounese women to go overseas, and these informants came to the US. Fengsu relentlessly generated chain effects on young immigrants’ post-migration life, marriage and eventually the practice of sending their children to home in China. They saw that their transnational and shared motherhood were fengsu-constructed, leading them to lose control of keeping their newborn infants with them. Sending their children to their home country appeared to be the single most customarily accepted option that Fuzhounese young mothers would choose to address their qualms of mei-banfa. As a result, mei-banfa forced these immigrant mothers into a highly ambivalent circumstance that led to their separation from their newborn babies.

Fengsu-constructed transnational mothering has been widely practiced in the last two decades in the Fuzhounese immigrant community. All informants in this study experienced the influence of fengsu. During pregnancy, many informants knew that their infants would go to their families in Fuzhou after birth. They would have to endure separation, and they would not be able to see their child for long time. In such circumstances, what did the early motherhood and mothering experiences mean to the informants? How did the informants react and respond to the separation from their sent-away newborns? The following chapter will discuss the complexity of the informants’ perception and experiences of mother-infant bonding and attachment during early motherhood.
CHAPTER VIII: MOTHERING THE SENT-AWAY CHILD

Introduction

The previous chapter described Fuzhounese immigrant mothers’ lack of agency that forced them to concede to the *fengsu* practice of marriage and family arrangements. All the informants who sent their infants to China represented a type of *fengsu*-constructed transnational motherhood. This chapter presents the immigrant mothers’ experiences of mothering their *sent-away* babies while they were still in their care in the US. Informants experienced the complexity of becoming a mother. They cared for and bonded with their unborn and newborns, despite the knowledge that the infants would leave a few months after birth. In addition, this chapter presents informants’ perceptions and responses in anticipation of this separation.

Mothering represents the interaction between the caregiving mother and the developing child. Winnicott (1960) stressed that whenever there is an infant, there is maternal care. He introduced the notion of the good enough mother as someone who suffers the normal illness of “primary maternal preoccupation” (Winnicott, 1956, p.302). The mother of a newborn becomes preoccupied with her infant in order to provide for its physiological and psychological needs. A healthy mother must become completely lost in her baby (Flanagan, 2011). The good enough mother possesses the capacity for attunement to the baby’s changing developmental needs (Flanagan, 2011). In this study, informants experienced this preoccupation with the maternal care role with her American-born infant, even though their family in China would raise the infant. The birthmothers became lost in their babies, despite the fact that they would be sending the child to the other mother in China.

The informant’s transition to the mothering role began as soon as they learned they were pregnant and continued following childbirth. Although all the women had planned to send away
their unborn children after birth, they were engaged in an intensive emotional interaction with the fetus from the beginning. They stopped working in order to ensure their safety and protect their unborn children (Rubin, 1984). They returned from their jobs located outside the City and relocated into New York City for *yang-tai* [nourishing the fetus] in search of prenatal care. Moreover, these expectant mothers experienced special binding-in (Rubin, 1984) relationships and gave themselves over to the babies growing within (Rubin, 1984).

**Safe Passage for the Mother and the Child**

In this study, all mothers were working when they found they were pregnant. Thirteen worked in Chinese restaurants in suburban and rural towns outside New York City. In most circumstances, informants were not immediately aware that they were pregnant. They might have sensed the physical changes in their bodies, but they were unsure of their pregnancy. Consequently, they continued to work at the arduous physical jobs in restaurants, even if they thought they might be pregnant. This mother offered this story:

One weekend, I was busy working in the restaurant. I held a big tray in my hands, and I stepped on some tomato salad. I almost slipped and fell. I suddenly felt so scared. I felt that something was in my belly… I sensed that kind of child-mother connection inside me… I could feel it, but I was not 100 percent sure… (Gao Fen)

Even though Rui Na had already had a 10-year old daughter that she raised in China, she was unaware that she was bearing a child; she just thought she was unwell because of the flu. She saw a doctor, who prescribed her flu medications. She explained,

I thought I caught the flu. I went to see a doctor in Chinatown. He prescribed me some flu medications. I went to the pharmacy to fill my prescriptions. When I was waiting, I looked around and checked on the over-counter products. I was curious and I bought a pregnancy test kit. I tested, but did not know how to read the result. I showed my friend, and she told me I was pregnant. She stopped me from taking the flu medicines.
Some informants felt embarrassed talking about their physical changes to strangers in the workplace; they often felt isolated because no immediate family members lived nearby. The most prominent signs of their pregnancy were a lack of energy and absence of their monthly period. Lei Min was fortunate; she could talk to her cousin’s wife who worked in the same restaurant. The cousin-in-law helped her buy the pregnancy test kit that she eventually used to learn of her pregnant state. Other informants, including Ta Fu, Oi Jie, Lei Min, Rui Na, Gao Fen, and Xi Lan, learned by word of mouth and from personal experiences of their friends, coworkers, and relatives to use over-counter pregnancy test kits to confirm their pregnancy. According to Oi Jie, “Many women did not know they were pregnant. We heard other people talking about it… Once a woman was pregnant, she easily felt tired and lack energy all day. As the menstruation period was overdue, I went to buy the pregnancy test kit. I tested and I confirmed that I was pregnant.”

Because of language barriers, undocumented immigration status and the lack of medical coverage, informants would not have been able to access maternal healthcare if they continued to work outside of New York City where care was available. Moreover, they could not work the required hours a day in the restaurants when they were pregnant. These jobs required them to stand or move around nonstop all day, and with the lacked energy, it was impossible. Therefore, in most circumstances, they decided to stop working for yangtai (nurture the fetus) at as early as one or two months of gestation. If their jobs were outside of the City, they most likely came to New York alone or with their husbands. One mother stated that, “Generally, we Fuzhounese returned to New York right after we found out we were pregnant. It was about one or two months’ of gestation…” Oi Jie came to New York and stayed alone in Sunset Park while her
husband continued to work in Chicago. Her husband came to New York to visit her once a month.

Informants usually rented a small place and settled in the Chinese-inhabited neighborhoods in Chinatown, Brooklyn, or occasionally Flushing. In these locations, they could have access to social support and community resources. They knew that they would not live in these places for long term, because they had already planned to send away their newborn babies. The rentals were generally small, communal areas without much privacy. In most circumstances, the other tenants in the apartment were strangers. Pei Jin described her home as “only one room… one bed… one closet for clothing…and… nothing else.” In New York, expectant mothers were eligible for maternal healthcare covered by Medicaid regardless of their immigration status. Living in the Chinese-inhabited communities, informants had easy access to prenatal and postnatal services provided in Chinese dialects. They also found it convenient to shop in Chinese stores for groceries similar to their hometowns in Fuzhou. Pei Jin said she enjoyed walking from her small rented place located near Delancey Street to East Broadway daily to meet a few friends and shop for groceries.

Consequently, awaiting childbirth in New York became a common practice and fengsu among Fuzhounese immigrant women. Expectant mothers formed a compact community in the traditional Chinese-inhabited neighborhoods in Chinatown and Brooklyn. Many Chinese women could be seen heavily pregnant walking in the streets in Sunset Park of Brooklyn and around East Broadway in Chinatown.

Oi Jie’s husband continued working outside of New York while she stayed alone in Chinatown. However, there were other couples who stayed together while the women were pregnant. Ta Fu and her husband quit their fu-qi-gung in Texas and came to New York together
when Ta Fu’s pregnancy was confirmed. Upon their return to New York, they rented a small place in Flushing, and her husband found a job nearby. She said, “My husband came to New York with me. It was convenient that he could come home daily to take care of me.” She had no close family or relatives who could watch over her during pregnancy, so she would have been alone if he had not come with her. When they moved in their rented room, they did not know any of the tenants in the shared apartment. They had not expected any help from their roommates when the baby was born.

Most of these expectant mothers did not have immediate families in the US. Their husband, the child’s father, was the only person who could give these expectant mothers both physical and emotional support. The expectant fathers always took over all financial responsibilities during the pregnancy. In many circumstances, they urged their wives to stop working and returned to New York. Some informants stated that the husband’s support was particularly important to a family-absent expectant mother:

Pregnant mother always felt physically very uncomfortable. I always felt sick and was in bad mood. I easily got angry and threw a temper…It was normal…If my better half did not support me…Or, he gave me more stresses…how I could bear… My husband had good temperament. He always tolerated… (Cai Lan)

Cai Lan, Fei Yin and Mei Ho admitted that they were always angry over trivial matters during pregnancy. Fei Yin appreciated that she had an understanding husband who endured her wuli-qunao [making troubles out of nothing] during her pregnancy.

Informants stopped working for the sake of their own health as well as the baby’s safety. As stated earlier, almost all informants had been working more than 10 hours a day in restaurants. “The restaurant was very busy… mangsi [busy to die]. Sometimes, I did not have breakfast or regular meals.” Lei Min stated. She described the restaurant as an unsafe workplace. When workers moved around in the dining hall, they easily ran into each other resulting in many
collisions. Moreover, she had to climb up and down to retrieve things from high places, which was an unsafe practice for pregnant women in Chinese culture. According to Gao Fen, “Work in the restaurant was laborious and hard… when I was pregnant, my child could be in danger. It was just so dangerous.” Lei Min finally decided to quit during the third month of her pregnancy. She said, “I worked until the third month of my pregnancy, and I was fine. I thought my daughter was so fortunate... That was my first child. For my child, I did not feel I should continue working.”

Other informants also resigned and came to New York in between two to four months of their pregnancies because they were preoccupied with their babies’ health. Mei Hoe stopped working because she wanted to take good care of her physical health for her baby. Ta Fu was worried and wanted to get examination for her baby as soon as possible. When they stopped working, they lost their portion of the family income for the several months until their work resumed. All mothers in this study said they stopped working at these jobs for the sake of their babies.

In some cases, a mother might stop working because she felt her pregnancy was at risk. At the third month of gestation, Sue Qing began to bleed. She was petrified and thought of quitting her job. Undertaking all financial responsibility, her husband urged her to stop working immediately and rest while she awaited the birth of her child. She told herself:

- When I went to work, I was very tired. I did not eat regularly. I came home late and still cooked dinner. My life was chaotic. When I began to bleed, my husband did not allow me to continue working. I told myself, “Let go… I quit.” Although I wanted to earn the money, I was pregnant and safety was my first priority.

Both informants and their husbands had deep concerns about the safety of their unborn children. Due to that safety factor, all informants stopped working in the early stage of their pregnancy. They generally did not work for a year in total from the time they left their jobs until their babies
were on the way to China. During that period, the husbands were the sole breadwinners; they paid for all the expenses including the rent, transportation, and family’s daily upkeep. In addition, the couples had to spend money to prepare for the childbirth and pay for the child’s travel to China, along with the mounting debt. In some cases, they might have had to withhold their debts temporarily until the babies were sent away and the mothers could return to work. This caused the couples to pay more interests in order to extend the period in which they could repay the debts. After the birth of the baby, they had no money or even larger debts.

**Binding-in to Her Unborn Baby**

As the babies continued to grow, these pregnant women began to experience a special bond with their unborn children. Informants recounted their joyfully experiences during the interviews. The movement of the fetus inside the womb became a special and private experience unique to each expectant mother. They enjoyed massaging their bellies, believing that this patting and caressing showed their love for their babies. One mother recounted her experience by saying,

> There was a baby inside my womb. It was growing bigger and bigger, day-by-day. Gradually, it started kicking my belly…It was *bingbon bingbon* all day. I was very happy. It kicked and kicked…it is certain that the baby was inside my womb. It is my blood…there was a bonding relationship. (Oi Jie)

All informants patted and massaged their wombs, which intensified their relationship with their unborn children. Rui Na happily described her unborn child as energetic because it moved nonstop. Lei Min felt very happy and could not stop patting her unborn daughter. De Gui strongly felt the love and relationship with her unborn son. Gao Fen believed that her baby felt the touch and caressing and would become calmer. Mei Hoe had never thought about becoming a mother until she felt the baby was inside her womb. She said it felt amazing to become a mother. To Bei Le, the fetus’s movement gave her special meaning. “It was inside me…My child… a
new life. It was a new life to me too. I came to the US alone. I was lonely. My baby was a comfort to me. The child would be with me for my whole life. I felt I was close to it. I felt warm and comfortable.” (Bei Le)

When Oi Jie described her baby as “my blood”, it reflected the strong connection she felt with her unborn child. Hui Yue and Cai Lan expressed the same intensity of their relationships with their babies. Cai Lan said, “It belonged to me. It was part of my body and part of my life. I felt I had a relationship with him when he moved and kicked in my womb.”

Hui Yue felt that she was the source of her baby’s life. “The fetus was part of my body. It relied on me for survival. I had to protect it well. It was inside my womb. He kicked inside my womb… and only mine... I was so happy.” Hui Yue cherished her private experiences with her unborn child inside her body. After her baby was born, she experienced a sense of loss because she was no longer the only one person the baby relied on for survival. She did not feel the child kicking her from inside anymore. “After birth, everybody could provide care for him. After birth, my husband could feed him… my mama could feed him. He did not kick me from inside anymore.” Hui Yue’s frustration was further aggregated and it foreshadowed the loss she would experience when she sent her baby away.

**Binding-in with Her Imagined Baby**

After the fetus started moving and kicking inside the wombs, the expectant mothers also began to imagine what their babies would be like. The babies were already real people in the would-be mothers’ lives, even though they could only see their images through the ultrasound images. They constructed an image of their babies through the babies’ activities – a moving arm, a kicking foot, or a beating heart. They were binding-in to their unborn children.
This mother said, “I went for the ultrasound; I saw the fetus inside me. That was so lovely. It sucked its fingers in its mouth… I listened to its heartbeat… Every time I went for examination, he moved incessantly. I could see its feet kicking. He kicked and kicked, it was funny.” (Pei Jin)

Through the ultrasound screen, Cai Lan saw her baby curled inside her womb. She had imagined how her baby would look like after it was born. Ta Fu and Yiu Qin had the same feeling. When the fetus was moving, Yiu Qin imagined the raised parts of her belly were the hands or legs of her baby. When she touched them, they retracted. Hui Yue attempted to guess how the raised shapes looked. She described her experience: “When it kicked me this side… bom-bom-bom. It looked like a palm or a foot. I could see them. I saw the shapes and I could guess.”

Fei Yan and Sue Qing also enjoyed the fetus moving. Fei Yan felt her baby was joking with her:

I told his father to touch and see how the baby moved. Originally, my belly was round. It kicked me on one side… He touched slightly… Drone…drone…drone (Informant made the sound) …the surface curved…Then, it slowly flattened and moved towards the other direction. It was interesting and funny. It was joking with me. (She was laughing. she pointed to different sides of her belly playfully and joyfully during the interview.)

Sue Qing was startled when the baby kicked her for the first time. But ultimately, she enjoyed the movements. She responded to and joked with her unborn baby:

The first time it kicked me in the middle of the night, I was awoken startled. I was startled… Then, I realized that it was my baby kicking me from inside… I began to enjoy it. I told my baby, ‘Have to be nice to mama. Do not hurt me. I give you a lot of food everyday… you are nurtured well and becoming strong. Now, you are here to strike me. That is not nice. Haha…’ (Laughing).

**Interaction and Bonding between the Awaiting Mother and Unborn Child**

While the women were awaiting the birth of their babies, they were already attributing characteristics to their unborn children – strong, joking, or playful. Through the imprecise sonogram image and the fetus’s movements, an expectant mother ascertained the reality of their
forthcoming child. They imagined what their children would look like. They *played* and *joked* with their babies when they moved. All these tactile, verbal responses and behaviors indicated the strong attachment they were forming with the unborn children. In some cases, the mothers also talked, sang, and prayed with their babies. Several chatted with their unborn babies. They spoke to the unborn child as if they were listening and understanding. “*Baobe-ah*, mama is talking to you. Did you hear?” Ta Fu asked her unborn baby.

Sue Qing chatted daily with her unborn child and always joked with it. I told it, “You are a boy. I hope you will have small eyes. If your eyes are too big, you will not look handsome. You do not need to have double-fold eyelids. Single-fold eyelids are fine.” When her son was born, he really did have single-fold eyelids. “He was born with *mimi-yan* (small eyes). It was so funny...I felt he had heard what I said to him.”

Gao Fen was a Christian. She chatted with her baby and prayed with it. She expressed her love to her child: “*Baobe*, do not kick mama. *Baobe* has to behave well. After you are born, mama will love you very much. Papa will also love very much.” She also prayed to God with her baby, “Please be with the baby and protect it. All in peace!”

Yiu Qin also sang to the unborn baby, while other mothers let their babies listen to music. Several always kept music on, so the babies could listen. They believed that listening to music was *taijiao* (fetus and antenatal education), which is very important to the unborn child. One mother explained, “Because people said fetus education are important, I always played music for him. I played the piano songs and let it listen. He listened to the music of saxophone too. I like these types of music. We listened to the music together.” (Fei Yin)

Many expectant mothers were home alone while they were waiting for the babies to be born, since their husbands spent long hours working, sometimes in another city. The expectant
working fathers were not present during the bonding process. In addition, these family-absent mothers had very limited social support and interpersonal relationships, which left the mothers to focus entirely on the baby and develop the intense intimate relationships with the unborn. Fei Yan confided her feelings to her baby:

Papa had to go to work. He leaves you and me at home. You are with mommy now. In a few days, my Bao-bao will be born. How you will look like...How mommy will care for you...mama will care for you. You only have mama and papa here in New York. There will not be many people to embrace you…’

**Giving Herself to the Unborn Child**

When the mothers began to bond with their unborn children, they also learned to give of themselves. They were willing to suffer and sacrifice their own well-being for their babies. De Gui suffered from nausea and vomiting from the beginning of her pregnancy; she vomited several times a day almost until childbirth. She found it intolerable but had to endure throughout her pregnancy. “I vomited until I almost had to give birth. I vomited, but I continued to eat. I ate and vomited...vomited and ate again...for my baby. Although I suffered, I was willing to tolerate that for my child.” She emphasized that her baby needed the nutrients, and she persisted in order to provide proper nourishment for the baby.

Similarly, Fei Yan suffered chronic waist pain from an old injury during her pregnancy. She did not complain, although her baby’s movement made her very uncomfortable. She had difficulties lying down on either side of her body, but did so. Otherwise, the baby continuously moved. The fetus still moved often and caused her to wake up every one or two hours. She tried different positions in the bed but gave up trying to lie flat in the bed when she slept. In the end, she sat in an upright position in order for her baby to feel calm and comfortable:
Sometimes I slept on one side. I felt the baby was uncomfortable, and moved continuously. I had to sleep like this… (She showed the posture of sitting up and leaning on the backboard of the bed.) I slept like this. Then, it was becoming calmer and more comfortable. It did not move too actively. I always slept by leaning my back against the headboard of the bed, with three pillows behind my back.

She slept like that until the baby was born. She was willing to sacrifice her own comfort, because she was bearing her own child. These small sacrifices for the well-being of their unborn children were typical and illustrated the care the mothers took during their pregnancies.

Primary Maternal Preoccupation

All but one informant had their first child after they immigrated to the US, so they had no experience caring for infants, and few had family members to help them learn neonatal care. In one case, Rui Na had a 10-year daughter in China when she gave birth to her son in New York. However, she actually did not have much experience caring for a newborn. Her daughter was born in Fuzhou, and her family and her mother-in-law were around and helped her. In New York, Rui Na and most informants did not have any family members nearby. With very little experience, they only had themselves and their husbands to care for the infants.

Without any previous childcare experience or help, the mothers worried that they did not know how to care for the newborn babies. In the absence of family support, the women became preoccupied with their infants in order to provide for and meet their physiological and psychological needs (Winnicott, 1956). Even so, they possessed a capacity for attunement to the baby’s changing developmental needs (Flanagan, 2011). As this mother said, “I fed him, changed his clothes and diapers…The little baby always slept, but I was not able to sleep well. I was afraid that he would catch a cold… I repeatedly checked and covered him with blankets.” (Rui Na) Another mother also stated, “When he was in bad mood, I used all my efforts to comfort him. Once I held him for a while, he would stop crying.” (Mei Hoe)
Mei Hoe continued, “When I first became a mother, I was *shou-mang-jiao-luan* (bustling and in confusion).” The first-time mothers gained maternal care experiences over time, primarily because they were so preoccupied with their babies. Yiu Qin explained, “I cared for him every day. I picked up the skills naturally and gradually. I started little by little. I picked up smoothly.” (Yiu Qin) Another mother explained, “The care was based on how I felt… what I sensed was the best way to provide for my baby. I fed her and I took her out to socialize.” (Oi Jie)

Although these mothers knew that they would be sending off their children to the other mother in their hometown, they were concerned that their children would forget about them. This mother stated, “It was a great experience, which I cherished as my first mothering experiences.” (Pei Jin)

According to Winnicott (1956), good enough mothers lose themselves in their babies. In this study, some informants experienced more difficulties in their early motherhood. They appeared more preoccupied and completely lost themselves in their babies, often at the expense of their own wellbeing.

