

Mothers in Transition: Using Images to Understand the Experience of Migrant Mothers in Shanghai

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In-country migration is changing the face of China's urban areas. Since the 1980s when the Chinese Government initiated broad economic reforms and opened its doors to international trade, China's urban and industrial centers have experienced dramatic growth with a seemingly endless need for labor (Zhu, 2002). The opportunity for higher-paying manufacturing jobs has prompted mass in-country migration from the country's rural areas to urban centers. Official census data for 2010 indicated that 8.98 million migrants, or 40% of Shanghai's population, were living and working in Shanghai (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010). As individuals and families move from the countryside to the cities, parents and children must adapt to new expectations and challenges. And raising children as a migrant parent usually brings particular challenges.

Method

Most researches on immigration examines data from large surveys that describe trends or characteristics of the migrant population. Little research includes individual migrants telling their own migration experiences, how they view their lives in urban areas, how they perceive child rearing, and how these perceptions affect their decision making in their new urban world. Apparently, the aggregate studies are valuable but insufficient for understanding how these perception-level concerns translate into individual decision making and actions. In the present study, the research team adopted Photovoice, a participatory research method, asking migrant mothers in Shanghai to take photographs of their daily lives and use these images in group discussions to describe their parenting experiences.

Sample

In this study, a group of 14 mothers were recruited from village T with a predominantly migrant population. Study participants aged between 30 and 50 years old. Most of

them moved to Shanghai within 5 years and the longest residing mother had migrated to the city 20 years ago. Their education level was relatively low, most receiving primary and middle school education. All mothers were married and most had more than one child. The larger family size seen in this sample are understandable because these families are from rural areas where China's "one child policy" operates differently than in regions with high population densities (Lv, 1997). Of the 14 mothers, 10 worked outside the home.

Data Collection

The study was conducted by a transnational American and Chinese research team. The first and second authors – one Chinese and one American –are both social work practitioners and researchers. The third author is a Chinese PhD student studying in the United States. All group discussion sessions were audiotaped, transcribed in Mandarin, and then translated into English. The discussions were led by second author, who is a Chinese citizen and native mandarin speaker. The first author, an American citizen, participated in the discussion sessions with the assistance of an interpreter, and recorded field notes throughout the sessions.

The transcripts of these discussions helped to understand cross-cutting themes for this migrant population. In addition, the research team independently coded the photographs to identify themes not included in the mothers' initial discussion. And then, it returned to the mother group to check the codes and do additional data collection. Researcher-derived codes were member checked before including the results in this article. A community forum was subsequently organized for those mothers to share their photographs and stories with government officials, scholars, media and social organizations

Results

In this study, 6 themes resonated strongly with the participant mothers were presented. Researchers gauged resonance by how much participants wanted to talk about the particular theme raised and emotions displayed while talking about certain themes.

6 themes were identified in the study:

1. Education: Parental focus on children's school achievement was the most dominant, overarching theme in the study. Mothers wanted their children to attain excellence in school and they expressed worry about children's future. It was noted that boys were described to have more school-related problems than girls. However, mothers firmly placed responsibility for classroom success on the children and on themselves. Besides, family's living space often negatively affected study habits of their children.
2. Safety and Recreation: Mothers worried about children's physical well-being, specifically their diet, lack of exercise, too much screen time, and physically threatening living environments.
3. Health Care. China's health care system covered basic but not comprehensive medical services. Therefore, in many situations health care was too expensive and difficult to obtain.
4. Work and Family: Mothers spent nearly all of their personal life on parenting but their work schedules and limited education kept them from adequately caring for their children.
5. Fathers: Some fathers with a higher level of education helped children in study. Some mothers supported their husbands' work. Due to their work

reasons, many fathers could not contribute in child rearing and some couples had to live separately even both were living in Shanghai.

6. Resilience: Despite the mothers' collective distress over their inability to strike a balance between meeting the needs of their children and the needs of their elderly parents, the participant mothers consistently presented hope and resilience as the theme of photographs or words. The migrant families enjoyed leisure activities outside their village. Some luxuries enjoyed by the families, such as a store-bought birthday cake, indicated the rise of their living standard unthinkable in the rural hometown.

During the community forum, mothers shared their individual stories of migration and hardships experienced with forum participants, including policy makers and social workers. Critical issues faced by migrant families were identified and corresponding problem-solving strategies were discussed. Forum participants listened intently to the mothers' stories, and some were moved to tears upon hearing their stories. They opined that hearing directly from the migrant mothers helped them to develop better understanding of the issues facing the migrant population.

In conclusion, the Study has raised the awareness of the Chinese Government which had identified the floating population of migrants as an area for research and policy development in Shanghai. Moreover, the study has demonstrated the usefulness of visual methodology for understanding the lived experiences of a migrant population. However, visual methods are not intended to replace other qualitative or quantitative methods, but they can enable clients to influence and shape the interventions, and give depth and specificity to supplement quantitative data in future researches.



