

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I sent my son back to China to live with his grandparents because I do not want him to live here with us in a shabby apartment full of second-hand toys, clothes and furniture. It is not going to do him any good psychologically. For him, the negative influence of living with us is much worse than that of growing up far away from his parents. As a matter of fact, parents have to suffer a great deal more pain from the separation than the child himself who will forget what has happened to him almost immediately. So I would rather suffer from the pain of separation myself than to let my son live with us in such a bad condition.

---- Online posting, November 3, 2005

In one word, those parents who sent their kids back are extremely selfish... They do not want to take the responsibility of raising their kids, they do not want to work harder for their kids, and what's worse, they do not want to admit this! Stop trying to find any excuses and stop saying that this is for the benefit of your kids. This is more than just being selfish! Who else is not struggling here in a foreign country? If you are not able to raise your own kids, why did you bear them in the first place?! Irresponsible parents, I despise you!

---- Online posting, November 3, 2005

Heated discussions like this, which almost always end up with nasty accusations, are commonly seen on popular Chinese online forums whenever somebody bring up the topic of sending one's child back to China to be cared for by the grandparents. These kinds of discussion are almost always two-sided, with side A accusing side B of being irresponsible or selfish parents and side B accusing side A of being mean and not at all understanding of other people's situation no matter what it is. Not only were they accused of being selfish and irresponsible, parents who left their children with the grandparents in China were also blamed for their timing of parenthood, which was

believed by many to be one of the most important reasons why these Chinese immigrant parents later had to send their children away. This is indicated in the following two quotes from online discussions:

Why did those parents decide to have babies when they were not ready? They lack a plan for themselves and for their children as well. This is where the problem lies. They chose to have babies anyway, only to find out that they couldn't handle them, so they just abandoned their very own children.

---- Online posting, November 3, 2005

Now you have realized that you as parents cannot give your child much and therefore have to send him away. But you could have avoided this! You knew that you did not have much to offer to your child, so why did you still let your child come to this world to suffer. You claimed that sending him away is for the benefit of the child, but if you really think you love your child, create better living conditions for him before you decide to even have him.

---- Online posting, November 3, 2005

Criticized for their bad timing of parenthood parents who sent their children to live with the grandparents in China oftentimes find it necessary to fight back. When the online discussions last several days and attract dozens or even hundreds of people to post their opinions without any signs of subduing, the hosts of those online forums always have to step in and call for a ceasefire. If after several warnings the nasty accusations are still going on, the hosts will exert their granted authority by resorting to more drastic methods – they will either set to ban violators from posting on the forum for a certain period of time (two weeks, a whole month or even permanently at the discretion of the forum hosts) or simply delete the whole discussion thread to prevent further discussions on this unwelcome topic. As a matter of fact, one of the most popular Chinese online forums (mitbbs.com) even includes “whether to send one’s child back to China to live with the

grandparents” on its blacklist of discussion topics. But this is still not enough to deter, as it usually does not take long before similar discussions come back.

The impact of this parenting arrangement, that is, having the child cared for by the grandparents in China while the parents still remain in the U.S, goes beyond the Chinese community as the topic has not only been discussed heatedly on Chinese online forums, but also caught the attention of the mainstream English media. On September 14, 1999, the *New York Times* published an article titled “Squeezed by Debt and Time, Mothers Ship Babies to China” written by Somini Sengupta<sup>1</sup>. The author talks to many different people in New York City, not only to immigrant mothers themselves who have sent or are planning to send their babies to China, but also to doctors, nurses, social workers and labor organizers who have been involved in the immigrant Chinese community in the city. In this article she discusses how immigration to the U.S has fractured families, especially among recent illegal immigrants who are faced with a series of problems such as lack of affordable child care, lack of the safety net of an extended family, and most importantly, large debts owed to their smugglers for bringing them to the U.S., which has forced them to work long hours in garment factories for paltry pay for at least six days a week. All of these issues have made it impossible for these Chinese immigrant mothers to care for their own children in the U.S and therefore caused a growing number of them to send their U.S-born infants to the grandparents’ home in China. However, largely due to their illegal immigration status and their fear of deportation if detected by immigration authorities, although according to workers at clinics across the city a large number of

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<sup>1</sup> This report can be accessed from New York Times’ online archive:  
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C04EFDE1F3DF937A2575AC0A96F958260&sec=&spn=&pagewanted=3>

Chinese immigrant mothers have sent their children away, only “a few mothers agreed to speak to a reporter, and would give their first names only”.