As mentioned earlier, Fei Yan had a history of back injury from a young age. When she cared for her son alone at home, she performed all childcare and home chores. Eventually, she developed chronic back pain. Moreover, she did not get more than two hours of sleep a night, because she had to feed him. Otherwise, he cried and made noises that disturbed other people in the apartment at midnight. She stated,

> Because I always crouched down to bathe my son, I developed chronic back pain. The pain became persistent and I always felt numb on my low extremities… When I cared for my son, I could not sleep properly. I fed him and he fell asleep. When I fell asleep, he woke up and cried… I had to get up and attend to him. When he slept during daytime, I had to do chores – washing his clothes and cleaning the milk bottles. Sometimes, I had only had one meal a day. I was always tired, sleepy and befuddled…
Fei Yan had emphasized to the interviewer that because she was a mother, her whole being was only to care for her child. She would have done everything, regardless of her well-being as long as the baby was protected and cared for.

Caring for and Sending-Away Newborn with Medical Problems

Maternal attitudes and behaviors varied in relation to the child’s biological, physical, and psychological development. When a mother had to care for her newborn baby who suffered special medical conditions, she became even more preoccupied and involved in caring for her baby. This was a particular concern, since the baby was going to be away from her.

Fei Yin’s son suffered a hernia in the second week after birth. She described how she was preoccupied with her son’s sickness and she dissolved herself in caring for her sick child:

Forty days after birth, he had a surgery at Lutheran Medical Center. He was in the hospital for a week. I was present alongside him during his hospital stay. Within that one week, I lost 10 pounds. I was extremely tired, but I was so worried about my son. Although I went home briefly, I was unable to sleep. I lay in my bed for an hour but then I returned to the hospital. (Fei Yin)

Sue Qing’s baby suffered from a high fever one week after birth. She rushed him to the emergency room; he stayed in the hospital for two weeks. Sue Qing groaned that she had spent her first month of confinement in the hospital. In the Chinese tradition, new mothers stay home for the first 30 days after childbirth in order to recover from childbirth:

He suffered a 103°F high fever. He stayed in the hospital for two weeks. I stayed in the hospital with him the entire time. I had not gone home. I could not leave him alone in the hospital. Mama had to be with him. I had not slept well in the hospital.

Sue Qing’s baby had a persistent high fever, but the cause of the fever was unknown. Her week-old infant had undergone several medical tests. She was distressed seeing her son crying like si-xin-lie-fei (a torn heart and cracked lung, meaning cracks in screams of anguish):
Several doctors conducted many tests on him, but they could not find out the cause of his condition. I saw the doctors drawing bone marrow from the spine of my son’s body with long needles. I was in pain when I saw him crying…the way he cried was like si-xin-chie-fei. He was desperate. I felt his pain…

Verbal interaction gave the caregiving mother and the infant enjoyment as well as comfort. “When he cried, I chatted with him. I said a few words and he stopped crying. He heard my voice, and he would calm down.” (Sue Qing) Simultaneously, her son’s smiles were a miraculous cure to Sue Qing’s bitterness about caring for her sick child. “When he smiled, I was very happy. I had suffered depression and tiredness. Just a smile…when he smiled to me, all the bitterness disappeared. All the bitterness had yan-siao-yun-sa (vanished like smoke in the air). Instead, the sweetness filled in me.” Sue Qing always played with her son and sang to him:

I sang and taught him to sing. I held his hands up and helped him exercise. I moved his arms and legs… I said to him, “let’s do exercises…left for three times… right for three times…” I also sang to him and he gege-da-xiao (giggled and laughed loudly). I bathed him and massaged his body. He seemed like he was enjoying it. He was not able to speak, but laughed loudly. I wanted to laugh when he kissed me. When he smiled, I was so happy.

Xi Lian had given birth to a premature baby. When he was born, he weighed a little over one pound. She did not get the first glimpse of her newborn baby because the baby was rushed into an incubator immediately after birth. She explained,

I asked myself, ‘Was my baby going to survive?’ I was extremely worried. I saw him the next day through the window of the nursing room. He was very small (stretched her hand to show that the baby was the size of her palm). He looked so tiny and pitiful. I saw medical tubes attached all over his body. I was in pain from just looking at him. His eyes were not open until the seventh day. He was in the incubator for months, until he weighed about 4 pounds. Finally, the medical tubes were removed. When the doctor told me that he was done well, I was so relieved.
Her baby could not go home with her, but stayed in the hospital for post-natal care. She had to commute to the hospital four hours round-trip every day to see him. However, she could only see her baby outside the nursing room. She was not able to touch or hold her baby during the first two months:

When he was too small, I was not able to touch him. We had to be cautious about bacteria… The nursing staff brought him out of the nursing room for me after the tubes on his body were removed. However, they did not let me hold him for too long. I played with him for two hours every day. I did not want to leave. I wanted to stay there, but I had to leave and no later than 8:30pm. I arrived home after 10pm from the hospital.

Sue Qing and Xi Lian continued taking care of their babies after they went home from the hospital. Sue Qing felt herself become outspent, and she was *jin-pi-li-jin* (use up all energy) experiencing the pleasure of having a new baby. Gradually, she developed insomnia. Here she states:

After he came home, I was preoccupied with making phone calls and medical appointments. I had to give him medicines on time. I cared for him; I felt I was *li-bu-cong-xin* (out of my depth) and *jiao-tou-lan-ee* (had a beaten head and scorched brow). I felt no enjoyment with my newborn baby. I felt like I suffered a loss after I gave birth to my child. I want to provide the best care, sometimes, I felt like my waist was going to break. I held him in my arms all day because he cried nonstop. I told myself I could not fail and I had to care for my son. Then, I began to suffer insomnia.

Xi Lian experienced severe stress from caring for her premature baby. She described herself as a “different type” of mother. She said, “Generally, a mother should not be so nervous like me. I had to provide special care because my baby had special needs. I did not know much about childcare.” Her baby went home when he was six pounds, and she cared for him alone at home:

The night I brought him home, I did not sleep well. I was worried from his incessant crying. To pacify him, I held him in my arms, against my breast all night long. I had him in my arms for the first three nights while he slept… He did not allow me put him down in his crib… I was so worried for months until I saw him moving and doing things like other babies. Then, I gradually felt comfortable.
Affectional Bonding between the Caregiving Mother and the Infant

In this study, some informants used specific metaphors to describe their relationships with their newborn infants. Lei Min felt her baby was a piece of meat falling from her body. She put all her heart and efforts on her baby. “I felt I had to love her…and love her with all my heart. I have a child; I must love her.” Sue Qing also described her baby as the flesh coming off her body. She used the expressions xu-nong-yu-shui (blood is thicker than water, meaning intense bond) and han-zai-zui-li-pa-hua-liao (held in the mouth and anxious that would be dissolved, meaning extreme carefulness) to describe her feelings over her baby. “…a piece of flesh from my own body. It was so intimate. I felt like he was mine… and only mine. I love him so much… yet not knowing how to protect it, and so nervous about keeping him safe.”

Mother-infant attachment is established through continuous, warm, and intimate interactions between the caregiving mother and the developing infant. The infant sends signals to seek proximity and a sense of security utilizing crying, smiling, vocalizing, and crawling to the caregiving mother – its attachment figure. The caregiving mother responds to these attachment appeals by attending to her infant’s needs. Bonding forms because of satisfaction and enjoyment between mother and child (Bowlby, 1952).

My baby seem to recognize my smell. When I spoke to him, he would listen to me and show recognition. I said, “guai-guai (good and well-behaved baby)… you had grown bigger recently…” I saw him grabbing the bottle and sucking the milk via the nipple of the milk bottle. I was very happy. When he was hungry, he signaled me by kicking me. I fed him and he would be fine. I would give him my fingers and he grabbed them with all his strength. It felt wonderful... (Xi Lian)

I cared for him after birth. I was with him every day. I saw him cry and smile. He was so cute. He ate and he slept… He made the wao...wao...wao sound, making a lot of noise. (De Gui)
I had so much fun seeing him playing with the pacifier. Sometimes, I purposefully tease him by taking the pacifier and waving it in front of him. He followed me with his eyes. I was so contented. I was very pleased more than my baby did. (Pei Jin)

As illustrated in the many ways these new mothers cared for their babies, observed their attachment appeals, and interacted with their newborns, all informants demonstrated strong attachment feelings and pleasure towards their babies that they would soon be sending to China. However, for those mothers with sick children, their attachment pleasure and satisfaction might have altered. On the contrary, the babies’ attachment appeals might further intensify their worries about the children’s health conditions.

**Mother-Infant Interaction and Bonding**

Informants were essentially alone while they cared for their babies in New York. Consequently, the intimacy between mother and infant was more intensive compared to other mothering experiences. Many informants liked to play, chat, and sing with their babies. The babies responded to their mothers by smiling and speaking gibberish. Some mothers enjoyed the interactions enormously and gave their children’s responses special meaning. They were accessible and responsive appropriately to their infants. They showed strong maternal sensitivity to their infants’ attachment signals. This mother offered the following,

I spoke to him. We called his papa who was at work. I told him to call papa. He was able to utter pa-pa. He was so small. I took him to the park. I taught him to say shu (tree) and xiao-niao (little bird). Whatever we saw in the park – flowers and other things, I said those names to him. He did not really say them, but he looked at those things. He responded to me so happily. (Mei Hoe)

When Pei Chun and Gao Fen chatted with her babies, both felt their babies comprehended what they said. “I told him, “Son, you are guai (good and behaved well). He seemed to understand and responded happily. He made the ah-ku…ah-ku…sounds.” (Pei Chun)
As we watched TV, she would lay over my body and smiled. When I told her, “Mama is watching TV. You are also watching TV,” she laughed... *qi...qi...qi...* She kept laughing. She was very adorable... As a mother; I felt that she understood me. (Gao Fen)

Some informants reported that their babies sought the mother’s availability and proximity. Lei Min said, “I played with her. She lay in the center of the bed. I ran around the bed. Her eyes rolled and followed my direction.” Pei Jin and Sue Qing’s sons had similar experiences with their babies:

Sometimes, I had to go out of the room to do chores. I would put him in the bed and he cried. I would then put him in the stroller and place him by my side. He watched me as I performed my chores. Once I remained in his constant vision, he would not cry. (Pei Jin)

My son was not shy with anybody. He laughed and played with other people. However, his laughter was heightened when he saw me. With my presence, his laughter was sweeter. Once he started crawling on the floor, he would come look for me. He would smile at other people but continue in search for me, crawling into my room. When he saw me, his eyes shined. (Sue Qing)

**My Baby Sleeps With Me**

These informants were aware that their babies would leave them in a few months, so these early caring experiences had a special meaning for them. Several mothers stated that the baby slept in the same bed with them, although the child might have their own crib. This mother said, “My son had his own bed, but he often slept with me. We slept in the same bed, and I just fed him in the bed.” (Cai Lan) The mothers tended to maintain the closeness with their sending-away babies. Sleeping with her baby meant so much for Ta Fu. Because of that, she felt the three months she cared for her newborn baby had a great impact on her. She strongly bonded with her child and felt sad when seeing the empty crib after her baby had left for China. “Those three months, I slept with him side-by-side. We slept in a big bed every night. We were so close. So, when he was away and I did not see him in my bed, I missed him so...so much.”
Many Pictures of the Baby

Informants observed the physical, facial and emotional changes of their babies when they cared for them. Ai Yan stated, “I held her and I looked at her. I saw her sucking milk. When she was just born, her face was tapered. However, after a week, her face rounded out from the milk. She was like a doll.” Many informants treasured and attempted to capture those moments when they fed and bathed their babies. Fei Yan and Ta Fu had taken many pictures of their babies being fed and bathed, and diaper changed. Ta Fu and Yiu Qin developed the films into photos and placed them in albums. “I had so many pictures that filled the whole album. I developed the films. I did not remember how many. There were pictures when he was bathing and after he finished bathing. I took three or four each day. There could be hundreds … I bought two albums and put the pictures in them.” (Yiu Qin)

In fact, all informants took many pictures of their newborn babies in the first few months to record their daily changes. Through these photographs, the mothers attempted to preserve memories of their babies that they knew would be leaving. Under these circumstances, photographs were cherished and helped them reminisce about the time they were together.

He could stand up while leaning against the sofa after the second month. I took pictures of him standing up on the sofa. He was big...he had a big body. I took multiple pictures on a daily basis. I caught every moment of him. (Cai Lan)

I felt she changed every day. She grew a little every day. She gained weight and became lovelier. I took pictures, day and night. I took three rolls of films and developed them. I sorted out pictures with her lovely faces and ordered few more large-sized pictures. I put them in the photo frames and placed all over in our room. (Lei Min)

In addition to photographs, some informants also took videos of their babies. Gao Fen said, “I videotaped my daughter on all different occasions – when I was chatting with her, sleeping with her, and when she was crying.” Some informants put the photos in the albums.
Gao Fen and Rui Na stored the photos and videos on their cell phones. Rui Na transferred them onto her computer. They carried the photos, cell phones, and computers to the workplaces after their child went to China. Later, when they missed their children, they found comfort looking at their pictures.

**Breastfeeding and Mother-Infant Bonding**

Informant’s narratives showed that breastfeeding had an important role in the formation of mother-infant bonding. “When I breast fed him, I felt the intimacy between my son and I. My tears fell when I fed him; those were happy tears.” (Sue Qing) Breastfeeding is an enjoyable experience to the caregiving mothers. Ta Fu breast-fed her son for four months until he flew to Fuzhou. She explained,

> I breast fed my son. When he cried, I let him suck my breast. Then, he stopped crying… We would gaze each other and he would be drift off to sleep. When he fell asleep and no longer sucking, he would still had it in his mouth all night. He did not release it. It was warm and sentimental.

Breastfeeding upheld informants’ intimacy and sentimental feelings towards her babies. After her baby left for China, Ta Fu was unable to breastfeed him. This signified that the mother-infant bonding and emotional connection was disrupted.

Many informants thought of breast-feeding their newborn babies as an option. However, for different reasons, most informants eventually gave up breast-feeding. Some informants did not lactate. Some informants were too physically weak and became ill after the birth of their babies. Some had to return to work after the first month’s confinement. Some informants felt disappointed when their babies resisted sucking milk from their breasts. Gao Fen planned to breast feed her newborn daughter. However, in the hospital, her baby’s first feeding was from a bottle of formula. Then, she refused to drink milk from her breast. She said,
The bottle’s nipple was longer and she seemed favor bottler feeding. When I tried to breastfeed her, she did not latch on. The nipple of breast was shorter compared to a bottle. I tried to bottle-feed my breast milk, but she did not like it and refused to drink, eventually, she pushed the bottle away.

Gao Fen attempted to breastfeed her daughter, but she was unsuccessful. In the end, she gave up and feed her formula. She rationalized with the fact that her daughter had to go to China soon and had to adjust to bottle-feeding anyways. Yiu Qin shared Gao Fen’s idea that her child had to be bottle-fed when it was sent to China. She stated that, “I thought about breastfeeding. Eventually, I gave up. I worried that my son would have difficulties from changing to formula when he went to China.” In such circumstances, giving up breastfeeding in some way reminded the mothers their children would be leaving.

**Conclusion**

Fengsu drove thousands of immigrants to send their newborn babies to Fuzhou to be cared for by their family back home. Transnational mothering implies that the birthmother had to separate from her newborn infant physically but continue to nurture from afar. In this study, informants already understood during their pregnancy that they would send their babies to families in Fuzhou. An informant, Sue Qing, asked if she was a heartless mother for sending away her own children. Her narratives revealed that she loved her children very much. She dissolved herself and was preoccupied in her son’s medical care for the first five months. She endured the separation. She carried her son to home to China and left him there.

Like all mothers, the informants in this study experienced the transition of becoming mothers. The young immigrant women came to the US to work, and they had to pay debts. However, almost all informants stopped working regardless of financial difficulties after they confirmed their pregnancies. They did this for the safety of their unborn babies. These mothers experienced the special maternal-fetus bonding especially during fetal movement. They showed
their motherly love to their unborn child by massaging, patting, and caressing the womb, and chatted with the fetus. They believed that their unborn child listened and understood what they said. The mothers described their unborn child as *their blood, part of their body, and part of their life*.

After the baby was born, the mothers became preoccupied with the care of their newborns, particularly the mothers with babies born prematurely or with postnatal complications. Informants provided daily care and chatted with their babies. They also responded to the infants’ attachment signals in order to satisfy their physiological, psychological, and developmental needs.

This chapter explicated the complexity of the early motherhood and mother-infant bonding even though the immigrant mothers knew they were sending their babies to be cared for in China. The next chapter continues to examine the emotional distress and maternal attachment behaviors as transnational mothers reacted to their separations. The chapter also explores how these mothers lived through and negotiated separations at different stages after their babies had gone.
CHAPTER IX: MATERNAL ATTACHMENT AND NAVIGATING SEPARATION

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the early motherhood experiences of transnational immigrant mothers who sent their children to China. From pregnancy to separation, the absent child came alive to their mothers but then disappeared. They nurtured their unborn babies while pregnant and bonded with imagined children. After the birth, the women experienced maternal preoccupation and lost themselves in caring for the newborn infants. Their interactions were intimate.

Separation could be a very distressful experience. Previous studies on attachment and separation focused primarily on the adverse effects of separation on the child’s development. Fewer studies focused on adult or maternal attachment. However, as observed in this study, maternal separation from their newborns could be traumatic and precipitate strong emotional distress for the mothers.

Maternal Attachment and Separation Anxiety

Mother’s instinctive inclination to protect the child results in anxiety (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Maternal separation anxiety defined as “an unpleasant emotional state tied to the separation existence…evidenced by expression of worry, sadness or guilt” (Hock et al., 1989, p. 794). Similar to the mothers in this study, studies that have focused on the effects of separation on mothers from newborns have found that they developed symptoms of depression and despair. They want to be with their babies who are the object of their attachment, so that the loss of the attachment figure resulted in constant anxiety (Bowlby, 1980). If separated from their babies, mothers expressed feelings of loss, grief, and distress (Nystrom & Axelesson, 2001). Bowlby
viewed grief as a form of separation anxiety (Davis, 2004; Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1996).

**Separation, Loss, Mourning and Grieving**

Loss and grief are at the core of attachment and separation theories (Bowlby, 1980; Nelson, 2010). Loss refers to “an event that produces persisting inaccessibility of an emotionally important figure” (Weiss, 1988, p. 38). Such an event may occur because of death, estrangement, or geographical distancing from the attachment figure (Weiss, 1988). In this study, the immigrant mothers experienced the loss of their attachment figures – their children – when they were sent to China. Geographical distancing from their newborns implied that their privileged days, during early motherhood, and the bond shared between mother and child were disrupted. This loss led to deep mourning and prolonged grieving. Mothers who have lost children exhibit intense and prolonged grief (Weiss, 1988). A mother’s grief for her lost child is complicated by a sense of permanent commitment to the child’s care and protection (Weiss, 1988). Based on numerous sources and studies (Bowlby, 1980; Parkes, 1969, 1971) on grieving the death of a spouse and child, conducted between 1944 and 1971, Bowlby (1961, 1970, 2005b) recognized that the grieving and mourning processes among adults comprised of four phases: numbness, yearning and searching for the lost figure, disorganization and despair, and reorganization.

Bowlby (1980, 2005b) observed this pattern among parents of fatally ill children; the numbness phase started when they learned the child had a terminal diagnosis. In those circumstances, parents felt stunned but exhibited various degrees of acceptance. Some parents appeared in denial. They sealed off their feelings; they acted in a detached manner; and presented as though nothing had happened. Others consciously avoided their feelings and remained calm.
Some parents expressed anger towards the physicians who conveyed the diagnosis (Bowlby, 1980).

The phase of yearning and searching for the lost figure began within days or weeks after the loss (Bowlby, 1980). Having registered the reality of the loss, parents began to experience intense distress, restless, and tearfulness. They were preoccupied with the loss and often felt the presence of the missing child. During this phase, the bereaved parents had an urge to search for and recover the lost figure (Bowlby, 1989). They might move about restlessly and scan the environment, thinking intensely about the lost child (Bowlby, 1980).