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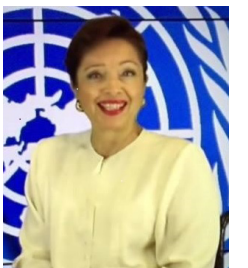


Message from Mrs. Patricia CHU, Chairperson CIFA

With the 5th CIFA Symposium approaching, all parties concerned are working extremely hard to finalize the details of the symposium and to promote the event with the view to appeal for support and participation. We are extremely pleased and honored to have the recognition and support of the United Nations with Ms. Daniela Bas, Director of Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accepting our invitation to be the Guest of Honour to deliver the Opening Address and to officiate at the Wofoo 3A Project 2016 Award Presentation Ceremony. She has also kindly written a message for the program brochure of the symposium. I would like to quote Ms. Bas:

"I am pleased to see that the 5th Regional Symposium of CIFA will contribute to the achievement of these important tasks at the regional level. I believe the topic you chose for the Symposium 'Asian Families: Changes & Consistency' makes us ponder how to provide timely support to families coping with a number of social, demographic and cultural changes,....."

"I wish you all the success for the Symposium and your current projects. You can count on the support of my Division, the Division for Social Policy and Development within the Department of Economic & Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat in your future endeavours."



In this issue, apart from updating you on the progress made in organizing the 5th CIFA Regional Symposium and the Wofoo 3A Project 2016, there are two interesting articles presented by representatives of two CIFA member organizations, namely the East China University of Science and Technology (ECUST) and the Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association (HKYWCA), in which they will respectively share their experience and findings of studies on "Mothers in Transition: Using Images to Understand the Experience of Migrant Mothers in Shanghai" and "Exploring the Elements Facilitating Elderly Couple Relationship in Hong Kong". The two papers cover some of the challenges faced in mass in-country migration of workers from rural areas to urban centers in China and the growing phenomenon of domestic violence amongst elderly couples in Hong Kong. These are emerging issues that warrant our attention and I hope the two papers will pose much food for thought in our endeavours to enhance the well-being of different members in the Asian families.

Exploring the Elements Facilitating Elderly Couple Relationship in Hong Kong: A Qualitative Study

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Introduction

In recent years, the general public is alarmed and saddened by news reporting domestic violence and in some extreme cases murder incidents among elderly couples. In fact, the society has been paying high cost to help elders with broken and vulnerable marital relationships (We news, 2016; Time, 2016). Compared to previous generations, elderly couples in future will have a longer life expectancy and spend more time with their spouses after retirement. The expectation of life at birth was 81.2 years for males and 86.9 years for females in 2014. The proportion of the ageing population in Hong Kong is projected to increase from 15% in 2014 to 33% in 2064 (Census and Statistics Department, 2015).

Retirement Adjustment & Marital Satisfaction among Older Adults in Hong Kong Study - 2013

In order to shed light on the retirement adjustment and marital relationship of the elderly, the Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association (HKYWCA) and the University of Hong Kong (HKU) had jointly conducted a study "Retirement Adjustment & Marital Satisfaction among Older Adults in Hong Kong" in 2013. The study included a survey using standardized questionnaires and a focus group (HKYCA & Lou, 2014). The results revealed that around 40% elders were dissatisfied with their marriage life. It was noted couples retired for longer period had higher marital satisfaction (around 60%). Moreover, couple goal congruence, marital dispute, and relationship with other family members were significantly associated with marital satisfaction of elderly couples.

Exploring the Elements Facilitating Elderly Couple Relationship in Hong Kong: A Qualitative Study

HKYWCA and HKU had launched a qualitative study "Exploring the Elements Facilitating Elderly Couple Relationship in Hong Kong" between 2014 and 2015. The Study aimed to identify elements influencing marital relationship of elderly couples, their need in enhancing marital relationship and constructive coping strategies to resolve marital conflicts. In this Study, 23 healthy elderly couples with fair marital relationship and their spouses willing to participate in the focus group were recruited. These couples, aged between 55 and 80, were recruited from five elderly service centers in Hong Kong.

Table 1: Age and Sex of Elderly Participants

Age	Female	Male	Total
55-59	2	1	3
60-64	7	3	10
65-69	10	5	15
70-75	4	13	17
76-80	0	1	1
Total	23	23	46

Table 2: Age and Education Level of Elderly Participants

Age	Illiteracy	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary or above	Total
55-59	-	-	1	2	3
60-64	-	3	5	2	10
65-69	3	7	4	1	15
70-75	1	4	11	1	17
76-80	-	1	-	-	1
Total	4	15	21	6	46

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the elderly couples and focus group discussions led by social workers. During interviews and group sessions, 9 domains were discussed, including common interest, time management, health, finances, social network, self-management, resilience, common belief and communication. And content analysis was adopted in this Study, which was essentially a coding operation, with coding being the process of transforming raw data into a standardized form (Babbie, 2001, p.309).

Discussion

From data collected from 5 focus groups and 23 couple interviews, the elderly couples opined that discussion of the 9 domains had helped them to identify elements influencing their marital relationship and coping strategies to resolve conflicts. Couples' views had been considered in refinement of these domains but no new domain was identified.