More recently, the *New York Sun*, in its November 18, 2005 issue<sup>2</sup>, published an article titled “New York Parents Sending Children Back to China” written by Deborah Kolben. This article also discusses the childcare issue for illegal Chinese immigrants in New York City. Again, enormous debt, six-day workweeks, and the lack of affordable child care are the most important issues discussed in the article that have forced many Chinese immigrant mothers to send their children to relatives (mostly grandparents) in China. Although according to the news report illegal immigrants whose children are born in America can qualify for subsidized care, many parents are afraid to provide proof of employment because they worry that this may disclose their immigration status and cause trouble for them. In addition to the above two newspapers, online media such as [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com) and [www.newsmax.com](http://www.newsmax.com) have also published similar reports. These reports were titled “Outsourcing childcare to China” (published on November 18, 2005) and “Insider Report: U.S. Babies Couriered to China for \$1,000” (published on November 27, 2005) respectively. Among other things, these three sources (*New York Sun* and the two online media) all reported a recent study, “Prolonged Separation among Chinese Immigrant Families in New York City,” conducted by Dr. Henry Chung (principal investigator) who serves as the assistant vice president for student health and a clinical associate professor of psychiatry at New York University.

Dr. Chung points out in his study that although sending children away is widely known within the Chinese immigrant community, it has never been quantified by

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<sup>2</sup> Media report about this study was published in the November 18, 2005 issue of the *New York Sun*. It is also available online at [http://www.nysun.com/article/23221?page\\_no=1](http://www.nysun.com/article/23221?page_no=1).

researchers. And this point echoes the *New York Times* article in which the author states that “it is impossible to determine just how widespread the practice is.” But the *New York Times* article does manage to make an estimate based on limited data obtained by clinics and health centers where Chinese immigrant women seek medical help:

At the Chinatown Health Center, 10 to 20 percent of the 1,500 babies delivered last year were sent away, according to Celia Ng, the nursing coordinator there. And at the St. Vincent's Hospital Chinatown clinic, according to Ms. Lee, one-third to one-half of the women who seek prenatal care said they plan to send their babies to China.

In Dr. Chung's study, however, he and his associates talk to 219 Chinese immigrant women who are using prenatal services at the Charles B. Wang Health Clinics in Chinatown, Manhattan, Flushing and Queens. They find that 57 percent of the mothers interviewed are sending their babies back to China for the infant's early years. They also find that there are even services offered within the Chinese communities in New York City which courier babies back to China for about \$1,000 each.

This parenting arrangement, with one or both parents living in one country while the child is in another (usually the home country), has already attracted much scholarly attention in the past decade. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) call this arrangement “transnational” parenting, and they originally used this term to refer to the common practice of Latino immigrant parents in the United States as it is very common among this group of immigrants. The New York study on sending young children away to China and mainstream English media reports as well as heated online discussions on this issue, however, provide enough evidence that the practice of transnational parenting is not limited to the Latino immigrant communities. Instead, it is also common among Chinese immigrant families in the U.S, although as discussed previously how common this

practice is still not clearly known. The New York study has provided some valuable insights into the practice of transnational parenting among Chinese immigrant families, but there is also a problem with this study. The population on which this study is based is only limited to illegal immigrants from the few provinces in southern China (mostly from Fujian and Guangdong Provinces). And according to previous studies, those immigrants who crossed the border illegally face very severe restrictions in their daily lives in the host country (Chavez 1998). In the case of Chinese immigrant parents who are classified as undocumented immigrants, their immigration status, the immigration-related debts that they owe to the smugglers, and the low wages paid to their unskilled labor have all caused these parents to have very limited access to resources and social assistance. As a result, keeping their children with them may simply not be a workable option at all. Also, without economic resources and legal protection, these parents are not even able to return home themselves and therefore have to pay for the courier service to have someone else accompany their children back to China.