In the disorganization phase, bereaved parents gradually recognized and accepted their loss; they felt return was hopeless. Bereaved parents might exhibit anger and despair. Being able to progress through this phase, a bereaved parent would be able to let go of the attached figure and move into the phase of reorganization. Thus recovered, the parent could then set new goals to reorganize their life (Bowlby, 1980).

**Separation and Grieving among Chinese Immigrant Mothers**

In the present study, Chinese immigrant mothers had bonded with their infants before they were sent away. They anticipated that the separation would be temporarily, and they would reunite years later with their children. Therefore, respondents experienced a special kind of loss and mourning towards the absence of their children. The difference between these transnational mothers and mothers who had lost their children to death was that immigrant mothers had expectations of their child’s return and hoped to see them again.

Nonetheless, all the respondents endured separation from their beloved newborns. They reacted and behaved differently during different stages of the separation. I identified at least five different types of separation behaviors. Bowlby's (1980) four phases of mourning and grieving
processes served as a reference point in the analysis of these informants’ attachment behaviors towards their separation. Based on the experiences these Chinese mothers reported, I organized these phases as pre-separation, departure, post-departure, intermediate, and prolonged periods of separations.

The difference between Bowlby’s framework of the grieving process and the transnational mothers’ phases of separation was that Bowlby had not addressed the parents’ psychological reactions at the time of separation (Bowlby, 1980). The Bozeman and NIMH studies that Bowlby (1980) employed to conceptualize the four phases of mourning and grieving rested on data from parents before and sometime after their children’s death. In this study, respondents’ narrative revealed that their experiences witnessing the departure of their children and the brief moments after their departure were extremely significant. Those scenes continuously haunted their minds for years, even after they had reunited with their children in the US.

In this study, the pre-separation phase began once the birthmother became aware that the child would be going to China. This corresponds to Bowlby’s mourning phase of numbness (Bowlby, 1980). The new mothers avoided thinking about the departure of their infants. They seemed to set aside any distress in anticipation of the separation. The reality of the separation struck many of the mothers in the last few days before and on the day of their children’s departure. The post-departure stage occurred at the moment the respondents bid farewell to their children and returned home without their children.

The intermediate phase, which corresponds to Bowlby’s phase of yearning and searching for the lost figure (Bowlby, 1980), occurred during the first few days or weeks after the children
were gone. The interviews revealed it was at that point respondents exhibited separation behaviors, including yearning and searching for the images of their sent-away children.

Having gone through a brief period of disorganization and despair, informants reorganized their life after their children’s departure. Once again, they moved away from the Chinese neighborhoods they lived with their newborn babies in their early months. Then, they reset their goals very quickly and went to work outside of New York within a few weeks.

In the prolonged periods of the maternal-child separation, the transnational mothers adopted different strategies to negotiate the emotional distress of separation and avoided the fading of the already established mother-child bonds. This chapter examines the maternal attachment behaviors and reactions that transnational mothers exhibited during their children’s departure and absence.

“My Baby Is Leaving Me”

The Numbness and Pre-Separation Phases

Separation from their children was an extremely stressful experience for the women in this study. In the early days of motherhood, the mothers knew that their babies would be going to China very soon. Like parents with fatally ill children, the immigrant mothers had gone through the numbness phase of grieving (Bowlby, 1980). They reacted by denying and avoiding the stress associated with the departure of their babies. Some informants denied entirely that they had thought about their babies leaving. They focused intensely on the mothering tasks and adored the early months of motherhood. They were preoccupied with their maternal care and enjoyed the moments they had when the babies were present. They treasured the mother-infant bond and exhibited intense closeness with their babies. Their maternal attachment behaviors implicitly represented suppression of the impending separation.
However, when the departure dates approached, the mothers were no longer able to avoid the fact that their children were leaving. They began to exhibit signs and symptoms of depression and separation anxiety. “When the days approached, I started having that feeling…the feeling that he was leaving me very soon.” (Cai Lan) Oi Jie hoped that time would slow down. Hui Yue bargained with her mother, who would carry her baby son to China. She recounted this period and said,

I was struggling …. I became sadder, day after day. I stared at my child and my mind was blank… I murmured, ‘This week…next week, he had to leave.’ I counted down the days he had to leave … Then, I murmured to my mom, ‘Aya…Maybe you are better not to take him with you. Maybe this and that… aya…the little child had to see doctors and had to get immunizations…The milk powder in China was problematic.’ I made many excuses so that he could stay.

Thus, Hui Yue bargained with her mother to delay her baby’s departure. Other informants began losing sleep and appetite; they became tearful. They exhibited symptoms of depression in anticipation of their separations. Lei Min said, “I had bad mood swings. I began to cry one or two days before she left. I was crying. I lost appetite and I did not eat.” Rui Na lost sleep. “Those days, I looked at the clock. Hours and hours passed. I could not fall asleep and I did not want to send him home.”

Rui Na began projecting her own feelings about the impending separation onto her son. She interpreted her son’s responses to her mood swings onto the anticipated separation. She told her son, “You almost had to go home. You go home to da-lu (Mainland).” She felt that her son also sensed something was going to happen, because he began to lose his appetite, too. She said, “Those days he drank less milk than usual.”

As the departure dates approached, the mothers found it more and more difficult to let go of their babies. Although they knew the babies would not understand, they vocalized their
miserable emotions to their babies. In every case, they felt that their babies responded to them and seemed to understand what they were saying,

‘Now, mama talks to you... aye… you will not recognize my voice in future.’ I thought about those things: ‘You go home to be with ye-ye and nai-nai together. How much mama wants to go with you. Mama will miss you’ … My baby seemed to comprehend. He responded to me and gabbled yi-yi-ya-ya. (Fei Yan)

Fei Yan felt lost because she was sending her son away. She was afraid that her son would not remember her in the future. She expressed, “Of course, I felt a bit lost because bao-bao (baby) had to leave. He was so small. Out of nowhere, he came to me…and suddenly bao-bao had to leave.”

**Immediate Maternal Attachment Reaction to Separation: The Phase of Departure**

In this study, three of the respondents were documented and thus had accompanied at least one of their own children to China. However, birthparents that were undocumented could not travel or pass through customs, because they did not have the required valid documentations. Generally, they authorized a caretaker or a carrier to take their babies to China. The authorized caretaker could be the child’s grandparent, an extended family member, a relative, or a fellow villager. Other authorized carriers might be a neighbor, a friend of the parents, or a friend of the parents’ acquaintances. When the birthparents did not have family members or acquaintances to take the baby to China, they hired a carrier from a business agent in the community. In these cases, parents had to pay $1,000 for the transportation of the baby.

On the day of departure, the documented informants took their own babies and flew home in China to leave them there. Eleven birthmothers in the study brought their babies to the airport and handed them over to the caretakers. All mothers wanted to stay with their own babies until the very last moment before their children had to board on the plane. Pei Jin protested when her husband suggested she stay home and not to go to the airport with her baby son. Her husband
felt that Pei Jin should avoid seeing her son off. She recounted, “I told my husband I definitely had to go. I could not stay away and let my son just leave. I had to accompany my son to the airport and stayed with him until the last minute. I was afraid that he would cry and scream in the airport if he did not see me around.” Pei Jin eventually brought her son to the airport. However, two respondents were not able to bid farewell to their own children in the airport. They were only able to watch families and relatives take their children away from home. Both Ai Yan and Ta Fu were in this situation and experienced pain as they watched their babies leaving; but they felt powerless and lacked control over their circumstances. Ai Yan’s husband and in-laws expected her to stay in the family restaurant, while her husband drove her in-laws and her child to the airport. She felt she could not bear the pain of letting her daughter go because she could not be with the baby in the airport. Ta Fu’s relative drove her mother-in-law and her baby son to the airport, and there was no room for her in the vehicle. She saw her mother-in-law carry her son into the car and drove away. She experienced intense feelings of pain:

The morning he left, I held him tightly. It was so hard to let him go. I cried incessantly with my son in my arms. My mother-in-law questioned me, ‘What to cry for? Very soon, I will bring him back. I am not taking him to other people; I bring him to your own mother.’ However, in my heart… I was in pain. I felt like people cong-wo-shen-shang-ge-liao-yikuai-rou (cut off a piece of meat from my body). People took away something very important from me. That kind of feeling… I felt hurt… and pain.

“So Long, My Love” Farewell in the Airport

Those informants who accompanied their babies to the airport held and embraced them tightly in their arms. It was their last moment of intimacy with their children. “My son was in my arms facing me when we were on the way to the airport. He was sleeping and stuck into my body at all times.” (Pei Jin)
On the way to the airport, some informants felt guilt and regret for sending away their young babies. “I felt sorry for my son. I had not given him a good environment. It was my fault. I should not send him away as he was so small. He was only 3 months old.” (Hui Yue)

In these situations, the mothers felt it was even harder to let go of their children. Many informants wept and cried all their way to the airport. They explained,

I brought my daughter to my aunt’s house as she was the one accompanied my daughter to China. In her house, I began to cry. I envisioned the moment of my daughter’s leave; I could not control myself to stop crying. My child was crying too. In the airport, I cried tremendously. (Lei Min)

I held him in my arms at all times, until the last minute he had to enter the restricted area and board the plane. Then, I gave him to ah-yi. He turned his head to look at me for comfort. I burst out crying and felt great hurt in seeing him leave. (Pei Jin)

Whenever the child’s mother bid farewell to their babies, the moment of separation was traumatic and unforgettable. Ta Fu saw her baby driven away outside her home and she felt somebody had cut off a piece of meat from her body. Several mothers who accompanied their babies to the airport experienced similar sentiments of intense loss of their children. They felt the children were a part of themselves. As soon as she handed her baby to the caretaker, Pei Jin immediately felt somebody had robbed her child from her. She said, “It was as if other people stole a very important belonging from me. I felt an ache in my heart…a physically ache in my heart. I yao-jin-ya-guan (gritted my teeth)...gritted my teeth tightly to let him go to China.” (Pei Jin)

In the airport, some mothers grasped for their last chance to care for their children. Cai Lan emphasized that her last chance to change her son’s diaper was unforgettable. “I wanted to look at him a little long. I did not want ah-yi to change his diaper. My husband and I brought him to the family room to change his diaper. I missed that special private moment very much. We
knew that when we saw him again, it would be four or five years later… the time that he would not use diaper anymore.” Gao Fen claimed she would never forget how she comforted her daughter for the last time, and the baby stopped crying. She was entering the restricted area, and she started crying. “I did not know why she cried, but I comforted her. I said, ‘Bao-bao, don’t cry.’ I was not sure if she understood my words, but she heard my voice and stopped crying.”

Watching their own children leave, informants were heartbroken. They seemed more sensitive and reactive to their young child’s behaviors in the airport. They attributed the actions of their babies to their own emotions. Oi Jie wanted to give up her plan as she saw her daughter crying incessantly. She felt guilt for not being available when her daughter cried and looked for her on the plane. Mei Hoe interpreted her son’s protest for their separation, when he acted irritated in the airport:

I felt regret even before he left and the worst was on the day he was expected to leave. I thought he would be on the plane in a few moments. I was feeling unhappy. I felt he did not want to leave either… In the airport, he cursed a racket without any apparent reasons. He probably sensed that I was sending him away. He made noises and hit me repeatedly. I felt that he did not want to go home in China.

Knowing that she was not able to reverse the plan to send away her child, Hui Yue began to worry about her child flying on the plane. Her two younger boys had traveled back and forth between the US and China. Each time she became worried at the airport about the safety of the plane. She murmured to her mother who took the young children to home in Fuzhou:

Aya… you have to cover and protect his ears on the plane. You have to give him a lollipop on the plane. You have to let his mouth move a bit. If he is too naughty on the plane, you have to give him some toys.

When the mothers parted from their babies and the children did not pay attention to them, they felt aggrieved. In contrast to their own emotional distresses, when their babies appeared indifferent, it further intensified their grief.
Ah-yi took him away. She bought him a toy in attempt to entertain and distract him. I stared at the baby…I stared at my son. I have taken care of him for months. He has to leave me and he did not even look at me. Then, I burst out crying. I felt aggrieved in my heart. In fact, I knew that he was a baby. He did not know anything. At that moment, I only felt now reluctant in letting him go. However, he did not even give me a glimpse. (Cai Lan)

After I handed bo-bo to my aunt, he began to play with her. He ignored me… he did not pay any attention to me. I sighed that he had just began his journey home to China and he already threw mama away. I told my husband, our son did not want us anymore…I felt lost. (Fei Yin)

**The Phase of Post-Departure**

*“You Just Disappeared…Mama Did Not Want to Leave”*

After they handed their babies to the caretakers, the mothers remained at the airport. They all waited at the gate until their baby and caretakers disappeared from sight. Many of them did not move away and stood there crying for a long time. “I saw him going inside the restricted area. I stood at the gate seeing him moving in until I only saw a small spot and he gradually disappeared out of my sight. I did not leave until I could not see anything at all.” (Pei Jin)

Some of the mothers were able to leave the airport when they could no longer see their babies, however, others could not tear themselves away. They stayed longer or until her child’s flight took off. “I waited for half an hour before I left the airport. I was standing there…and sat on a chair feeling empty, void of anything in my mind.” (Yiu Qin)

After she entered, I was unable to see her. I cried with my husband. I turned my face to the other side and started weeping. Because there were so many people in the airport, I did not burst into loud wails. I silently wept and my tears began to damper my husband’s clothes. (Gao Fen)

Rui Na and Xi Lian both remained in the airport until their sons’ planes took off. Rui Na was standing in the airport, crying non-stop. Her feelings continued to resonate with her memory of separating from her older daughter in China. She was in deep grief for her repeated separation from her children.
Xi Lian began to worry about her son the moment he was out of her sight. She insisted on staying in the airport until her son’s flight took off, although her husband continued to rush her to leave. Xi Lian and Cai Lan both felt that men were more hardhearted and emotionally stronger than women. One woman stated, “My husband dragged me away. I was standing there, to continue to look. My husband took me home, and he did not cried; but I was cried all the way home.” (Cai Lan). Whether informants left the airport very soon or stayed longer, all grieved for the loss of their children. Although the loss was temporary, and they knew their children would return, their grief was enormously intense. When they returned home from the airport, all the mothers reported they cried nonstop.

**Good-bye My Love; Mama is Leaving You**

No matter whether a caretaker or a birthmother took the child to China, it resulted with the children’s mothers feeling lost in regards to their separation. Oi Jie’s relative carried her older daughter to China. Two years later, she took her younger son to China and visited her older daughter. When she had to return to the US, she found it difficult to bid farewell to her children and leave them with her mother-in-law. She said, “I knew that my family …my mother-in-law would take good care of them, but it felt hard to leave them for my family.”

Another informant, Sue Qing, accompanied her two babies to China. When she took her baby daughter to China, she stayed a month longer to visit her older son. She treasured the brief reunion, but avoided a more intimate relationship with him. Her former experience of separation from her own parents had significant impact on how she viewed separation with her own children. She adopted the strategy of avoidance to address the anticipated distress that her son might encounter upon her departure:
I felt I should not be too close to him. I was so afraid that once I left, he would suffer from separation. I had experienced that kind of loss from separation. When I was young, my papa ran a business in another province; he was coming and going... I did not want to play an active role in my son’s present life. If he wanted to get close to me, I allowed him. I was afraid to disappoint him again when I left... The morning I left home in China, my son was still asleep. I avoided going into his room to check on him. I was so anxious. I tried not to expose any emotions. I told my ah-yi to stay home to care for my children. I did not allow them a chance to bid farewell to me in the airport.

When Sue Qing flew back to New York, she saw other children on the plane. Watching the children bought back her memories of her own children and made her cry. She felt extreme guilt about leaving her children in someone else’s care:

I recalled my daughter’s facial expression the morning that I had to leave. Usually my daughter slept so well and did not want to get up. That day, she got up very early. It seemed like she realized that I was leaving. She became sleepless. She kept staring at me. Her eyes were wide-open and she stared at me. When she looked at me, I realized that my daughter and I had bonded together. The bond was there... I kept thinking about this on the plane. I wept secretly and my tears began to fall. I felt pain in my heart. I asked myself why I could be such a heartless mother. I left my own children into the hands of other people and ran away...

**The Phase of Yearning and Searching for the Lost Figure**

The bond between mother and infant was always present. Therefore, the mothers mourned and grieved for their loss. Upon separation from their young infants, informants began to experience intense distress, restless, and tearfulness. They cried a great deal, had difficulty sleeping, and felt emptiness in their hearts. According to Bowlby (1961), weeping is a component in the effort to recover the lost object (p. 333). The mothers were preoccupied with thoughts of their babies. They also felt the children’s presence. This is congruent with Bowlby’s phase of yearning and searching for the lost figure (Bowlby, 1980).
**Home Without My Child**

Many informants reported that they burst out crying the moment they returned from the airport and opened the door of their home after bidding farewell to their babies. They saw the emptiness at home and felt the emptiness inside their hearts. They missed the ambience in the home when their child was still with them. They enjoyed the time playing and chatting with their babies. One informant explained,

I was so sad, when I returned home after work. My daughter was not home anymore. Usually, I could enjoy playing, talking and singing with her after I came home from work. Suddenly, she was gone. It was not the same anymore. It took me some time to settle my emotions and routine. (Ai Yan)

Gao Fen described home as *kong-dong-dong* (completely empty). She was alone there after her husband returned to work outside of New York. Fei Yan felt her home suddenly became very quiet. “Usually, I heard *bao-bao’s* crying and laughing… *ka-ka-ka…* but I did not hear it anymore.” (Fei Yan) Hui Yue compared the atmosphere in her house before and after her child was away:

When my son was still here, there was *bustling noises* and *lively* atmosphere at home. Time went by so joyfully. When I came home from the airport, I saw the empty room. Nobody slept there. Both my mom and my baby had gone. I saw the empty room and felt intolerable. I went inside and stayed for a while, it was *noiseless*. For a moment, I felt lost and sad. When my child was here, life was so contented. The first week was particularly difficult.

Cai Lan, Ta Fu, Xi Lian and Yiu Qin reported that they had difficulty sleeping in the empty and vacant room. Ta Fu felt extremely regretful and miserable, because she did not have the chance to bid farewell to her son in the airport. The moment after her son was driven away, she returned home. She was still unable to accept the fact that her son had been separated from her. “I opened the door, and I was devastated. I burst out crying. My son had gone home, and I was left alone in
this empty room. I cried nonstop. I could not sleep and I did not sleep. I got up at 4am. I padded around my bed, and I had not found my son by my side. I felt great pain.”

Several informants slept with their child in the same bed during early motherhood. They were startled when their children were not in their beds the next morning. Ta Fu and some other informants reported that they could not stop crying when they saw their children’s belongings including the pictures, their tiny clothes, toys, bathing utensils, and the cribs that remained in their rooms after the children’s departure. Goa Fen said, “I looked at her crib; it was empty. Her little wooden bed was empty. All the items I saw at home, all her belongings and her bathing utensils made me cry. When I packed all her things she had used, I burst out crying.” Similarly, Lei Min said, “When I looked at her pictures displayed in the room, I burst out crying. I was in a bad mood. I was unable to eat. I threw myself on the bed and cried… eventually, my family had to put away my daughter’s pictures. They did not let me see her pictures. Three days later, I stopped crying.”

Some mothers felt that their children were still with them; informants heard their babies crying and laughing. “I heard my son giggle kaka-kaka there.” (Sue Qing) Gao Fen heard her daughter crying in the middle of the night and went to search for the baby in her crib, but she was not there. Both De Gui and Fei Yan felt that their sons were still home and needed their care on the first night after they left for China. Fei Yan said, “I woke up at midnight… I felt so strange. I wondered why bao-bao was so quiet and how come he did not cry out that night. Then, I gave a thought… Oh! Bao-bao was not there. For half a year, it was my routine… I had to get up in the middle of the night to feed him… but now he is not here.”
The Urge to Search For and Recover the Lost Figures

Informants reported that they had strong emotional distress the first few days or few weeks after their infants had gone; but they were still preoccupied with their children. Their thoughts were concerns about what their children were doing and not doing. According to Gao Fen, “She was on my mind all the time. I was still unable to accept that she was away from me. I asked myself how my daughter was doing in China. What she was doing the moment when I thought of her. Was she having milk? Had she cried? I thought of so many things…”

Mei Hoe described her life in the first few days after her son left as “no goals and no plans” and “living through day-by-day”. She wandered into the places where she went with her baby in order to recover those memories about experiences they had enjoyed together. Respondents reported that they thought of their babies excessively and attempted to search the lost memories. “In the park, I saw other babies my son’s age, I felt like I was seeing my son there.” (Mei Ho). “I followed the children that I did not know. It seemed like I was mentally ill.” Although the mothers continued to feel miserable without their children, they gradually accepted the reality that their children were home in China with their families.