Common interest

Elderly couples reflected that the communication with their spouse could be enhanced only if they shared common topics and common interests. Some couples expressed that joining social activities and programs together would help them develop common interests. Previous study also confirmed that "couple-oriented activities solidify their identity as a couple and enhance the quality of their relationship" (Solinge & Henkens, 2008, p.51).

Time management

After retirement, many elderly couples apparently had more free time and did not know what to do with each other. They reflected that they had to make compromise on how to spend their time after retirement. The results were consistent with the contention of Poulson (1964) that couples had to negotiate how to attain their goals based on their values and resources, such as money, time, interests and skills.

Health

In previous studies (Hanks, 1990; HKYWCA & Lou, 2014), health was reported the highest priority concern of all elders. Health was also noted for its influence upon marital relationship (Beck, 1982; Doty, 1986) and marital satisfaction after retirement of the elderly (Webber, 2000). In this Study, health was also the most concerned issue of elderly couples and they strived to stay healthy and to live healthy together after retirement.

Finances

The results revealed that elderly couples from upper or middle class families kept two bank accounts, one for self and the other was a joint account for household expenditure. Some male elders wished to use their savings to develop their new career after retirement but all agreed

that stable financial status would prevent quarrels with their spouses. Obviously, financial security is a significant determinant of retirement adjustment as well as marital dispute (Webber, 2000).

Social Network

In this Study, the common friends of the elderly couples were their former classmates, former colleagues and church friends. Male elders had less friends after retirement. The couples treasured meeting with more friends and a larger social network after retirement. Webber (2000) pointed out that for elderly couples, "further developing outside relationships could aid in relieving marital stress since it may help to relieve the pressure of too much time together" (Webber, 2000, p.36).

Self-management

The results indicated that self-management was associated with conflicting resolutions. Particularly, anger management was important for maintaining marital relationship. Anger management tactics, including time out, forgiving and stop arguing with spouse when he/she was in a rage, were reported helpful.

Common Belief & Resilience

The Study showed that female elders remembered the kindness "恩情" of their husbands in their marriage. These good memories would enable them to forgive their spouses or stop further argument. Constructive values and beliefs such as autonomy, endurance, trust and feeling of security were also the important factors maintaining elderly couple relationship after retirement (Barry, 1970; Eliutina, 2013).

Communication

The elderly couples revealed that they had their own communication patterns and treasured reciprocal communication (有商有量). Coombs (1996) found both sexes were prone to like their partners if they communicated easily and perceived themselves as being liked by their partners. Open and honest sharing were clearly crucial factors enhancing the communication among couples.

Conclusion

The Study results were inspiring, indicating that elderly couples would encounter difficulties in their marital relationship after retirement. Early retirement planning is of paramount importance for the elderly and retirement preparation should involve their spouses while their health is their priority concern. In conclusion, the 9 domains, including common interest, time management, health, finances, social network, self-management, common beliefs, resilience and communication, were elements influencing elderly couple relationship in Hong Kong.

5th CIFA Regional Symposium in Seoul

Theme: Asian Families: Changes & Consistency
Date: 3 to 5 November, 2016
Venue: National Museum of Korea at Ichon-dong, Korea
Website: <http://cifa2016seoul.org>

With the 5th Regional Symposium round the corner, we are pleased to announce that the symposium is attracting academics, researchers, government officials and professionals from 9 countries/regions to register for the main symposium, as well the pre-symposium agency visit and post-symposium workshops. We are excited to have received confirmation from the 2 keynote speakers and 15 plenary speakers who will share their insights on the themes on The Future of Asian Family; Contemporary Issues on Parenting; Family Happiness; and Family Practice in Asia. Moreover, we have received over 100 submissions for oral and poster presentation and those accepted will be presented either at the Concurrent Sessions or displayed at the symposium. Another highlight of the symposium is the Final Round Adjudication and Award Presentation Ceremony of the Wofoo 3A Project.

Hurry up to register and join this exciting CIFA event. Looking forward to seeing you at the symposium in Seoul.

Wofoo 3A Project 2016

The Interview Session of the Second Round Adjudication scheduled on 14 and 15 July, 2016 for the 16 shortlisted teams was successfully held with the assistance from Department of Social Work, CUHK in providing the venue and technical support. The results had been announced on 25 July, 2016 and uploaded onto CIFA website. The 8 finalist teams consisting of 5 teams from HK, 1 from Singapore and 2 from China will receive subsidy to attend the 5th Regional Symposium in Seoul when the Final Round Adjudication and Award Presentation Ceremony will take place on 4 November, 2016. Apart from the Adjudication Panel, those participants attending the Final Round will be involved in voting My Favorite Project. Do not miss the chance!

We are pleased to inform that Dr. Joseph Lee, the President of Wofoo Social Enterprises, the Title Sponsor of 3A Project since 2010 will be joining us in Seoul to witness the Final Round and to present awards to winning teams.

For more information of the Wofoo 3A Project, you are most welcome to visit our CIFA website at <http://www.cifa-net.org>.