But what is the case with professional Chinese immigrants who usually have much higher socioeconomic status due to the United States' selective immigration policy? Although it is not known at all how many percentages of the Chinese professional immigrants are sending their children away to China, as no previous studies on Chinese immigrant families have attempted to find out, the practice of transnational parenting may also be common among this group of Chinese immigrants as indicated in those heated online discussions and also from my personal experiences with Chinese immigrant communities in different U.S cities. Professional immigration is a major preference category of the U.S visa allocation system. Those who come to the U.S as professional

immigrants not only enter the U.S legally but are also highly trained personnel and are therefore not destined to the bottom layers of the American labor market (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Therefore, the reasons behind their transnational parenting practice might not be the same as those illegal immigrants whose transnational family arrangements are largely attributed to their illegal immigration status and their economic situation, and the parent-child separation for the former might also be somewhat more “voluntary” than the latter.

For my current study the questions to which I have hoped to find answers include: why do many professional immigrants choose to separate from their young children when they are not confronted with severe restrictions in their daily lives as those illegal immigrants are? How do these parents reach such a decision? Under what circumstances do they have to make such a decision? Also, what do they think of the decision they have made? And how does this separation affect how mothering or fathering is practiced transnationally and how these parents interpret their transnational parenting roles? There are many questions like these that warrant more research into this topic. While the dire economic situation of the immigrant family might be a dominant factor in parents’ opting for transnational parenting, as is the case with illegal immigrant parents, for professional immigrants who not only have legal status but generally also much higher socioeconomic status, there are reasons to believe that it is not the dominant reason behind their transnational family arrangement and that there might be other factors involved in the whole decision-making process. By focusing on professional Chinese immigrants and closely examining how their family lives are interrupted in the process of settlement, I attempt to discover what challenges these professional immigrants are confronted with in

the U.S and what kind of life struggles might be hidden under the cover of “model minority”, a title granted to immigrant groups from Asian countries.

To answer those questions raised above, I have engaged myself in the study of Chinese immigrant parents in Nashville, Tennessee who now have their children living with the grandparents or other relatives in China or who had their children live in China for a period of time in the past but have already brought them back to the U.S. For the purposes of this study, “immigrants” only refer to those legal immigrants who have documents that allow them to stay in the U.S legally and who came to the U.S to work or to study with the intention to stay after they graduate. This is to differentiate them from undocumented (or illegal) immigrants who entered the U.S without any legal papers or who entered legally but chose to outstay their visas, as these people are at a disadvantage and may not be entitled to opportunities and resources usually available to legal immigrants. For this reason, keeping their children with them in the U.S might not even be a workable option, as the New York study has indicated. Also, these illegal immigrants belong to the hard-to-reach group because of their illegal immigration status and their fear of being deported if detected by immigration authorities. For these reasons the study of illegal immigrant families is not in the scope of this current study.

This study focuses on the Chinese immigrant community in the Greater Nashville Area in the state of Tennessee for the following reasons: first, Nashville is a place of convenience as it is where my academic institution is located. Second, the Greater Nashville Area has a Chinese immigrant population that is not negligible, and according to information available to me, the practice of transnational parenting is also very common among this Chinese immigrant community. Third, basing this study in

Nashville also carries another important significance. Nashville as one of the U.S interior cities has begun to attract scholarly attention and become a new site for immigration studies. A review of the immigration literature reveals that immigrant studies overwhelmingly prefer immigrants in big cities such as New York (Foner 1998; Min 1998; Sanders and Nee 1996; Zhou and Logan 1989; Zhou and Logan 1991) and Los Angeles (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000; Lee and Karageogis 1997; Light and Bonacich 1988; Sanders and Nee 1996). While this is no surprise as historically immigrants tend to accumulate in big coastal cities in the U.S., starting in the 1990s, more and more new arrivals have settled in the U.S. interior and built new ethnic communities there (Cornfield 2004; Cornfield and Arzubiaga 2004). This current research, by focusing on the Chinese immigrant community in the Greater Nashville Area, will contribute to the ongoing study of immigrant communities in the U.S interior.

## Chapter Layout

In Chapter I I have provided a distinct rationale for this research project: why the study of transnational parenting among Chinese immigrants is of interest to me and why Nashville was chosen as the site of study. In Chapter II I review the scholarly literature on transnationalism and argue that there are three issues to which previous studies on transnationalism have not given sufficient attention: existing studies tend to focus on the public sphere (such as transnational economies and politics) but less on the private sphere (such as transnational families); and studies that do address transnational families are usually limited to immigrant groups of Latin American background. Transnational practices by other immigrant groups, however, are not well studied. Also, immigrant

fathers are oftentimes left out in the study of immigrant families. I indicate that my current study is able to address all these three issues identified. In Chapter III I provide an overview of the method used for data collection and analysis and I argue that in-depth interviewing with a non-random sample gathered through snowball sampling is the most suitable method for my project, given the research questions I hope to answer.