Managing Separation in the Prolonged Period of Separation

The Phase of Disorganization and Reorganization

Unlike parents with deceased children illustrated in Bowlby’s (1980) writings, Chinese immigrant mothers preserved the hope that their children would return in a few years. Although they went through the emotional distress and grieving process from the departure of their children, the disorganization phase was relatively brief compared to parents with deceased children. They reset their goals and moved into the reorganization phase rather quickly. They were conscious of their mei-banfa reality, to return to work and paid off their debts.
Reorganization was enabled by a desire to have the children return sooner, because the faster their debts were repaid, the sooner they could be reunited. This propelled them to reorganize their life within a very short time. In the prolonged period of the maternal-child separation, informants adopted different strategies to balance their emotions and distress derived from the separation. On the other hand, they attempted to maintain and continue the existing mother-child bonding under the geographically distanced barrier.

**Reorganization of Work Life**

To reorganize their “normal” life, these transnational mothers had to put aside their mothering roles and resume their productive roles. They returned and put all their energy into work. They sought distraction in work as a strategy to deal with their loss. They kept themselves busy at work to avoid constantly thinking about their babies. “Later on, I left New York to work in other states. When I worked, I focused on work and did not think about him that much. Then, I began to feel better.” (Xi Lian)

**Continuing Bonds**

Moreover, maintaining a connection with the absent child was a factor in healing (Davis, 2004) for the transnational mothers. Some informants tended to self-validate their son’s very being and their continuous bonds with their children through a “linking object” (Klass, 1993, p. 352) – an object connected with the child’s life.

Hui Yue connected with her children in China on the internet daily. Moreover, her children became central to her conversation with people in her daily or working life. She found comfort in talking with her coworkers about her son. Through linking and sharing her son’s developmental milestones, she was able to reconstruct the mother-child bonds within her inner and social worlds and created meaning for her (Davis, 2004). She stated,
Sometimes, I talked to my coworkers who had babies around my son’s age. We shared how many teeth our babies had. We talked about their developmental milestones such as when they started crawling and sitting up properly. I talked about these movements and I felt comforted in my heart. Otherwise, I did not know how I went through those days that I did not see him or listen to his voice.

**Maintaining Contact by Telephone**

Telephone calls were the primary means that informants used to maintain contact with the children and their caregivers in China. Maintaining connection with their babies through phone calls helped the mothers deal with their loss and moderated their maternal separation anxiety. All of them used phone cards and called from their cell phones. Lei Min said, “A phone card cost over $10 at that time, which was more expensive then. One card would not last very long.” Given their meager salaries and the need to repay debts, this represented a significant sacrifice for the mothers.

Because of separation anxiety, some informants started making phone calls to family members in China while the baby was still on the plane. After babies arrived in China, they continued to call several times a day. In reality, they could only speak with adults, because their children were too young to talk. Even so, they called to enjoy listening to the children’s cooing. De Gui said, “We called every day or every two days. Although he was not able to speak, I listened to the ‘urh…urh’ sound he gabbled and I was so happy.”

Many informants called every day in the beginning. Then, they gradually called less, especially after they resumed full-time employment. Lei Min persisted in calling daily, even though she and her husband worked outside of New York. “Each time we were on the phone, we chatted for an hour …over an hour. We chatted about family affairs and my child, like if she behaved well, ate well, and slept well.” As the children grew older, the family caregivers put the
some children on the phone to speak with their parents, even though the children typically spoke for short period.

Some informants admitted that they did not always want to place the phone calls to their child’s caregiver in China, especially when the caregivers were their in-laws. They felt that they were not familiar enough with their husband’s family. Ai Yan never initiated calling her in-laws caring for her children in China. Generally, her husband called them and passed the phone to her. Xi Lian felt that she had nothing much to say to her mother-in-law. “I asked a little bit about my son. It was different… If I called my mom’s home, I talked and asked whatever I wanted to. But, this was my husband’s family.”

Both Mei Hoe and Bei Le placed their children with the maternal and paternal grandparents. They compared their experiences with how they maintained contact with their own families and their in-law’s families,

I called home daily and my mother called me too. We did not spoke very long… a few minutes here and there. I was free to ask about the details in my son’s life. I asked if he was well behaved. Sometimes, my son came over to speak to me on the phone. My mom told him to call me mama… (Mei Hoe)

My oldest daughter was with my own family in the Capital City of Fuzhou. The happiest moment was to call my mom and talked about the child. When my daughter was able to speak, I chatted with her. I asked what movies she liked… I let her talk whatever she wanted… Then, I told her, “Mama would be very happy to see you in future. I will watch the cartoons with you.” I tried to get close to the child. I talked to her like a friend. She was willing to tell me more and more. She grew close to me, forming a strong relationship. (Bei Le)

Unfortunately, Bei Le was unable to do the same with her two younger children who were in her husband’s hometown in the countryside. She stated that she had little connection with her younger children. “I had difficulties and was inconvenient to call them. I did not know my mother-in-law well. Moreover, she had hearing problem. She would not hear the phone ringing.”
Telecommunication is now in common use all over the world. However, human relationships could be a barrier for communication and hamper mother-child interactions. In addition, a caregiver’s disability such as hearing impairment could limit her capacity to mediate the connection between the child and his/her transnational mother.

**Internet QQ Network**

For most informants, Internet QQ network was a preferable way to stay connected to their children in China. Even some parents with limited education and no prior computer knowledge purchased computers and began to log onto the Internet daily because they wanted to remain connected to their children. Informants usually bought these computers in stores located in Chinese neighborhoods, where the store personnel already pre-installed different types of software commonly used by Chinese customers.

The QQ Internet (also Tercent QQ) network provides the largest social networking sites in China with over 300 million active users (Leow, 2008). Users described the QQ network as combination of MSN, Skype, Facebook, and Twitter. In order to use the social network, an individual has to download the software at [www.imqq.com](http://www.imqq.com). Then, they sign up and open a password protected QQ account. The user could invite and add friends to the account. Then, they could chat with family or friends via text, live audio or video chat. The user could also upload and share files and photos with groups, families, and friends in the network.

Cai Lan had signed up and opened a QQ account before her son went to China. She said, “He just left. The next day we went online and connected with our family via the QQ network.” Gao Fen joined the QQ network not long after her daughter went to China. She said, “In the beginning, I always logged on the QQ network. I saw my daughter and interacted with her. Soon, I began to log on once a week. Then, it became once in two weeks...” Through the QQ network,
informants “met” their children who were far away. This also allowed the children to see their parents on the computer screen. Fei Yin said, “He had seen *papa* and *mama* on the computer screen. He knew this is *papa* and this is *mama*. He called for us.”

The QQ network was not only an effective tool for the visual connection, but also a significant means of maintaining the emotional bonds between the transnational mother and the child. Lei Min’s frequent flyer daughter first returned to New York at two years old, when she was pregnant with her younger son. When she was waiting for her new baby, she stayed home alone. She missed her daughter tremendously and requested her family return her daughter, so that she could make up the lost time. However, upon her arrival, the little girl acted out with detachment behavior towards her mother. She had no memories of her birthmother. She felt this *stranger* had stolen her from China. She refused to hold Lei Min’s hands. She did not sleep at night. She cried incessantly in search for her *nai-nai*, paternal grandmother, the primary caregiver in China. Lei Min felt helpless and sent her daughter back to China after two weeks. She felt aggrieved and heartbroken when her daughter rejected her so strongly.

After the girl had returned to China, Lei Min immediately bought two computers: one for her in-laws and one for herself. She started to connect with her in-laws and her daughter very frequently. Through the QQ network, mother and daughter gradually reestablished their bonds. When her daughter finally returned to New York, she had a stronger relationship with her mother.

However, not all informants were able to maintain contact with their children through the Internet. One limitation was the inability of the caregiver in China to use a computer. It mattered whether a caregiver had the skills to mediate the connection between the child and the mother.
Because of that, many informants could only maintain connection with their children through the telephone. One informant explained,

I had not used the QQ network. My mother-in-law was in the countryside. She had never used computer. In fact, even if I sent my in-laws a computer, they would not know how to use it. I was still not able to connect with them via QQ. I only connected with my son once. He had to go to other people’s house. I saw him, I was so happy. However, he could not always go to other people’s place for the exchange. (Pei Jin)

**Exchanging Photographs and Videos**

According to Riches (1998), bereaved parents use photographs and other representations to integrate their memories into their ongoing lives. In this study, photographs and videos provided continuous support for the child-absent mothers. These visual artifacts preserved and restored the memories of mother-child bonding moments that women experienced during their early motherhood. They were a rehearsed set of memories (Riches, 1998) of their child’s life, which was very meaningful and strongly associated with her mothering role and identity (Riches, 1998).

All respondents had taken many pictures of their babies in the first few months of their lives when the babies were with them. After their babies left, looking at those pictures helped to ameliorate their strong yearning for their babies. The parents and the baby’s caregivers in China continued to exchange photographs and videos while the children were in China. Many informants had friends and relatives who helped by bringing photos when they traveled between the US and China,

She was 7 months old. A friend brought the pictures here. The moment I got the pictures, I had to look at them immediately. I looked at her face and my tears began to fall right away. She was so lovely. She had changed in a few months. She had more hairs. Her eyes were big. Her body was a little chubby. I was still standing in the street…I looked at the pictures repeatedly. I carried them with me wherever I went. (Lei Min)
In order to learn more about their children’s lives in China, Lei Min and Cai Lan immediately bought video cameras and sent them to China after their children left. Cai Lan stated:

I bought two camcorders, one for my in-laws and one for myself. I sent many blank tapes to his grandparents. I asked them to record episodes of his daily life. I did not miss any of his developmental milestones, important events and special holiday celebrations. I got excited when I saw him dancing and singing on the stage. I would then reminisce about when he was a baby; I held him in my arms and fed him on the bottle of milk. I was happy, but I also felt sad. I was not by his side and I could only watch him in the videos most of the time.

At the end of the interview, Cai Lan showed me about 20 tapes that her in-laws sent from China. At the same time, she and her husband had sent his son about 20 tapes of their daily life in the US.

Sending Gifts and Supplies

Informants felt that mothering from afar was a heartache. They attempted to compensate in other ways to show their motherly love for their children. Gao Fen said, “I sent chocolate to China. She likes chocolate and lollipops. I sent a package every few months.” Oi Jie also sent gifts to her children:

When I shopped, I bought some clothes, American style clothes. I would send it to China for my children. Of course, I bought in the American department stores. Clothes in Chinatown were the same that everybody could buy in China. I did not want those – those that my mom could buy in my hometown.

Yiu Qin spent several hundred dollars on gifts every year. Beside the purchases, she had to pay for postage. She said, “The postage was expensive. It was $3 a pound.” Cai Lan sent clothes, books and toys. She said, “These things could be purchased in China, but were not bought by me. We wanted to send something – things I wanted to give to my own child.”

Other than clothing, all informants sent milk powder and baby food to their children. Although milk powder plus postage was expensive, it was the most important supply for ensuring the child’s growth and development,
I had to give the best to my children. I provided the supply with milk powder to my children until they were age three. The milk powder in fact is not expensive here; each canister costs $24. The postage was more expensive. At that time, milk powder in China was problematic. It was unsafe and I was so afraid. I had no choice. I sent their supply of milk from the US. (Pei Jin)

De Gui sent gifts and supplies in the beginning. Later on, she mainly sent money to her mother-in-law, who used the money to purchase supplies locally for the child:

We sent clothes and pants. We sent milk powder too. We sent packages very frequently in the beginning. Later, my mother-in-law told us not to send anymore. She felt it was too troublesome. At that time, we were not in New York. We worked in other states. It was not very convenient since we had to travel to purchase the goods and then sent it.

Hui Yue sent various items and she avoided paying postage by asking relatives to carry her “gifts” to China. “I had so many relatives traveling back and forth; at least one relative came every few months. Each time, somebody came, I brought some goods and I asked them to bring it to my children.”

**Indelible Memories and Unhealable Wounds**

Almost all children sent to China had returned to New York and reunited with their mothers by the time of the interviews. However, all respondents cried when they recalled the moments when they first separated from their babies after early motherhood. They choked up, and the tears ran down their cheeks. Some fell into deep thinking and had difficulty in continuing the interview.

Many respondents emphasized that separation from their infant children resulted in indelible memories of pain and sorrow. Pei Jin and Lei Min still felt pain when they talked about the moment they saw their babies moving out of their sight in the airport. Pei Jin’s son stayed in China for four years, and he had just returned nine months earlier at the time of the interview.

“Now, I think of that moment, I still feel the ache in my heart.” Lei Min’s voice choked, and she
wept several times during the interview. She stated that she still had strong feelings when recalling those memories. In fact, her daughter had returned to New York five years earlier. No matter how long ago the children has returned to these mothers’ sides, they still felt immense pain when recalling the separating moments from their children.

Some informants said that Fuzhounese transnational mothers rarely talked openly about their experiences and feelings about immigration and separation from their children. Immigration and sending away children were *fengsu*-practices and commonly accepted in the community. Informants followed the principle of *jiāchǒu-bùkě-wài*yáng (domestic shame should not be talked in public). They assumed if other people could endure the hardship, that they should be able to tolerate it, too. People who shared their problems with others showed weakness and thus shame in the Chinese community.

Ai Yan described herself as an emotionally reserved person. She had never cried in front of other people, so she had to suppress her feelings and grief at the separation from her daughter. However, she could not hold her tears on one occasion:

It was on the Mother’s Day. The young children in my church presented flowers to all the mothers. Each mother had a flower. A child gave me one; I took it and started to cry. My church friends wondered what happened to me. I just became so sentimental. I lowered my head and cried. I felt… in my heart… the pain of my child being away from me… I felt the bond between my daughter and me… and the sadness, as my mother-in-law took her away from me. I felt hurt and miserable.

Bei Le stated that she was reluctant to send her children home to China. When her children were not with her, she missed them profoundly and *yanlei-zai-xinli-tang* (tears fell into her heart). After her children went to China, she suffered depression and had to seek psychotherapy. In this study, the mother’s stories indicated they had suppressed their feelings about their arduous immigrant life and separation from their children. Other than Bei Le, no
informants had addressed their traumatic experiences on mother-infant separation. Sue Qing said that she had kept her distress bottled up inside for years. At the end of the interview, she expressed feeling relieved after sharing her stories.

**Conclusion**

This chapter described the maternal attachment behaviors that transnational mothers exhibited after their child’s departure and how they negotiated their child-absent transnational motherhood. None of the respondents were comfortable letting their infant children go to China. The separation implied the loss of their newly developed mother-child bond and the sense of motherhood. Although they expected the loss would be temporary, the mothers’ feelings of loss and grief were inconsolable early in the separation. They often suffered symptoms of anxiety and depression when the children were no longer under their care.

In this study, respondents went through numbness (Bowlby, 1980) in the pre-departure phase. Most of them were in denial and did not think about their children’s leaving during early motherhood. They suppressed their feelings by focusing on the child’s care. When the time for departure approached, they showed symptoms of depression including loss of appetite, loss of sleep, and tearfulness. Some began to count down the days and cried incessantly. On the day of departure, some regretted making plans to send their children to China, but they were unable to stop the planned separation. Informants who were able to go to the airport for the departure did not want to leave, even when they lost sight of the child at the boarding area. Some mothers had to be dragged away from the spot where they had passed their babies to the carriers.

Their houses felt empty without the child, which intensified the mother’s feelings of emptiness in her heart. Many of them cried for days and weeks after her child left. They were constantly preoccupied with yearning and searching for the images of sent-away children.
Regardless of their emotional distress from separation, they had to reorganize their life and return to work rather quickly to achieve the goals; most significantly, this included paying off the debts that had to be settled before they could bring back their children.

In the prolonged period of separation, some mothers found comfort and continued bonds with their children by sharing their child’s daily life with friends or coworkers. Pictures and videos taken in the early months after birth were the greatest consolation for the child-absent mothers. Some mothers treasured hearing their child’s babbling sounds on international phone calls. Some mothers continued to exchange photos and videos with the other mother in order to learn more about their child’s life in China. Many mothers logged on the Internet to meet and interact with their children. Many spent their meager earnings on phone cards, Internet services, and gifts and supplies for their children. They did all these whilst worrying about paying off mounting debts. They wanted to give their children the best care possible under these circumstances.

The *mei-banfa* reality forced the Chinese immigrant mothers to act against their wills and separate from their infants. In some cases, the mother’s voices were silenced in the decision of sending away their newborns. Their agency was constrained and undermined (Charrad, 2010). They had bonded with their newborns, but helplessly bid farewell to them. The informants agreed that the greatest advantage for sending away the child was the convenience to return to work, but many felt that their gains could not compensate for the losses. Conversely, they experienced more problems and disappointments from transnational mothering. The following chapter will examine these problems and disappointments, and how the mothers’ frustration inspired them to regain control and act on their own agency to the return of their children.
CHAPTER X: FLUIDITY OF SENDING AND RETURNING
ATTEMPTS TO GAIN AGENCY

Overview

In the preceding chapters, I discussed Chinese immigrant mothers’ lack of agency and their concession to the fengsu path from migration through sending their children to China. The mei-banfa reality, consequently forced them to suffer the distress from separation. They grieved for the loss of the newly formed mother-child bonds and the privileges of motherhood. Their mei-banfa problems were closely interwoven with their fengsu-driven migration. Consequently, their fengsu-derived perceptions led informants to believe that sending the child to China would help resolve their mei-banfa struggles.

Most informants felt that the greatest advantage for sending away their babies was that it enabled them to return to work. “The two years my son was not here, I had put all my energy in work” (Fei Yan). Overwhelmingly, they believed that sending their children to families in China was the immediate solution to financial hardship, especially those who owed large debts. The few informants who had sick infants were relieved from the distress of caring for children with postnatal complications when their children were in China. One informant was able to return to school in her child’s absence.

As one informant stated, “You-de-bi-you-shi (losing something for gaining something)!” (Mei Hoe) When Mei Hoe among others re-evaluated their transnational motherhood, many felt that their gains did not outweigh the losses. “Positively, we earned some money for living. We bought things for our children, but that was all” (Yiu Qin). For the most part, they felt that there were more problems and disappointments from sending their children to China. Informants reported that they suffered emotional struggles over separation from their children; loss of power
over their own child; anxiety about their child’s wellbeing; and missing the child’s growth and development. Some mothers felt a sense of losing family integrity.

Individual mothers responded to these problems and disappointments differently. Some continued to conform to convention and have their children return to the US at school age. However, ten informants in this study attempted to regain control over their children’s lives and chose a different schedule for their return, often in the face of their husband or in-law’s discontent. Some mothers decided to go against the *fengsu*-practice by not sending away their second child after they reunited with their first child. These mothers found their own voices, channeled them, modified them, and gained a measure of empowerment (Charrad, 2010). They made their own choices and attained their desire to keep their children with them (World Development, 2012). Their actions represented newfound agency enabling them to actualize their own as well as their children’s well-being on their own terms.

In the past, people in the community generally anticipated that the sent-away American-born children would return to the US at school age. In this study, some respondents acted against that norm and sent for their children at different times. Respondents’ narratives revealed the changing patterns and fluidity of the *fengsu* practice children to home in China. This chapter examines the extent to which immigrant mothers reestablished their rights to mother their children, and how they navigated the tide of *fengsu* practice of sending babies to China. There were different conditions that altered or interrupted the plans of their children’s return. Because of problems and disappointments, some of these transnational mothers acted to have their children return without reservation.

However, not all informants were able to follow their own desires. Some felt that they lacked control because of family crises or persistent financial burdens, which resulted in their
children remaining in China longer than they anticipated. In Lei Min’s situation, her daughter returned to New York permanently at age six after Lei Min and her husband had paid off their debts. For other women, family crisis hampered the ability of the mothers to act according to their own desires to have their children return. An informant, Bei Le, continued encountering frequent family crisis, which delayed her from bringing back her children:

We Fuzhounese, many came here undocumented. The undocumented status was a tremendous hit on Fuzhounese family. After I carried my son to China, the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) took my husband away. The incident had tremendous impacts on our family. That was a disastrous strike against me… After that, all things changed… I absolutely could not support all three children alone…

After ICE arrested her husband, Bei Le suffered a nervous breakdown. Since then, she had to receive mental health treatment. When her husband was out of the jail, she had her two oldest daughters returned to the US. Her oldest child had turned seven already upon return.

The 16 respondents in this study had 29 American-born children in total (See Table 5). Twenty-five of the children stayed in their parents’ hometowns in Fuzhou between one to six years. Five children were frequent flyers and repeatedly flew between New York and Fuzhou. The average period of time that twenty children stayed in China uninterrupted was approximately 3.9 years. The average age of babies sent to China was 4.8 months, the median and modal ages were both four months. Twenty-three infants flew to Fuzhou between six and seven months after birth; two flew at the age of one month. Four infants were never sent to China.

Community Norms versus Unconventional Returns

Four mothers followed the community norm, and sent their children to China at about four months with the children returning at school age. They made plans to bring their children back when they could enter school. Upon the children’s return, they entered the first grade,
kindergarten, or Pre-K in the public schools in Chinese neighborhoods. However, the majority of the mothers (12) followed an “unconventional” practice for the return of their children. Three mothers prescheduled their children’s return, whereas nine other mothers sent their children to China with an undetermined return date. Seven mothers had their children returned earlier than they originally planned. Five mothers were very determined for their children’s return regardless of the wishes of their husbands, in-laws, or family members.

Practically, these women made ad hoc decisions for the return of their children based upon individual circumstances and conditions. Fundamentally, their decisions were grounded in their strong maternal attachment and desires to mother their separated children. The kind of mother-child bonding was deep rooted and sustained throughout their early and transnational motherhood after their children’s leave. These maternal attachment grounded decisions were justified by their separation anxiety reactions, emotional struggle over mother-child bonding, birthmother’s dissatisfaction of caregivers’ disciplining skills, and conflict between birthmothers and caregivers. These circumstances served as catalyst that motivated the mothers to follow their own desire to have their children returned to them.

**Perspectives on Early Education and Time-Limited Returns**

Education distinguished the actions of some mothers from others. It empowered women with more education to advocate for their children’s return for better and early education. In this study, the few mothers with higher education set a higher value on early education. Fei Yan, Hui Yue, and De Gui had completed high school education or higher either in China or in New York (see Table 3). Although they all sent away their newborn infants to China, they insisted that their children would not stay in China for long. In the interviews, they repeatedly emphasized their concerns for their children’s early education. They planned so that their children could return
when they could enter nursery or daycare. These mothers wanted their children to have an early start in the New York City school system, because their American-born children eventually would eventually have to receive their education here. They wanted to give the children time to adjust the school life earlier in their country of birth. They worried that their children would have problems catching up, because they grew up differently from children raised here. They feared the older the child was when returned to the US, the longer it would take them to adapt to the American way and to learn English:

I am telling you, I emphasized greatly on the child’s education. At two-and-a-half years old, certainly he had to enter the nursery. I had to let him receive education in the US. Although we did not speak English at home, he had to adjust the school environment in the purpose of learning. Therefore, I had to bring him back very early… (Fei Yin)

Hui Yue had similar ideas about her child’s education. Her child was a frequent flyer who traveled repeatedly between Fuzhou and New York. His last flight from China was at age two and a half. At that point, Hui Yue kept her son in New York and enrolled him into a daycare center in Chinatown.

When De Gui sent her child to China, she had already decided not to follow the normal practice. The child returned to the US at three and a half years as opposed to the anticipated five years:

I would not do what other people did. I would not bring my son back at the age of five. I had told my in-laws that I would bring him back anytime. The latest would be about three years old. Although my in-laws educated him quite well, I still decided to bring him back at three years old…because he had to interact with people in the outside world of China.

De Gui’s son had lived with his grandparents in a suburban village in Guantau. She felt that her son did not have enough exposure to the outside world. Therefore, she wanted him to return
sooner than age five. Similar to Fei Yin, she believed that if the child returned at older age, he would have social gaps with other children in the US.

**Maternal Attachment, Desire for Family Integration, and Early Return**

Informants reported that they suffered severe pain and sorrow from the mother-infant separation. Their emotional distress reflected that they strongly identified with their mothering role and intensely attached to their babies. It felt intolerable to separate from them. In Ta Fu’s case, her son was cared for in China by her mother. Originally, Ta Fu did not schedule a specific time for her son to return to the US. However, she experienced emotional struggles since the separation. Her mother-in-law had brought the boy to China, but Ta Fu remained intensely attached to her son and experienced a high level of maternal anxiety. When she became pregnant with her second daughter, she wanted to have her son returned immediately. She missed her son, particularly when she was alone awaiting the birth of a new baby. She felt the separation, from both her son and her husband, as being intolerable. At that time, her husband worked outside New York. Ta Fu had grown up with her mother, because her father left home and came to the US when she was still a little girl. She reunited with her father after a decade of separation. Because of this experience from her childhood, she strongly believed that her children should stay with her and the family should be kept intact.

They all told me to bring my son back at age five or six. I missed him so much. I could not stand for it. I felt I could not wait…I told my husband, ‘Three people in one family and one family in three different places. How is it like a family?’ … When I was pregnant again, I asked my mother-in-law to go to China and bring my son back to New York. She was reluctant to go, but I forced her to bring my son back immediately.”

Ta Fu wanted her son to return regardless of her mother-in-law’s objections. Her son went to China at three months and returned at two years.
Dissatisfaction with the Child’s Discipline in China

Both Cai Lan and Pei Jin demanded their children return immediately after they learned that their children were misbehaving. Cai Lan’s original plan was to leave her son in China until she and her husband saved enough money to pay off debts and prepare for his return. However, she changed her mind because she was concerned that the child’s grandmother was not providing proper discipline; instead, she spoiled him and taught him improper behavior. Although the child’s paternal grandparents did not want let go the child, Cai Lan made up her mind:

At four or five years old… I saw many things about my son that I had never imagined. I felt helpless because I was apart from him so far away. When I started feeling that way, I brought him back within three months… I knew that their grandparents wanted to take good care of him. However, they were incapable of doing well by my standards. I did not challenge my mother-in-law on how she discipline my child. I just told her the child had grown old and we wanted him to be with us.

Pei Jin was also concerned that her son behaved badly in China. He repeatedly scolded and cursed people with bad words. Pei Jin’s husband supported her decision, and she brought her son back at age four. In the interview, Pei Jin was confident that she had made the right decision to send for her son when she realized the grandmother was not providing proper discipline:

His nai-nai (grandmother) was unhappy when we decided for him to return to New York, but we had to bring him back earlier. We would teach him properly for not cursing people and use good words. We believed that at young age, he would listen to us and we were able to discipline him. Now, he does not curse at people. We were dui (right and correct), my husband and I had made the right decision. Even more so, I feel we were absolutely right. (Pei Jin)

Caregivers in China were mostly paternal or maternal grandmothers. In some cases, they were an aunt or a grandaunt from the extended families. Most family elders were uneducated and had spent all their lives in the countryside. Informants complained that they spoiled their children. When parents learned about their children’s behavioral problems, they requested an early return of the child to New York.
Birthmother and Other-Mother Dynamics

Ai Yan was one of the informants who had drifted along the tide of *fengsu* when she sent her child to China. In the interview, she repeatedly expressed the *fengsu* practice was part of the *shenghuo* (life) of Fuzhounese people. On the contrary, she was not pleased the arrangement that her in-laws were to care for and bring her children back and forth to and from China. Feeling helpless, she could not resist and accepted it as her *ming* (fate). However, her in-laws complained of their caring responsibilities and monitored Ai Yan’s access to her children. “My little child was sick... After I finished work and came home late at night, I tried to go see my child. They blocked my pathway to see my daughter. I just wanted to see my child ...I am her mother, but I was not allowed to see my own child.” Ai Yan felt that she lost her power and status as her children’s birthmother. She could not *mother* her child, because her in-laws seemed to act as if the children belonged to them. Eventually, she decided to regain control and exercise her maternal role as a parent. In order to achieve this, she urged her husband to sell the take-out restaurant they owned. She stopped allowing her in-laws to take her children to China. This allowed her to take up the responsibility and care of her own children.

The best way was to quit working. After the third time my daughter returned from China, I started to think I had to take care of my own children. Half year later, we sold out the restaurant. Then, I took over the responsibility to care for my children. In the last two years, her *ye-ye* and *nai-nai* had visited China twice. They wanted to bring my children with them. I would not allow it. It was my responsibility to care for my own children.

Ai Yan was very frustrated with her in-laws for years after her children were born. She felt they disregarded her opinion as a mother, which left her ignored and marginalized. Although she had once planned to have her own mother care for her younger son, her in-laws had ruined her plan. Eventually, her years of frustration led her to decide to regain control of her children’s care:
I had filed all documents and planned to have my son staying with my mother for a few years. My father-in-law was supposed to leave my son to my mother during his visit in China. However, he brought my son back to the US without discussing with me or my mother. In fact, my mom wanted to care for her grandson. (Ai Yan)

**Perceived Caregiver Dynamics that Shortened the Child’s Stay in China**

Dynamics between the mothers and the caregivers in China also influenced how they felt about their children being cared for in China. In many circumstances, both paternal and maternal grandmothers were enthusiastic about providing childcare for their grandchildren. However, under these circumstances conflicts between the two sets of in-laws sometimes occurred. This was the case in Ai Yan’s and Mei Hoe’s families.

When Ai Yan’s daughter stayed with her maternal grandmother in Tingjiang, a suburban town in Fuzhou, Ai Yin’s father-in-law suddenly took the girl away without discussing her removal with anyone. Ai Yan had a difficult time understanding why her father-in-law had created such conflict with her mother. She knew that her mother loved to care for her granddaughter, but her in-laws thought otherwise. Ultimately, they did not allow the maternal grandmother to see the girl. This dynamic between Ai Yan’s mother and her in-laws was another trigger that led her decide to regain control of her children’s care.

Mei Hoe originally planned to bring her son back to the US at age four. However, her mother and mother-in-law had conflict over the child’s care:

In the beginning, I sent my son to my mother. But, my mother-in-law wanted to take care of her grandson. Therefore, she complained about how my mom did not take good care of my son. The child had flu. Little child got sick, it happened and was normal. When he was sick, she blamed my mom for not taking good care of him. We heard and felt *bu-shuang la* [unhappy]. (Mei Hoe)

Later on, Mei Hoe allowed her mother-in-law to assume the care for her son in order to avoid her mother-in-law’s *shuo-qi-shuo-ba* (making disparaging remarks). She said, “Although my mom
wanted to see her grandson, she did not go to my mother-in-law’s place. She did not want to *meishi-zhaoshi* (look for trouble when there is no trouble). She wanted to care for my son, but she adhered to my decision.” Generally, birthmothers were more confident with the maternal side of the family acting as caregivers for their children. The mother felt that she knew her own family better than she knew her husband’s family. Many informants did not speak often with their in-laws. The conversations that the mother did have with their in-laws were mainly about childcare.

Eventually, Mei Hoe brought her son back to New York after he stayed in China for a year. She insisted on bringing him back to the US even though her husband disagreed:

> I was unhappy and I did not want the two elders to fight over my child. I told them I would take care of my own child. I gave birth to him and I have the responsibility to take care of him. Then, I resigned from my job and sent for my son. My husband did not agree with me, but I insisted on my point of view. He disagreed, but had to allow it. I was very determined. If there were no arguments, I would not have sent for him so soon.

Mei Hoe resigned from her job and, upon his return, stayed home to care for him. She stated that she would rather tolerate the financial hardship and have her son in New York with her. She felt relieved after her son returned.

**Unexpected Circumstances**

Two other informants also had their children return earlier than they expected. Gao Fen’s daughter returned at three and a half years, when the child’s paternal grandmother broke her arm and consequently was unable to care for the child. In fact, she had been dissatisfied with her mother-in-law’s care and was struggling with her. Her grandmother’s broken arm became the catalyst that enabled her to make up her mind and have her daughter returned.

Another informant Sue Qing returned to New York with her son after she returned from a visit to China. Sue Qing was a US citizen and took advantage of her status to travel freely
between her homes in New York and Fuzhou. Her travels allowed her to become fully informed about her son and her daughter’s care in China. Moreover, her US citizenship allowed her to make ad hoc decisions based on how she saw events unfolding. During her last visit, she found that her aunt was overwhelmed with taking care of her two children and her aunt’s own daughter. She decided to bring her son back to New York with her. When he returned, he was one month shy from four years old.

In this study, ten informants attempted to regain control of the care of their children and had them back with them in New York before the expected five years. Some emphasized the importance of early age education. Some felt separation and family disintegration was intolerable. Some were disappointed with how the caregivers in China disciplined their children. Still others were frustrated with conflicts between in-laws and caregivers, or they encountered unexpected circumstances.

**Rejecting the Fengsu Practice with Second Children**

Although the cultural expectation was to send second babies to China for childcare, the women in this study acted contrary to this *fengsu*-practice once their firstborn children were permanently returned. Because of the separation from their firstborn children, these mothers suffered intensely. Some mothers experienced traumatic reunion with the firstborn child, who rejected them and cried for going back to their Chinese mama in Fuzhou. The mothers’ painful experiences led them to realize their inseparable mother-infant bonding with their children. When it came to consider the child arrangement of the younger children, they acted on their agency and decided to keep the second child with them.

Moreover, some had problems with childrearing practices or conflicts between in-laws when those babies were in China. They did not want to experiences these troubles and made
themselves discontent again. The children were theirs; the elders could not substitute the birthparents. They wanted to experience the real motherhood and mother their own infants. These factors contributed to their rejection of the practice with their second children.

**Maternal Attachment**

Because of Ta Fu’s emotional struggle over the separation from her first child, she refused to send away her younger daughter to China for childcare. She even refused to allow her daughter to visit China briefly to meet her maternal grandmother, even though the grandmother continually expressed her desire to see the baby girl:

> If my daughter went to China, I would not be able to see her for a long time. I will feel hurt. *No way!* I do not like that. When my older son was not by my side, I felt solitude all the times. I do not want to separate from her. I do not want those kind of feelings…

Ta Fu worked in New Jersey but visited her home in Sunset Park, Brooklyn once a week. When she worked, her mother-in-law helped taking care of her two children. She called home and spoke to her daughter on daily basis. She said, “If I want to see her tonight, I will take a late night bus from NJ and come home. Just half hour…across the bridge, I can go home and see her right away.” She wanted to see her daughter every day. She had been thinking of getting a driver’s license and learning to drive for that sole purpose of seeing her children every day.

Two other informants, Gao Fen and Mei Hoe, also rejected separation from their younger daughters and kept their babies with them after they were born. At the time of the interview, Gao Fen’s oldest daughter had returned to New York for five months, and the new baby was just a month old. She experienced a traumatic reunion with her older daughter, who rejected her birthmother and cried uncontrollably for several weeks upon return. Gao Fen described herself heartbroken and feeling aggrieved by this experience. She did not want to send her second daughter away, although her mother-in-law kept insisting on it. She loved her children very
much, and she wanted to make up the time she had lost with her older child. In addition, she thought she could provide care for both daughters simultaneously. In addition to her strong feelings that she wanted to care for her own children, she rationalized her decision on financial grounds:

Because I was not with my older daughter in the last few years, I want to spend more time with her now. If I care for her, I will not have time to go to work. I think this way – I do not work, I take care of my older daughter and the newborn baby at the same time. If I send the little one and keep the older one here... and return to work, I have to spend money hiring a babysitter to care for the older girl. In fact, I want to be with both of them. If my two children were in two different homes... one in New York that I had to support. In addition, I had to send money to China for my younger daughter’s living expenses.

Mei Hoe made similar remarks, but was willing to accept financial hardship in exchange for having her children with her. In fact, she quit her job and stayed home to care for the son that returned from being abroad in China for a year. She stated she would rather tolerate the financial consequences, so that she could be there to care for her children. “Mothering was my responsibility. I would not send my children away again even though the elders did not have conflict over the care of my son.”

**Experience the Real Motherhood**

Fei Yan felt that she was not a “real mother,” because she had missed the experiences of her first child’s growth and development. Her first child was sent to China at six months. “I had not heard his initial words. I had not seen how he learned to walk.” Although Fai Yan had sent her older son to China without reservations, she never sent her younger son to meet his paternal grandparents. She wanted to experience “real motherhood:”
Luo-erh had never gone to China. I did not want to let him go… (Laughing)… because I had to be a real mother. When a child was young, he possessed the most innocent vivacity… the most lovely moments of the child… we had to experience those moments. I told myself, “My luo-erh, I must raise him by myself. Of course, I will be very tired, because luo-da had just returned. He was just a little older than two years… I still had to care for him. Si-bu-si (isn’t it)?”

Therefore, she wanted to keep her younger child with her no matter how tired she would be taking care of both young children. She hoped that she would experience real motherhood.

**Conclusion**

Fuzhounese immigrant mothers conceded to the fengsu-practice of sending away their children to China hoping that their mei-banfa problems would be resolved because of the separation. Although respondents agreed that the greatest advantage for sending away their children was the convenience to return to work, they felt that the loss of control over their children’s early lives outweighed the gains. Some informants could not stand the separation from their child because they experienced strong maternal attachment. Some mothers were dissatisfied with how caregivers in China disciplined their babies and toddlers, and felt they lost control over their own children. They were afraid that the elders at home would spoil their children. Mothers reported they missed their children’s growth and development, which led them to feel they were not real mothers. Some felt disturbed by negative birthmother-caregiver and caregiver-caregiver dynamics. Challenging their unpleasant circumstances, some mothers attempted to regain control and acted on their own agency to have their child return at their own preferred time instead of the conventional practice of return at school age. Some even insisted on having their younger children remain in the US with them. They were very determined to make these decisions, regardless of their families’ and husband’s disagreement.

Not all the mothers that had their children return at an earlier period encountered critical losses or unpleasant circumstances. Narratives revealed that mothers with higher education were
more assertive in planning to have their children return at an earlier age so they could start schooling in New York. Moreover, a few respondents responded to unexpected circumstances such as grandmother having an injured arm. Then, the mother made up their minds to take control over her child’s care.

All transnational mothers looked forward to reuniting with their own children. Unfortunately, reality could interfere with their desires. Although some mothers brought their children back earlier than they expected, crisis and persistent financial burdens could lead to children staying away longer than the anticipated time. When these children returned to US, they might be older than the other early returnees did. In consequence, they might have more challenges in adjustment to the new environment, parent-child and family relationships, and schooling.
CHAPTER XI: IMPLICATIONS

Summary of the Research Findings

This qualitative study in the phenomenological tradition explored the experiences of transnational motherhood among Chinese immigrant mothers in the US. Through phenomenological analysis, five central themes emerged from the narratives of the respondents. These included “fengsu” and sending American-born babies to home in China; “mei-banfa” and immigrant mothers lack of agency; mothering the sent-away child; maternal attachment and navigating separation; fluidity of sending and returning, and gaining agency. This study found that fengsu-driven migration experiences and migration-derived mei-banfa realities were two interrelated forces that drove these immigrant women to send their young babies to family in China for childcare.

Fengsu, the cultural norm and tradition of the Fuzhou region, drove the young Fuzhounese to migrate to the US. Twelve of the 16 Chinese women interviewed in this study were the first member of their families to come to the US. Many Fuzhounese preferred sending their daughters overseas, believed that they considered them more reliable and willing to sacrifice for their families. Moreover, they expected that their daughter’s future husbands would contribute to the migration debts of their brides.

Most of the informants came to the US through zouxian or smuggling. When these young women left home and set out on their journeys, they never imagined the hardships they would have to endure. Further, they never expected the realities of the fengsu-constructed path in their post-migration life. Their post-migration path started from their arduous work life. Although many new immigrants perceived New York as their post-migration hometown, in the beginning, very few settled inside the City. Because of limited job opportunities in New York City, almost
all informants started working in Chinese restaurants in other states all over the country. They worked long hours in low-paying jobs, where they were socially isolated. They sent virtually all of their earnings to China to pay smuggling debts and to support their families. Even though some respondents came to the US with higher or vocational education prior to their migration, they were not able to find jobs or develop careers that used their prior education and training; they became deskillled.

Fuzhounese pursue the social custom that girls must marry and have children. Because of that, all informants in this study believed that eventually they would have to marry someone. However, after working for several years, many of these immigrant women had past the expected marriageable age. Under family and peer pressures, they married their husbands whom they met in the workplace or through xiangqin or blind dating. Most respondents married the men they barely knew. As Fuzhounese saw marriage and childbearing inseparable fengsu events, many newly wedded women bore their first child right after engagement, based on the principle of shun-qi-ziran. Because of the fengsu, as well as the mei-banfa realities, many expectant mothers were aware that their newborn infants would leave them and go to China.

The practice of sending their children to China was fengsu-driven. In addition, these young Chinese immigrant mothers encountered numerous migration-related mei-banfa (nothing can be done) conditions as they struggled with sending their children to China. Their mei-banfa conditions stemmed from personal, cultural, financial, and environmental complications. Married women had to fulfill the family expectation of their dual roles of production and reproduction. Because of their migration debts and financial difficulties, they had to resume their productive roles and returned to work very soon after they fulfilled their reproductive roles in the family. In this study, some informants reported suffering post-partum depression and mental health
problems after their children were born. Besides, some newborn babies suffered postnatal medical problems. Another problem was that all informants lived in substandard environments. They could not afford to pay for appropriate accommodations for their babies in New York, while working in other states. Without any family support in the US, they conceded to the *mei-banfa* reality, and fell into the practice of sending away their small babies for childcare in China. *Fengsu* intensified by *mei-banfa*, and compelled the new mothers to act against their will to send away their newborns. In this way, the mother lacked agency to achieve the experience of motherhood they desired.

When they realized they were pregnant, these expectant mothers stopped working regardless of their financial obligations for the safety of their unborn babies. They experienced the special kind of maternal-fetus bonding with their unborn children. After the babies were born, the mothers lost themselves in the care of the newborns. This was particularly true for those mothers whose infants were sick. They responded to their babies’ attachment appeals in order to satisfy their physiological, psychological, and developmental needs. They treasured and enjoyed the early motherhood and mother-infant bonding; even though they knew their babies were going to leave to go to China.

All respondents went through a grieving process when their babies left for China; they exhibited various maternal attachment behaviors both before and after separation. The experience of separation from their infant babies left them heartbroken, particularly after the intense infant-mother bonding that occurred during the early weeks of motherhood. The new mothers experienced the attachment reaction of numbness. They were in denial and avoided thoughts about the departure of their infants. However, they had to face the reality of separation when their babies were leaving. They exhibited separation anxiety immediately before and after
they said farewell to their children. Some cried for days and weeks after the immediate separation. They constantly yearned and searched for the images of their sent-away babies. As the mothers preserved the hope that their children would return in a few years, they were able to reorganize their lives and reset their goals to return to work very quickly. In the prolonged period of the maternal-child separation, they adopted different strategies to balance their emotional distress from the separation. They maintained connection and bonding with their children through international phone calls, internet QQ network, exchanging photos and videos, and sending gifts and supplies.

When they reevaluated the costs and benefits of sending their children to China, almost all mothers felt that their gains did not outweigh their losses. The problems that arose from this form of transnational mothering motivated many informants to act to gain agency for their children’s well-being and their own emotional health. Many became determined to have their children returned before the normal five-year absence. Some refused to send away their younger children. However, reality of family crisis, financial difficulties, and at least one INS incident interfered with their wishes, and they had no choice but to leave their children in the care of relatives in China. These circumstances reflected the fluidity of the fengsu-practice of sending infants to China for childcare while the mothers worked until children could attend school.

**Discussion of Research Findings**

Overall, fengsu norms and mei-banfa realities illuminated the fact that Chinese transnational mothers lacked agency in the construction of their own lives. The daughter elected to be the first member to migrate also illustrated the gender inequality in Chinese families. As a daughter and a family member, these women followed family elders’ decisions to go overseas for the collective well-being of the family. As migrant workers, they traversed a predetermined
work path and suffered exploitation and hardship. Those with education or prior employment skills became deskilled, regardless of any prior education or training. Because of the cultural expectation for girls to marry, many eventually married husbands whom they barely knew or loved. As mothers, they were not able to choose their desired experience of motherhood and were unable to watch the early development of their babies as they grew into toddlers.

Respondents’ narratives revealed that the immigrant mothers became more conscious of their lack of agency when they recognized the pain and disappointments of the mother-child separation and shared motherhood with the other mother in China. At that point, their desire to gain control of their children’s care surfaced and in several examples established their own agency despite this wishes of other family members. These mothers demanded the early return of their children to New York City and refused transnational parenting for new babies.

Since there is no literature on theoretical perspectives based on Chinese culture to address the issues of early motherhood, mother-child bonding, and separation, I drew on existing theories as sensitizing concepts in scrutinizing what actually occurs in the mother-child experiences in relation to Chinese immigrant mothers and their satellite babies. These theories included Rubin’s (1984) tasks in the mothering process, Winnicott’s (1960) good enough mother and primary maternal preoccupation, and Bowlby’s (1952, 1980) attachment and separation theories. Existing theories were conceptualized on the basis of Western socio-cultural context in the last century. While applying these concepts and principles to study the phenomenon of transnational mothering among Chinese immigrant mothers, I found that Chinese immigrant mothers’ experiences were surprisingly consistent with Western generated theories of transition to mothering, mother-child bonding, and maternal attachment reactions to care and separation.
In the process of transition to motherhood, the Chinese mothers experienced the major tasks of becoming a mother (Rubin, 1984). These tasks included seeking safe passage for herself and her child through pregnancy, labor, and delivery, binding-in to her unknown child, and learning to give of herself. In terms of giving of themselves to their newborns, they were preoccupied with their American newborns’ care, particularly with the children with special medical needs. They were lost in the care of their infants (Flanagan, 2011), even though they were aware that their babies would leave them and go to the other mother in China. Although some community members have questioned whether Chinese mothers are heartless for sending away their children, this study found that the transnational mothers were not heartless mothers. They did not intend to surrender the mother-child side-by-side motherhood. These immigrant mothers experienced the separation within the cultural and social *fengsu-mei-banfa* context.

These mothers experienced the extreme pain at the separation from their babies and grieved for the loss of their children. In the grieving process, they reacted to the separation with numbness, separation anxiety, yearning and searching for their children’s presence, disorganization, and ultimately reorganization of their life. These maternal separation reactions were compatible with Bowlby’s (1980) framework of grieving process.

In his grieving process framework, Bowlby (1980) had not addressed the parents’ psychological reactions at the time of separation in his framework of grief process. Respondents in this study talked about their intense psychological reactions when their babies departed and they had to hand over their babies to an unrelated or family carrier. Their experience of separation from their newborns in fact left the mothers with indelible memories of pain and sorrow. Their experience while separated from their infants led to unhealable wounds that branded them for life. Even though their children had returned to them for years, at the time of
the interviews they still felt immense pain and guilt while recalling those memories. Transnational mothers rarely talked about their sufferings from post-migration life and mother-child separation in any public or social arena. They had to suppress their feelings, as fengsu-migration and sending their children to China were the norms and ordinarily accepted in the community. It was evident that these interviews represented the first time the mothers ever discussed their feelings and experiences as migrants or transnational mothers with anyone.

**Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy**

In the highly diverse city of New York, social work and human service practitioners often work with immigrant families. In order to serve the immigrant population more effectively, the social work profession has campaigned aggressively for culturally sensitive and competent practice. It is important for social workers to be aware and understand issues that contribute to migration, post-migration life, and the problems immigrants encounter. For example, to understand the Chinese mother’s fengsu migration history, social work practitioners should have a knowledge of their: migration related mei-banfa realities, mothering the sent-away child experiences and how their maternal attachment reactions to separation contributes to the clinical assessment of any Chinese transnational mother or returned child who may be in need of social and mental health services.

The findings in this study indicate that these Chinese immigrant mothers suffered personal, cultural and communal, social and structural disadvantages that deprived them from achieving social well-being. These offer useful insights for social work practitioners and human service program development workers in the Chinese immigrant community. This is particularly significant given the silencing these women expressed to me during the interviews, because some problems may be opaque to people serving these families. First, respondents’ migration was
*fengsu*-driven. They went through arduous migration journeys and post-migration work lives. Many of them had no family and social support during their migration and early work experiences in the US. Because of *fengsu* and *mei-banfa*, they experienced separation from their own children. Arduous immigrant life and separation from their own children significantly affected their psychological and mental health, but most of these Chinese women migrants had never addressed their emotional distress. In this study, all respondents reported feeling depressed at least once post-migration, particularly in their early work lives and after they separated from their children. Only two among the sixteen respondents admitted that they had postpartum depression and used mental health services. One respondent visited a private psychiatrist because of insomnia and suicidal ideation. However, she stopped seeing the psychiatrist after two clinic visits. In another case, some church members of the respondent sent her to psychiatric emergency after she suffered an episode in her church. Subsequently, she received long-term inpatient and outpatient treatment in the community.

Because the Fuzhouhensive community generally accepted *fengsu*-driven migration and sending children to China as part of life, most of these Chinese immigrant women barely talked about their painful experiences to other people. Some were unaware of the impact that resulted from their psychological distress, because they lacked knowledge about mental health or were unaware of mental health resources in the community. Because of their undocumented immigrant status, they did not have medical insurance, and they could not afford self-pay services. In many cases, they denied their problems and attributed their hardships to *fate*. They bore the shame, guilt, and grievances for the separation. They did not use mental health services to address their psychological distress because of the stigma that associated with such services among their co-nationals.
In the community, Chinese transnational mothers’ mental health needs are overlooked. Social service providers are primarily concerned about the effects of the satellite baby phenomenon on the returned children’s educational and psychological development. However, it is likely that the mental health status of the mother affects the adjustment of the child upon return and her relationship with an inevitable unfamiliar child. The transnational mother gave birth to the child, but she did not experience the child’s early development. When she begins to parent this same baby she gave birth to, it is as if she adopted this grown child from her home in China. She had no practical experiences raising her own child.

In this study, some respondents found that their returned children had suffered different developmental issues. However, the mothers were not able detect those problems when the children were in China. Both parents and the other mothers in China did not have sufficient knowledge about early childhood and developmental milestones. It is no wonder informants were upset that their returned children had missed the best chance to obtain early intervention services.

Some community members have commented that human service practitioners had to educate the Chinese immigrant parents not to send their children to China. Such comments disregarded the fengsu norms and the mei-banfa realities of the immigrant community. I question whether the fengsu practice, of sending their children to China, is the only solution for these women’s mei-banfa reality. Are there any other alternatives to resolve their migration related mei-banfa problems? Will the increase of childcare services or implementation of the universal pre-kindergarten program help immigrant parents of US born children keep their babies in the US? Many Chinese immigrants perceived New York as their post-migration home city where they could access to health, legal, social, and education services in Chinese languages. If Chinese
mothers keep their children in the US, do they still travel to work outside New York in order to earn more money and pay off their debts quickly? Is the New York job market able to absorb the huge labor force of these immigrant mothers? Do the children have to grow up in the congested Chinese neighborhoods and accommodate in chicken-cage like rental rooms with their parents. In New York, the number of children born to Chinese-born mothers continues to increase every year. An increase in childcare service and the universal pre-kindergarten program may help address the needs of these families, to a limited extent.

Recommendations for Culturally Sensitive Practice and Social Advocacy

This dissertation raised questions about what social service practitioners and community organizations have to provide to ameliorate the psychological impact on the transnational mothers, the sent away child, and the immigrant family as an integral entity. Although social service providers in the New York Chinese community have repeatedly discussed the satellite baby phenomenon and its impacts, community agencies and leaders act improvidently in response to the needs of these transnational parents and the sent-away children. Very few agencies have mobilized resources to implement sensitive programs to meet the specific needs of transnational families. There are limited services to address the psychological and behavioral issues of the returned children in the community, but these services are remedial and inadequate to meet the existing needs.

Because of the cultural norm of silencing emotional distress, Chinese immigrant mothers were passive in seeking help. I advocate the community to be proactive in developing sensitive programs and implementing outreach services to address the mental health needs of the transnational mothers, to help preparing the return of the sent-away children, to assist the returned children to re-establish relationships with their birthparents (and possible siblings), and
to get the returned children ready in the public school system. I recommend that human service agencies in the Chinese community work closely with each other to advocate and develop new resources to serve the low-income immigrant families. I believe that abundant resources for new programs and services are still unknown to the community.

I also recommend that community organizations, childcare and preschool programs consider implementation of supportive programs for the families with returned children. They should include preparatory groups for the returnees, parent education, and counseling prior to the child’s return, parenting training and workshops, multi-family support groups, mental well-being groups and community resources training for immigrants.

From my experience working with schoolchildren having special needs, many returned children exhibited adjustment and behavioral problems in the structured classroom settings. Schoolteachers frequently reported that these returned children did not follow instructions and classroom rules, and they tended to act their own ways. However, almost all returnees did not understand English, which made it difficult for them to follow class instruction and the curriculum. They might lose interests in learning and fidget. Many teachers quickly diagnosed the children as having attention deficit and hyperactive disorder or learning disabilities. Without adequate knowledge about the children’s psychosocial development in China, the teachers and community educators could misunderstand or misinterpret their problems and educational service needs. They were unable to provide the appropriate support or interventions for the children to become effective learners. Because of that, I recommend that school social workers help schoolteachers who work with returnees and their parents to become familiar with the lives of Chinese immigrant families and become sensitive to the psychosocial development needs of the child returned from China.
On the other hand, I recommend social service and health care agencies carry out extensive education programs and outreach to the community through news and broadcasting media, community forums, websites and brochures. Education materials should be printed in Chinese. Contents of education materials should include family planning and maternal health, considerations for preparing and planning to send your child to China, mental health well beings of immigrants, child developmental milestones and developmental issues, early intervention programs, preparing for your child’s return, parenting your unfamiliar child, parents’ right of schoolchildren in public school system and special education services.

**Implication for Future Research**

Social service providers and educators in the community have long recognized the social phenomenon of sending American born children to China for childcare and its impact on the Chinese immigrant families. However, there has been very limited research conducted about patterns of transnational parenting among Chinese immigrant families. The few previous studies focused primarily on the practical reasons for sending away the child and the risks factors on the development of the returned child. This exploratory study attempted to fill the knowledge gap from the birth mother’s perspective of sending away her own child. The phenomenological qualitative approach of this study had explicated the essence of Chinese transnational mothers’ experience on mothering the sent-away child and maternal attachment reactions towards separation. Moreover, the findings discovered that the underlying forces for sending the children to China were defined in socio-economic-cultural context of *fengsu* norms and *mei-banfa* reality.

In my dissertation, I did not present findings regarding reunification between the birthmother and the returned child. In fact, respondents had talked about their reunion experience with their returned children. Some of them had very traumatic experiences upon their children’s
return, but most mothers reported that they had re-established relationships with their children within few months after the children’s return. All returned children gradually forgot their *Chinese mama* and their early lives in China. When they were asked if they wanted to return to China, they expressed that they wanted to be with their birthmothers. They were only willing to visit China with the presence of their parents. They wanted to insure that their mother would bring them back to the US after the visits. Immigrant mothers believed that the birthmother-child connection was a natural human instinct. Their narratives revealed that reunification was not a state in temporal context, but a dynamic process from disappointment to resilience. I recommend further research to explore the risk and protective factors occurred in the process of reunification and resilience in addition to studies from the perspective of the children.

This study provides the basis for future research on the phenomenon of Chinese mothers sending American-born children to China for childcare. The phenomenon is multifaceted and there are still knowledge gaps to be filled. Suggested future research includes studies of the long-term impact on the relationships within transnational families, long-term impacts on the academic achievement and career path of the sent-away children, similarities and differences on family relationships, and comparisons of academic performance between sent-away and stayed children.

In reality, some Chinese immigrant parents keep their American-born children in New York. However, they are not the primary caregivers of the children. In some cases, these parents have family members or relatives residing in the US. Therefore, the parents designate their family and relative in New York to take care of their children. Primary caregivers of the children who remain in New York may be grandparents or other extended family members. On some occasions, grandparents or the relatives take care of several children of different parents. When
the children stay and attend schools in New York, their parents continue working in other states all over the country. They visit their children periodically, once a week or once in a few months. Other than sending children to China for childcare, the practice of designated caregiver and the collective childcare by grandparents or relatives are other phenomena that the community has recognized. Future research genre should consider these alternative types of childcare arrangements and their effects on the Chinese immigrant families.
Table 1

*U.S. Immigration Policies and the History of Chinese Immigration to the US*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Immigration Laws and Litigation</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>History of Chinese Immigration</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese laborers came to work in Hawaiian sugar cane fields. Chinese peddlers recorded in New York City (Johnson, 2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td></td>
<td>California gold rush attracts Chinese prospectors (Johnson, 2002).</td>
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<td>1850</td>
<td></td>
<td>California imposes tax on foreign miners, targeting Chinese (Johnson, 2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>The “Anti-Coolie” Act</td>
<td>This Act discourages Chinese immigration to California and institute special taxes on employers who hire Chinese workers (Harvard University, 2015).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Completion of Transcontinental Railroad</td>
<td>Chinese immigrants were responsible for laying down the tracks for the Western railways of the Transcontinental Railroad (Lee, 1966; Lee &amp; Mock, 2005). Many Chinese workers lost their jobs after the completion of the railroad. They started to move to other regions of the US (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution</td>
<td>The amendment guaranteed that all persons born or naturalized in the US and subject to its jurisdiction were citizens of the US and that no state could abridge their rights without due process or deny them equal protection of the law (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>The Naturalization Act</td>
<td>This Act expanded citizenship to both Whites and African-Americans, although Asians were still excluded (Harvard University, 2015).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Immigration Act</td>
<td>The law barred prostitutes and criminals from migrating the US (Tichenor, 2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Page Law</td>
<td>While the stated purpose of the Law was to prevent Chinese prostitutes from entering the US, it actually aimed at excluding Chinese women (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td></td>
<td>American workers were unhappy competing with cheap Chinese labors, and were fearful of being “overwhelmed” by non-White immigration. Anti-Chinese riots in San Francisco and other California cities broke out (Johnson, 2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Ah Yup case, District of California Courts</td>
<td>Court rules Chinese not eligible for naturalized citizenship (Johnson, 2002).</td>
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<td>1880</td>
<td></td>
<td>US successfully amended the Burlingame Treaty, winning the right to limit or suspend Chinese immigration (Johnson, 2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Immigration Act</td>
<td>This Act banned the immigration of paupers, convicts, mental defectives and persons likely to become public charges (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999; Martin, 2014). It also levied a head tax of fifty cents on each immigrant (Smith, 1998.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Chinese Exclusion Act</td>
<td>This Act prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years (later reenacted and extended in 1892 and 1904) and denied Chinese eligibility for US citizenship (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>The Alien Contract Labor Law</td>
<td>The law prohibited any company or individual from prepaying passage and bringing foreigners into the US under contract to perform labor (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999; Harvard University, 2015). The only exceptions were those immigrants brought to perform domestic service and skilled workers needed to help establish a new trade or industry in the US (Smith, 1998).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td><em>Yick Wo v. Hopkins</em></td>
<td>U.S. Supreme Court decision overturned a San Francisco ordinance against Chinese laundry workers as discriminatory and unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment protections prohibiting state and local governments from depriving any person (even non-citizens) of life, liberty, or property without due process (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Scott Act</td>
<td>Congress expanded the Chinese Exclusion Act by rescinding reentry permits for Chinese laborers and prohibited their return (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<td>1889</td>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. Supreme Court upholds constitutionality of Chinese exclusion laws (Johnson, 2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>The Geary Act</td>
<td>This Act extended the Chinese Exclusion Act for ten years and added the requirement that all Chinese residents carry permits and excluded them from serving as witnesses in court and from bail in habeas corpus proceedings (Harvard University, 2015).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td><em>Fong Yu Ting v. US</em></td>
<td>U.S. Supreme Court declared that executive officers may exercise the power of Congress to expel aliens from the country (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
<td>Chinese community raised money to bring this case before the Court to test the Geary Act (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Extension of Chinese Exclusion Act</td>
<td>Immigration officers authorized to ban the entry of certain aliens, including Chinese (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Gresham-Yang Treaty</td>
<td>China accepted total prohibition of immigration to the US in return for readmission of those back in China or a visit. This showed the enforcement of the Scott Act of 1888 (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td></td>
<td>Congress excluded Chinese laborers from Hawaii coming to the US (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td><em>United States Vs. Wong, Kim Ark</em></td>
<td>The Supreme Court ruled that a native-born person of Chinese descent was indeed a citizen of the U.S. despite the fact that his or her parents may have been resident aliens ineligible for naturalization (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td><em>US v. Mrs. Cue Lim</em></td>
<td>The Supreme Court ruled wives and children of treaty merchants were entitled to come to the US (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<td>1902</td>
<td>Renewal of the Chinese Exclusion Act</td>
<td>The act was renewed for another 10 years (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<td>1906</td>
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<td>San Francisco earthquake and fire Records of Citizens and Visitors lost, which provided opportunities for the “paper son” later (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1909</td>
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<td>The Boxer Rebellion Indemnity Scholarship Program was funded by Boxer Rebellion indemnity money to the US. The scholarship provided for Chinese students to study in the US. Approximately 1,300 students were able to study through the program from 1909 to 1929 (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<td>1914-1918</td>
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<td>Some Chinese Americans served in the US Armed Forces in WW I (US Army, 2010).</td>
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<td>1917</td>
<td>Asiatic Barred Zone Act</td>
<td>This law extended the Chinese Exclusion Act barring from admission anyone born in what Congress calls the “Asiatic barred zone,” which included most of the continent and the Pacific (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010). This law also included a literacy test for all immigrants (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>First Quota Act</td>
<td>The National Origin System used the country of birth to determine whether an individual could enter as a legal alien. The quota principle is set based on 3% of the foreign-born population in 1910. This act also was the basis of the immigration system up to 1965 (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999; Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>National Origins Act (also Johnson-Reed Act)</td>
<td>This Act set an annual limit of 150,000 on immigrants from outside the Western Hemisphere and then divided the 150,000 into quotas based on a country’s share of the total population in 1920 (Mills, 1994). The Act barred the admission of most Asians - who were classified as aliens ineligible for citizenship (LeMay and Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Oriental Exclusion Act</td>
<td>This Act prohibited most immigration from Asia, including foreign-born wives and the children of American citizens of Chinese ancestry (Harvard University, 2011).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td><em>Cheung Sumchee v. Nagle</em></td>
<td>U.S. Supreme Court ruled 1924 Immigration Act did not apply to treaty merchants’ wives or children (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>National Origins Act</td>
<td>President Hoover proclaimed new and permanent quotas and based the national origin quotas on the proportion of Eastern Hemisphere nationalities in the total population as determined by the 1920 census, with the total to be admitted lowered to just over 150,000 (LeMay and Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td></td>
<td>Congress passed an act providing for admission of Chinese wives who were married to American citizens (Chinese merchants) before May 26, 1924 (Chang, 2003).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Public Law 162</td>
<td>This law granted 500 Asian veterans who served in the US Armed Forces during WWI the right to apply for United States citizenship through naturalization (US-Asians, 2015).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943-1944</td>
<td>The Magnuson Act</td>
<td>Congress, in recognition of the alliance with China in the war against Japan, repeals the Chinese Exclusion Acts and authorizes a small quota and the naturalization rights of Chinese residents (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
<td>105 Chinese immigrants allowed entering the US annually, selected by US the government (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999; Dong &amp; Hu, 2010). 5,000 Chinese refugees enter the US (Johnson, 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Amendment of War Brides Act</td>
<td>The Act allowed Chinese-American veterans to bring brides into the US (Chang, 2003).</td>
<td>Anti-communist McCarthyism started in the US. Many Chinese were then viewed as communist after 1949, when the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established and the community party ruled (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Displaced Persons Act</td>
<td>This Act began a process of modifying the quota law by enacting exceptions to enable a greater number of immigrants to come to the US (Smith, 1998).</td>
<td>The US allows 15,000 Chinese who were unable to return to China due to civil war to change their status in the US, expired in 1954 (Chan, 1991).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td></td>
<td>The People’s Republic of China was established. The US terminated the diplomatic relations with the newly formed communist government (Chan, 1991).</td>
<td>500 highly educated Chinese citizens living in the US were granted refugee status (Chan, 1991). 5000 refugees enter the US (Johnson, 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1964</td>
<td></td>
<td>War brides and young children admitted to the US were exempted from quotas (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>The Walter-McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act</td>
<td>This Act repealed the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924 and allowed a small number of Asians to immigrate to the US with right of citizenship (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010). This Act re-codified immigration and naturalization law, maintained the quota system, set up a quota for the Asia-Pacific triangle, and removed all racial and national origin barriers to US citizenship (LeMay and Barkan, 1999). It revised the national origins quota system and tied it to the composition of the US as recorded in the census of 1920 (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>The President’s Commission on Immigration and naturalization issues its report: Whom Shall We Welcome?</td>
<td>The report called for an end to the quota system. Its recommendations became the basis for many of the reforms and amendments to the 1952 Act passed in 1965 and thereafter (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Refugee Relief Act</td>
<td>This Act contributed to the growing awareness in Congress that the quotas were too rigid. It allowed for “non-quota” immigration based on “refugee” status rather than national origin quotas (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
<td>2000 places allotted to Chinese out of total 205,000 people to be admitted to the US. The law expired in 1956 (CAS, 2011). 2,777 refugees of the Chinese Civil War entered the US (Wong, 1995).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Refugee Escape Act</td>
<td>This Act extended unused allotments of 1953 Act (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
<td>This act benefited over 2,000 Chinese (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Amendment of the Immigration and Nationality Act 1952</td>
<td>The Act provided for unmarried sons and daughters of US citizens to enter as non-quota immigrants (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td></td>
<td>Congress passes an Act to assist the resettlement of refugees from communist countries who had been paroled by the Attorney General (mostly Cuban) (LeMay &amp; Barken, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>President’s Directive</td>
<td>Refugees from PRC who stayed in Hong Kong allowed to enter the US immediately as “parolees” (Wong, 1995).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962-1965</td>
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<td>Attorney General allowed 15,000 Chinese to enter as parolees due to refugee situation in Hong Kong (Wong, 1995).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964-1965</td>
<td>Termination of Bracero Program</td>
<td>A type of guest-worker program began in 1942 and ended in 1964. Many Mexicans were allowed to work for nine months in a year for US employers to fill the severe agricultural labor shortage first created in the period of World War II. Millions of US workers left the farms for higher-wage wartime production jobs in the nation’s metropolitan areas. Also, many workers left to serve in the U.S. Army. The expansion of the US economy after the war continued the need for the program (LeMay, 2007).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Immigration and Naturalization Act (Also Hart-Cellar Act)</td>
<td>This Act amended the 1952 Act and ended the quota system. It established a preference system stressing family reunification and meeting certain job skill goals, standardizing admission procedures, and setting per country limits of 20,000 for Eastern Hemisphere nations, with a total of 170,000. It established the first ceiling on Western Hemisphere immigration (120,000) (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999). The Act ended the policy of admitting immigrants according to a hierarchy of racial desirability. It established the principle of formal equality in immigration (Ngai, 2004). The seven preferences were: 1. Unmarried children of US citizens; 2. Spouses and unmarried children of permanent resident aliens; 3. Members of the professionals and scientists and artists of exceptional ability; 4. Married children of US citizens; 5. Siblings of US citizens; 6. Skilled and unskilled workers in short supply; 7. Refugees (Chang-Muy, 2009).</td>
<td>This Act increased the possibilities for migration for peoples from Eastern and Southern Europe and from Asia. This Act allowed the admission of 20,000 immigrants per year from China (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<td>1979-1980</td>
<td>Re-establishment of diplomatic relationships between US and China. US broke diplomatic relations with the Republic of China.</td>
<td>Immigration from China increased. (Johnson, 2002). The Taiwan Relations Act gave Taiwan a separate immigration quota of 20,000 from that of mainland China (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy Report (SCIRP) issued</td>
<td>The report stressed that the nation’s first priority was to bring undocumented immigration under control. It recommended closing the “back door” to undocumented immigration while slightly opening the front door to accommodate more legal immigration. It advocated establishing a rational system of legal immigration recommending modest increase to expedite the clearance of the huge backlogs and to ease family reunification pressure. However, the SCIRP also legitimized the duality of the employer-sanction/legalization approaches (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<td>Its recommendations form the basis for subsequent reforms of immigration law, especially those enacted by Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 (LeMay and Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)</td>
<td>This Act established “employer sanctions” for employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers and set up amnesty program granting legalization to over one and one-half million undocumented migrants and over one million special agricultural workers then in the country (LeMay and Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Congress passed a major reform laws concerning legal immigration, setting new ceilings for worldwide immigration, redefining the preference system for family reunification and employment, and establishing a new category of preference called “diversity immigrants.” It set up a Commission on Legal Immigration Reform. It enacted special provisions concerned with Central American refugees, Filipino veterans, and persons seeking to leave Hong Kong. Significant changes were also introduced with respect to naturalization procedures (LeMay &amp; Barkan, 1999).</td>
<td>Nearly 5 million immigrants arrived from Asian countries (Johnson, 2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Immigration Act</td>
<td>The Act defines Hong Kong as an independent area with an immigration quota of 5,000 annually following the handover of Hong Kong to China (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Chinese Student Protection Act</td>
<td>Sponsored by U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi, the Act granted permanent residency to all Chinese nationals who arrived in the US on or before April 11, 1990.</td>
<td>This bill benefitted approximately 80,000 Chinese (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>The immigration of an adopted child was considered family reunion and was not subject to quota restrictions (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
<td>China officially allowed foreigners to adopt the abandoned babies, when China instituted its first Adoption Law, most abandoned girls, victims of China’s “one child policy” (Dong &amp; Hu, 2010).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>California Proposition 187</td>
<td>Proposition 187 was officially entitled the “Save Our State Initiative”. The measure required state and local agencies to report to the INS any persons suspected of being illegal. In addition, undocumented aliens were prevented from receiving benefits or public services in California (LeMay, 2007).</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act</td>
<td>This Act had two measures that were adopted into national law and policy provisions of Proposition 187. This Act cuts off SSI benefits and food stamps for non-citizens who came after 8/22/1996 and had not worked for at least ten years (LeMay and Barkan, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA)</td>
<td>This Act authorized expansion of the Border Patrol and INS agents and procedures to investigate and prosecute various aspects of immigration smuggling, authorize a border fence in San Diego, cracks down on document fraud and on illegal voting, reforms some detention and deportation procedures, establishes an employment verification program, and strictly limited public benefits to both legal and illegal immigrants. It also limited the ability of the INS to use of detainees to facilitate mass immigration (LeMay and Barkan, 1999).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Immigration Laws and Litigation</td>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>History of Chinese Immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Amendments to IIRIRA Section 601(a) and Section 101 (a) (42)</td>
<td>The Act addressed the persecution of Chinese nationals under the one-child family policy. Those Chinese who could prove they have directly suffered from an act, attempt, or had a fear of forced abortion or sterilization could make a claim of persecution because of political opinion (Edstrom, 2009, p.155).</td>
<td>With these new provisions, people from the Greater Fuzhou region obtain asylum and they subsequently petitioned their families to come to the US for reunification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Human Rights Restoration Act</td>
<td>This Act granted political asylum to a maximum of 1,000 people who can prove their home countries forced abortions or sterilization as a result of population control program (Smith, 1998).</td>
<td>Again, those from the Greater Fuzhou region obtained asylum and they subsequently petitioned their families to come to the US for reunification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-present</td>
<td>Comprehensive Immigration Reform</td>
<td>There are prolonged debates between pro-legalization and pro-restrictionist forces. Consequent to the failure of passive new immigration reforms on the federal level, increasing anti-immigrant sentiments are entrenched in some local and state governments. Thousands of immigration bills have been introduced and enacted in the 50 state legislatures in the last decade.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age of Arrival in US</th>
<th>Years in US</th>
<th>Community Type in China</th>
<th>Family in US at Arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Ai Yan</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bei Le</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Cai Lan</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 De Gui</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Fei Yin</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Gao Fen</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Hui Yue</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Lei Min</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Parents and Brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Mei Hoe</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Oi Jie</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Father and Siblings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Continued

*Demographic Characteristics of Informants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age of Arrival in US</th>
<th>Years in US</th>
<th>Community Type in China</th>
<th>Family in US at Arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Pei Jin</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rural/Suburban</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Rui Na</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Sue Qing</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rural/Urbnae</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Ta Fu</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rural/Urbnae</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Xi Lian</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rural/Urbnae</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Yiu Qin</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Rural/Urbnae</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

*Education and Work Histories of Informants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Pre-Migration Education</th>
<th>Chinese Work History</th>
<th>First US Job</th>
<th>Location of US Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ai Yan</td>
<td>Vocational High School in Foreign Trade</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>Outside of NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bei Le</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Electrical Engineer</td>
<td>Take-out Restaurant</td>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cai Lan</td>
<td>Junior high</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Take-out Restaurant</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Gui</td>
<td>High School, Certified Accountant</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Take-out Restaurant</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fei Yin</td>
<td>Vocational High School in Tourism</td>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>Take-out Restaurant</td>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gao Fen</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Busgirl</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hui Yue</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lei Min</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>Clothing Sales</td>
<td>Chinese Fast-food</td>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei Hoe</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Buffet Restaurant</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oi Jie</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Take-out Restaurant</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 Continued

*Education and Work Histories of Informants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Pre-Migration Education</th>
<th>Chinese Work History</th>
<th>First US Job</th>
<th>Location of US Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pei Jin</td>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Buffet Restaurant</td>
<td>Outside of NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rui Na</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Dish Washing</td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue Qing</td>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>Family Business</td>
<td>Meat Packing</td>
<td>Outside of NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta Fu</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Supermarket Sales</td>
<td>Busgirl</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xi Lian</td>
<td>Vocational High School Hotel</td>
<td>Hotel Marketing</td>
<td>Busgirl</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiu Qin</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>Cosmetic Sales</td>
<td>Buffet Restaurant</td>
<td>Chicago/Ohio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Family Characteristics of Informants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Age at Marriage</th>
<th>How Participant Met Spouse</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Number of Children Sent to China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Ai Yan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Blind Date</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Bei Le</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Blind Date</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Cai Lan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Former Schoolmate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  De Gui</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Co-worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Fei Yin</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Boyfriend in China</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Gao Fen</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Co-worker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Hui Yue</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Brother of Schoolmate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Lei Min</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Boyfriend in China</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Mei Hoe</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Blind Date</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Oi Jie</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Married in China</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Pei Jin</td>
<td>D.O.B. 2007</td>
<td>Blind Date</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 Continued

*Family Characteristics of Informants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Age at Marriage</th>
<th>How Participant Met Spouse</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Number of Children Sent to China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Rui Na</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>Married in China</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (in addition, one child was born and raised in China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Sue Qing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Boyfriend in China</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Ta Fu</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Meet at Workplace</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Xi Lian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Blind Date</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Yiu Qin</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Blind Date</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of Participants</td>
<td>Age Sent</td>
<td>Age Returned</td>
<td>Length of Stay in China</td>
<td>Child Carrier to China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AY1</td>
<td>6M</td>
<td>4Y, 9M</td>
<td>Interrupted Stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AY2</td>
<td>4M</td>
<td>2.5Y</td>
<td>Interrupted Stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BL1</td>
<td>4M</td>
<td>7Y</td>
<td>6.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>BL2</td>
<td>2M</td>
<td>5Y</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>BL3</td>
<td>4M</td>
<td>Not returned</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td>4M</td>
<td>6Y</td>
<td>5.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>DG</td>
<td>4M</td>
<td>3.5Y</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>FY1</td>
<td>6M</td>
<td>2Y, 8M</td>
<td>2 years, 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>FY2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>GF1</td>
<td>3M</td>
<td>3.5Y</td>
<td>3 years, 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>GF2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children of Participants</th>
<th>Age Sent</th>
<th>Age Returned</th>
<th>Length of Stay in China</th>
<th>Child Carrier to China</th>
<th>Caregivers in China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HY1</td>
<td>3M</td>
<td>2.5Y</td>
<td>Interrupted Stay</td>
<td>Maternal Grandmother</td>
<td>Maternal Grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HY2</td>
<td>2M</td>
<td>Not Returned</td>
<td>Interrupted Stay</td>
<td>Maternal Grandmother</td>
<td>Maternal Grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM1</td>
<td>3M</td>
<td>6Y</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Paid Carrier</td>
<td>Paternal Grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM2</td>
<td>3M</td>
<td>5Y</td>
<td>4 years, 9 months</td>
<td>Paid Carrier</td>
<td>Paternal Grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH1</td>
<td>11M</td>
<td>2Y</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Church member</td>
<td>Maternal Grandmother and Paternal Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not sent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OJ1</td>
<td>4M</td>
<td>5Y</td>
<td>4 years, 8 months</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>Paternal Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OJ2</td>
<td>4M</td>
<td>5Y</td>
<td>4 years, 8 months</td>
<td>Birthmother</td>
<td>Paternal Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PJ1</td>
<td>5M</td>
<td>4.5Y</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paternal Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Born and Raised in China</td>
<td>Paternal Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN2</td>
<td>7M</td>
<td>4.5Y</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Paid Carrier</td>
<td>Paternal Aunt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5 Continued

*Child Care Arrangements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children of Participants</th>
<th>Age Sent</th>
<th>Age Returned</th>
<th>Length of Stay in China</th>
<th>Child Carrier to China</th>
<th>Caregivers in China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23 SQ1</td>
<td>5M</td>
<td>4Y</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>Birthmother</td>
<td>Maternal Grandaunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 SQ2</td>
<td>5M</td>
<td>Not returned</td>
<td>Birthmother</td>
<td>Maternal Grandaunt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 TF1</td>
<td>3M</td>
<td>2Y</td>
<td>1 year, 9 months</td>
<td>Paternal Grandmother</td>
<td>Maternal Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 TF2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not sent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 XL1</td>
<td>1Y</td>
<td>5.5Y</td>
<td>4.5 years</td>
<td>Paid Carrier</td>
<td>Paternal Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 XL2</td>
<td>7M</td>
<td>1.5Y</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Paid Carrier</td>
<td>Paternal Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 YQ1</td>
<td>5M</td>
<td>6Y</td>
<td>5.5 years</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>Paternal Grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 YQ2</td>
<td>5M</td>
<td>4Y</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>Paternal Grandparents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer (English)

Has your American-born child been cared for by your family in Fuzhou? Would you like to participate in a research study about mothers who have babies cared for in China?

What is the purpose of the study?
To learn more about the experiences of mothers in New York who have infant children lived with relatives in China.

What do participants have to do?
The researcher will ask you to participate in a 90-minute interview.

Who can participate?
- Mandarin-speaking mothers between 18 and 45 years old
- With an American-born infant who
  - has lived in the Fujian-Fuzhou region
  - was cared for by a member of your family
  - returned to you within the last 6 years

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact the principal investigator Kitching Wong at (646) 217-8728 for more information. Kitching Wong is a doctoral student in the Ph.D. Program in Social Welfare at the City University of New York.
Appendix A:
Recruitment Flyer (Chinese)

你是否曾有小孩被抱回中国福州生活？
你是否愿意参与一项有关送小孩回国哺育的研究调查？

这项研究的目的是什么？
研究的目的是要更多了解有婴孩曾在中国和亲属一起生活的纽约移民母亲的经验。

参加者需要做什么？
研究员会邀请你参加一项约九十分钟的面谈。

谁人可以参与？
- 能说流利的普通话，年龄在十八至四十五岁之间的母亲。
- 你在美国出生的婴孩，在出生后
  - 被抱回中国福建省福州地区居住
  - 曾由你的家人或亲属哺育
- 在过去六年内返回美国与你居住。

如果你有兴趣参与这项研究或想获知更详细的资料，
请致电(646) XXX-XXXX与负责该项目的研究员黄洁贞联络。

黄小姐是纽约市立大学社会福利学系博士研究生。
Appendix B:
Response to Phone Contacts and Eligibility Questions

- (Speaking in Mandarin) Thank you for responding to my flyer regarding participation in my research project.

- (If the respondent does not speak Mandarin) Thank you for your time, but you are not eligible to participate in my study.

- It is my understanding that you are an immigrant mother between the ages of 18 to 45. Your infant child was sent to your hometown in Fujian Province and was taken care of by your family in China. S/he returned in the last 6 years and now lives with you. Am I correct about all these things?

- If “no”: Thank you for your time, but you are not eligible to participate in my study.

- If “yes”: I am performing a study on ‘transnational parenting.’ The reason I am conducting this study is to understand the experiences of mother like you who were separated from an infant child and then reunited with her/him. If you choose to participate, I will conduct a 90-minute in-person interview at a mutually agreed upon location. The interview will be audio-taped with your permission. I will transcribe the tapes and translate them into English for analysis. The transcriptions will contain no identifying information, so all interviews will be kept confidential. This is a voluntary study—that means you do not have to participate if you don’t want to. Also, I will take steps to ensure the confidentiality of what mothers tell me.

- If you are interested in participating, can we figure out a time and a place to conduct the interview? Since talking about your baby may raise your emotions, take that into consideration when you decide where we should meet to have the interview.

- If you become unable to participate or you change your mind, please contact me at (646) XXX-XXXX. If you have any acquaintances who may be interested in participating, I will give you a copy of the flier for you to give them if they want to contact me.

- Do you still have any questions regarding the project? Thank you for agreeing to participate.
Appendix B:
Response to Phone Contacts and Eligibility Questions (Chinese)

- (說普通話) 謝謝你回應我那份有關參予一項調查研究的傳單。

- (如果回覆者不會說普通話) 謝謝你的時間，但你不合乎參予該項研究的條件。

- 按照我的理解，你是一名年齡在18至45歲之間的移民母親，你的幼兒在出生後，被送回你家鄉福建省福州市地區，由你在中國的家人哺育，他在過去六年內返回美國與你居住。請問這都是正確的嗎？

- 如果答案是「否」：謝謝你的時間，但你不合乎參予該項研究的條件。

- 如果答案是「是」：我正在進行一項有關「誇國育兒」的研究。進行這項研究的原因是要了解你和其他與你有相同經驗的母親們，跟幼兒分開及重聚的經驗。如果你選擇參予該項研究，我將會與你約定，在一個互相同意的地點，進行一個九十分鐘的個人訪談。訪談內容將會在你同意的情況下被錄音。我將會把訪談內容按原本抄錄下來，然後再翻譯成英文，以待分析。抄錄本上，並不會載有任何識別參予者身分的資料，所有訪談內容將會保密。這是一項志願參予的研究——意思是如果你不想參予，你可以不用參予，再者，我將採取必須程序，確定所有參予的母親講述的內容得到保密。

- 如果你有興趣參予，我們可以現在就約定時間地點進行面談嗎？由於在談論你嬰孩的時候，會有可能引起你的情緒不安，所以，當你要決定在那裡進行面談時，你要考慮這一點。

- 如果你因某種原因或改變主意不能參予該項研究，請致电(646) 217-8728與我聯絡。如果你認識的朋友中，有其地人士對這項研究感興趣的，我會給你一份傳單，請轉交你的朋友。如果她們願意參予這項研究，請他們與我聯絡。

- 請問你對這項研究還有其他問題嗎？謝謝你同意參予這項研究。
Appendix C: Interview Guide (English)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study and to share your experiences of having your infant cared for by your family in China. I appreciate that you are willing to speak with me about your thoughts and feelings and to the circumstances of your experiences.

Through your participation, I hope to understand what early motherhood, separation and reunification with your young child meant to you. In this interview, I will ask you to tell me about your early maternal experiences, decisions for sending your infant to China, your life in the US without your child, your perceptions of your child’s life in China, connections between you and your child, and what happened when your child came back to live with you in the US. I value the unique contribution that you can make to my study.

During the interview, you are free to refuse to answer any questions or stop at any time.

Questions

1. What led you to migrate to the US? Tell me about your experiences when you first arrived.
2. What was it like when you learned you were pregnant? What was it like to have a new baby?
3. What went into your decision to send your baby to your family in China?
4. What happened when your infant left you for China?
5. How was your life in the US when your young child lived in China? What did you do while your baby was in China?
6. How was your child’s life in China? How did you learn about what was going on in his or her life? How did you stay in touch?
7. What happened when your child left China and returned to the US?
8. How did you feel when your child returned to live with you in the US? How do you think your child felt coming back to live with you? How did he or she behave?
9. How is your child’s relationship with you now?
10. How is your child getting along since he or she returned?
11. What do you think of your experience having your child raised by your family in China?
   What do you imagine it would be like if you have never sent your child to China?

Today, we have talked about the subjects that concern my research study. Before we end the interview, is there anything else you want to tell me about your experiences having your baby in China and your reunion with the child?

Thanks very much.
謝謝你同意參加我的研究，分享你的經驗。我很感謝你願意告訴我你的想法和感受，並與你的經驗有關的詳細情況。

通過你的參與，我希望可以了解你初為人母、與你小孩分隔兩地及團聚等經驗對你有什麼意義。在這個面談裡，我會請你告訴我有關你哺育初生嬰兒的經驗、送小孩回中國的決定、小孩不在時你在美國的生活狀況、你對你孩子在中國生活情況的瞭解、你與你孩子的聯繫，及小孩返回美國和你住在一起的情況。我很重視你對我的研究所提供的獨有的資訊。

面談中，你有自由拒絕回答任何問題或終止面談。

問題

1. 什麼原因使你移民來美國？請告訴我你剛到美國的經驗。
2. 當你知道你懷孕時，那是怎樣的？有了一個新生嬰孩是怎樣的？
3. 什麼原因讓你決定送你的小孩往中國你家裡去？
4. 當你的嬰孩離開你往中國去，情況是怎樣的？
5. 當你的幼兒住在中國時，你在美的生活是怎樣的？ 當你的嬰孩在中國，你做些什麼事情？
6. 你孩子在中國的生活是怎樣的？ 你如何獲知他/她的生活裡有些什麼事情？
   你如何(與他/她)保持聯絡？
7. 當你的孩子離開中國，返回美國，情況是怎樣的？
8. 當你的孩子回來美國和你住在一起，你感覺怎麼樣？ 你認為你孩子回來和你住在一起，(他/她)的感覺是怎樣的？他/她的行為表現如何？
9. 當你的孩子離開中國，返回美國，情況是怎樣的？
10. 自從他/她回來以後，你孩子的生活過得怎麼樣？
11. 你對你小孩在香港由你家人哺育的經驗，有什麼想法？如果你從來沒有把小孩送往中國，你想像這又會是怎樣的？

今天，我們已談了與我的研究相關的話題。在我們結束這個面談之前，你還有什麼關於你小孩在中國由你家人照顧和與你團聚的經驗要告訴我呢？

非常謝謝！
Attachment D:
Informed Consent Form for Interview of Chinese Mothers

My name is Rhoda Wong. I am a doctoral student in the Ph.D. Program in Social Welfare at the City University of New York. I am conducting a study about Chinese immigrant mother’s perceptions of motherhood and experiences of separation from their infants.

You are being asked to participate in a study that explores how Chinese immigrant mothers perceive early motherhood and their experiences of separating with their infant babies as a result of ‘transnational parenting.’ In the study, I also explore transnational mothers’ experience of reunification with their children. You have been identified as a possible participant because your baby was sent to China and was cared for by immediate family. Your child has returned to you in the last 6 years. You are between the ages of 18 and 45. I anticipated that no more than 25 individuals would participate in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the interview at any time. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

You are being asked to participate in a 90-minute in-person interview. During the interview you will be asked questions about your demographic background, your perceptions and experiences of early motherhood, separation and reunification with your child. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and location, but a place you decided you would be comfortable talking about a topic you that may raise your emotions.

You will receive $XX for your participation. Even if you do not complete the entire interview, you will receive the $XX.

There are no known benefits to participation in this study. There are no known risks to participation other than those experienced in everyday life. However, you may become emotionally distressed discussing your separation from your baby. In the event that happens, the researcher has a list of resources where people speak Chinese that you may contact for assistance should you need them. Your participation may contribute to increase knowledge on “transnational parenting” practice. The researcher will take notes during the interview. The researcher will audiotape the interview with your permission. Your will be given a separate form to indicate your permission. No one but the researcher will listen to the tapes. The tapes will use identifying codes. Your name or other identifying information will not appear on the transcripts. No personal identifiers can be linked to the data. All materials will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home office. Only the researcher and her faculty advisors have an access to the transcripts of the interviews and the notes. The data will be stored for three years, after which all materials and tapes will be destroyed. As long as the data exists, it will be kept secured.
The collected information will be used to produce a report for this research project, possible the researcher’s dissertation, or presentations at professional conferences. Only aggregate data will be reported in any papers or publications derived from this research. All identifying information about you and others who participated will be omitted or disguised. The researcher is mandated to report to the proper authorities suspected child abuse, and any indications that you are imminent danger of harming yourself or others.

The researcher may contact you in the future about other research she may conduct about transnational parenting, including studies that may take place in China. **Please check the appropriate box below to indicate if you agree to be contacted in the future for other research, which this researcher may conduct about transnational parenting.**

- [ ] I agree  
- [ ] I disagree

If you have questions about the study, you can contact the researcher, Rhoda Wong at (646) XXX-XXXX or her faculty advisor Dr. XXX at (212) XXX-XXXX. You should contact the Hunter College IRB Office at (212) 650-3053, if you have questions regarding your rights as a subject or if you feel you have experienced a research-related injury.

**I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form for my records and future reference.**

________________________  ________________________  ______________
Participants’ Name  Signature  Date

________________________  ________________________  ______________
Researcher’s Name  Signature  Date
Attachment D:
Informed Consent Form for Interview of Chinese Mothers (Chinese)

華裔媽媽面談同意書

我的名字叫黃潔貞。我是紐約市立大學社會福利學系的博士研究生。我正在進行一項有關「中國移民母親把美國出生華裔小孩送回中國家鄉哺養的經驗」的研究。

你被邀請參與這項關於中國移民母親對剛成為母親及育兒的體驗及因執行「跨國育兒」方法，而與幼兒分離的經驗的調查研究。這項研究包括探索跨國母親與孩子重聚的經驗。你被識別為合資格的參加者，因為你的幼兒在出生後，被送回中國，由至親照顧，在過去六年返回美國與你居住。你的年齡在十八至四十五歲之間。參予研究的母親將不會超過廿五名。參予研究是自願的，你有自由拒絕回答任何問題或在任何時間退出該項研究，拒絕參予將不會受到任何懲罰或被剝奪任何應有的利益。

你將被邀參予一個九十分鐘的個別訪談，內容包括實行「跨國育兒」的背景，你剛成為母親，及後來與孩子分開和重聚的感覺及經驗。訪談的時間及地點將由你及研究員共同訂定，由於談論的話題會有可能引起你的情緒不安，所以，你須要選擇一個讓你感到舒服自在的談話地點。

你將會在參予研究後收到XX元的車馬費。即使你沒有完成整個訪談，你也將會收到XX美元的車馬費。

參加該項調查並沒有已知的利益，但也沒有超過日常生活所經歷的風險。然而，當討論到與幼兒分離的時候，你可能會感到情緒不安。假如有這樣的情況出現，研究員已經為你預備好一份提供華語服務及資源的機構名單，在有需要的情況下，你可與他們聯絡。你的參予也許有助各界對執行「誇國育兒」方法的認識。研究員在面談時將作筆錄，且在你同意下進行錄音。將有另一份訪談錄音同意書讓你簽署。除研究員以外，不會有其他人聽取你的錄音講話。錄音磁片上只會使用代碼，以作識別。你的名字及其他身份資料不會在抄錄文本上出現。不會有個別身份的識別與搜集到的資料相連接。所有相關研究材料會被研究員鎖在其住家辦公室的文件柜內。除研究員及其學術顧問以外，其他人皆不可以接觸面談抄錄文本及筆記。搜集得來的資料會被儲存三年，然後所有有關物資及錄音將會被銷毀。只要資料還未銷毀前，都會被嚴密收藏。
搜集得来的资料会用作撰写一份有关这个研究的报告、或登载在专业期刊上、或使用在研究员的博士论文上、或在专业研讨会上发表。无论如何文献或刊物上，有关这项研究的资料，只会作整体报告。你或其他参与者的个人资料将会被删除或隐藏。研究员在法律规范下，对任何受怀疑虐待儿童或你有可能伤害别人或伤害自己的危急情况下，有责任向有关当局报告。

研究员或许在未来再与你联络，讨论有关进行「跨国育儿」在其他方面的研究，其中包括在中圂进行的调查研究。如果你对这项研究有进一步的询问，你可致电(646) XXX-XXXX与研究员黄洁贞联络，你也可以打电话给她的学术顾问 Dr. XXX (212) XXX-XXXX。如果你对自己作为受试者 的权利有疑问，或感到自己因为参与这项研究而受到伤害，你可以与纽约市立大学亨特学院访谈审查办事处 (Hunter College IRB Office)联络，电话号码是 (212) 650-3053。

我已经阅读 (或被告知) 这份同意书的内容，也被鼓励发问，我的问题也获得回答。我现在同意参与这项研究。我已收到 (或将会收到) 这份同意书的副本，作为记录及 日后的参考。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>参与者姓名</th>
<th>签署</th>
<th>日期</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>研究员姓名</td>
<td>签署</td>
<td>日期</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attachment E:
Audio Tape Recording Consent Form

Protocol # _________________________________________________

Researcher: Rhoda Wong

Title: Chinese Immigrant Mothers:
Perceptions of Motherhood and Experiences of Separation from their Infants

As part of this study project, this interview will be tape-recorded. The interview will be kept
strictly confidential and available only to the researcher. Excerpts of this interview may be made
part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying
characteristics be included in this report. Please indicate below which kind of the uses of these
audiotapes you are willing to consent.

1. The researcher can audio-tape my interview for this study. _____________________________

2. The researcher can transcribe the audio-tape of my interview. __________________________

3. The researcher can translate the transcript of the audio-tape into English. __________________

4. The transcripts of the audio-tape can be studied by the researcher for use in the study project.
   ___________________________

I have read the above description and consent to have my interview recorded on audio tape. I also
give my consent for the use of audiotapes as indicated above.

Participant’s Name: ________________  Signature: ________________  Date: __________

Researcher’s Name: ________________  Signature: ________________  Date: __________
Attachment E:
Audio Tape Recording Consent Form (Chinese)

面談錄音同意書

文件編號#  ______________________________________________

研究員: 黃潔貞

Title: 在美出生的華裔幼兒抱返中國家鄉哺育的經驗

作為這個研究計劃的一部分，這個面談將會被錄音。面談內容將嚴格保密，只有研究員才可查閱及使用。面談內容有可能被節選收錄在研究報告裏，但是，在任何情況下你的名字或任何可以辨別身份的材料，不會包括在報告書內。請在下列項目中註明你同意使用錄音內容的類別。

1. 研究員可以把我在這項研究的面談內容錄音
    _______________  _______________  _______________  _______________

2. 研究員可以抄錄我面談錄音的內容
    _______________  _______________  _______________  _______________

3. 研究員可以把抄錄面談錄音內容的文稿翻譯成英文
    _______________  _______________  _______________  _______________

4. 研究員可以使用錄音文稿進行這個專題的分析研究
    _______________  _______________  _______________  _______________

我已經閱讀過以上敘述的內施，並同意讓我的面談被錄音。此外，我同意讓錄音的內容按上述選項得到使用。

參加者姓名: ___________  簽署: ___________  日期: ___________

研究員姓名: ___________  簽署: ___________  日期: ___________
Attachment F: List of Resources

University Settlement
184 Eldridge Street, New York, NY 10002
Butterflies Program (212) 453-4534
Early Intervention Program (212) 453-4509/10, (212) 453-4533 (Chinese)

Lower East Side Family Union
84 Stanton Street,
New York, NY 10002
(212) 260-0040

Mental Health Association of New York City
50 Broadway, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10004
Telephone: (212) 254-0333

Parent Resource Center of Queens
87-08 Justice Avenue, Suite C-14
Elmhurst, New York 11373
(718) 651-1960
Asian LifeNet 1-877-990-8585

Chinese Planning Council Community Services
The Asian Child Care Referral Program
(www.childcarecpc.org)
165 Eldridge Street
New York, NY 10002
Telephone: (212) 941-0030

Chinatown YMCA – Hester Street Center
100 Hester Street
New York, NY 10002
Beacon Center Office: 212-219-8393
Attachment F: List of Resources (Chinese)

資源一覽表

University Settlement 大學社區中心
184 Eldridge Street, New York, NY 10002
Butterflies Program 蝴蝶服務計劃 (212) 453-4534
Early Intervention Program 早期發展介入服務 (212) 453-4509/10, (212) 453-4533 (Chinese)

Lower East Side Family Union 下東區家庭服務中心
84 Stanton Street,
New York, NY 10002
(212) 260-0040

Mental Health Association of New York City 紐約市心理衛生協會
50 Broadway, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10004
Telephone: (212) 254-0333

Parent Resource Center of Queens 皇后區家長資源中心
87-08 Justice Avenue, Suite C-14
Elmhurst, New York 11373
(718) 651-1960

Asian LifeNet 1-877-990-8585 心理安康一線牽

Chinese Planning Council Community Services 華策會社區服務中心
The Asian Child Care Referral Program 亞裔兒童照顧轉介計劃
(www.childcarecpc.org)
165 Eldridge Street
New York, NY 10002
Telephone: (212) 941-0030

Chinatown YMCA – Hester Street Center
華埠中華基督教青年會喜士打街中心
100 Hester Street
New York, NY 10002
Beacon Center Office: 212-219-8393
## Attachment G: Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Terms</th>
<th>Meaning in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ah-yi</td>
<td>An aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bao</td>
<td>Hold in arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baobe or bao-bao</td>
<td>My precious one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bu-shuang la</td>
<td>Unhappy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chuguo</td>
<td>Going overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cong-wo-shen-shang-ge-liao-yikuai-rou</td>
<td>Cut off a piece of meat from my body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dai</td>
<td>Carry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>di or di-di</td>
<td>Little boy or younger brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dinghun</td>
<td>To engage; engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dui</td>
<td>Right, correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>da-lu</td>
<td>Mainland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fengchui-caodong</td>
<td>Blowing wind that moves the grasses, i.e. Troubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fensu</td>
<td>Social customs, social norms, social tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fuqi-gong</td>
<td>Conjugal husband-wife employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gam-san</td>
<td>Gold mountain, i.e. The United State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gege-da-xiao</td>
<td>Giggled and laughed loudly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guai or guai-guai</td>
<td>Good and behaved well, or good baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>han-zai-zui-li-pa-hua-liao</td>
<td>Held in the mouth and anxious that would be dissolved, meaning extreme carefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huiqu</td>
<td>Going back to (home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hui-yin</td>
<td>Syndicate loan money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>húlǐhúdū</td>
<td>In a haze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jiāchǒu-bùkě-wǎiyáng</td>
<td>Domestic shame should not be talked in public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
jiao-tou-lan-ee  Had a beaten head and scorched brow
jie-jie  Older girl; older sister
jingshen-yali  Mental stresses
jin-pi-li-jiin  Use up all my energy
jiu-jiu  Maternal uncle; mother's brother
kong-dong-dong  Completely empty
lang  Wave, i.e. Moving force
li-bu-cong-xin  Out of my depth
li-jin  The betrothal gift money
luo-da  The first child
luo-erh  The second child
mama-huhu  Getting something done in a slapdash manner
mang-si  Busy to die
mei-banfa  No choice, no way out, cannot be helped or, nothing can be done.
mei-mei  Little girl; younger sister
meishi-zhaoshi  No troubles, but look for troubles
mimihūhū  In a daze
mimi-yan  Small eyes
ming  Fate
mo-banfa  No choice; no option
nai-nai  Paternal grandmother
piaobo  Vagrantly
qīngxiàng  Tendency
san  The third
shan-hun  Flash marriage
shasi-ren  Kills people
shenghuo  Life
shou-mang-jiao-luan  Bustling and in confusion
shu      Tree
shuo-qi-shou-ba  Talking the sevens and eights, i.e. Making disparaging remarks
shun-qi-siren  Let nature take its course
si-bu-si      Isn’t it?
si-xin-lie-fei  A torn heart and cracked lung, meaning cracks in screams of anguish
song      To send, sending, sent
song Zhong-guo  Send to China
taijiao    Fetus and antenatal education
tōudū        Human smuggling
waigung    Maternal grandfather
waipo      Maternal grandmother
wuli-qunao  Making troubles out of nothing
xiafang    Centralized reassignment of work commitments
xiangqin   Blind dates
xiangyi-wei-ming  Knitted to each other for living
xiao-hai   Young child(ren)
xiao-niao  Little bird
xia-si     Terrified to death
xiguan     Habits
xuanwo     Whirlpool
xu-nóng-yú-shuǐ  Blood is thicker than water, meaning intense bond
yang-liu-shou  Overseas stay-at-home children
yanlei-zai-xinli-tang  Tears fell into her heart
yan-siao-yun-sa  Vanished like smoke in the air
yang-tai    Nourishing the fetus
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yao-jin-ya-guan</td>
<td>Grit my teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ye-ye</td>
<td>Paternal grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yizhenfeng</td>
<td>A blast of wind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You-de-bi-you-shi</td>
<td>Losing something for gaining something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhong-guo</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zou-hui</td>
<td>Participate in the mutual aid loan syndicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zou-na-tiao-xian</td>
<td>Ran that route, i.e. Human smuggling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zou-si</td>
<td>Works to death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zouxian</td>
<td>Run the route, i.e. Human smuggling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Bohr, Y. (2007). *The effects of trans-nationalism on infant development: Are we meeting the mental health needs of our youngest victims of globalization?* Presentation at the
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