Chapter IV examines why transnational parents chose to have children at the time they did and whether immigration has any impact on their parenthood decision. This chapter provides background information about these transnational parents and sheds some light on why a decision of transnational parenting has to be made by them later on. Chapter V discusses how the decision to undertake transnational parenting was made and how parents made the transition to “childlessness” or partial “childlessness”. In Chapter VI I focus on how parenthood was reconstructed after separation and how mothers and fathers responded differently to their transnational family arrangement. Chapter VII concludes by stressing the impact of immigration on immigrant families and the policy implications of this study. Contributions as well as plans to expand this current study are also discussed.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Transnationalism and the Transnational Perspective

##### Transnationalism Defined

As a nation with one of the most open immigration policies in the world, the United States has attracted a huge number of immigrants in the past century. Meanwhile, the study of immigration has also flourished, from the classic study on Polish peasants in the U.S (William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki 1918) to the large contemporary research literature on immigration. However, from its origins in the nineteenth century when mass immigration from Europe started to take place, the study of immigration has been dominated by two major themes: 1) the determinants of migration; and 2) immigrant adaptation to the host society (Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002). In the immigrant adaptation literature, classical assimilation theory has influenced much research on immigrant integration into American society. However, in the past several decades classical theory has been vigorously challenged.

One of these challenges comes from the burgeoning research on ethnic enclave economies. Wilson and Portes (1980) contended that the ethnic enclave economy offers immigrant workers a protected niche of opportunities for career mobility and self-employment so that immigrants do not have to compete in the labor market outside their

ethnic enclaves in order to get ahead. The enclave economy has become an alternative adaptation for many immigrants.

Yet another challenge to the classic assimilation theory was brought into discussion about two decades ago: transnationalism. The concept of transnationalism was first developed in the field of anthropology and brought into migration studies in the late 1980s (Vertovec 2004). In their influential work, Basch, Schiller and Blanc (1994) defined it as processes by which immigrants “forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (p. 7). Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999), in their effort to refine this definition, limited the concept to “occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders for their implementation” (p. 219). Vertovec (2004) offered a more concise definition. He defined transnationalism as “a set of sustained long-distance, border-crossing connections” (p. 1). Despite the differences in wording, that is, transnationalism as “processes,” as “occupations and activities,” or as “connections,” these definitions all treat transnationalism as a unique type of framework for understanding migration that distinguishes itself from the linear bipolar model of “old country” and “new world.” As summarized by Caglar (2001):

Current scholarship on transnationalism provides a new analytic optic which makes visible the increasing intensity and scope of circular flows of persons, goods, information and symbols triggered by international labor migration. It allows an analysis of how migrants construct and reconstruct their lives as simultaneously embedded in more than one society. (p. 607)

This transnational perspective posited by immigration scholars moves away from studying immigrants simply from the perspective of the receiving country. It no longer treats immigrants as the “uprooted” who have forsaken all their ties with their home

countries. Instead, it recognizes that a large number of contemporary immigrants manage to maintain various connections with their home country while remaining rooted in their new country and are, therefore, leading dual lives. Since transnationalism has become a way of life for a growing number of immigrants, a transnational perspective can be very helpful in explaining the trends in transnational migration and facilitate researchers' understanding of migration in the context of the global economy (Rios 1992).

### The Debate on Transnationalism

Despite the large amount of research accomplished in the area of transnationalism, there has, from the outset, been a debate concerning whether the practice of transnationalism is anything new. There are two opposing arguments in this debate. One side of the debate holds that transnationalism is by no means an emergent phenomenon. It has existed, maybe ever since the start of immigration. According to Foner (2001), the processes that scholars nowadays call transnational originated many years ago: "Many transnational patterns said to be new actually have a long history—and some of the sources of transnationalism seen as unique today also operated in the past" (p. 37). In contemporary immigrants' practice of transnationalism, Foner sees mostly significant continuities with the past.

However, many other researchers regard transnationalism as an original phenomenon which deserves the attention it has received and justifies the creation of a new concept (i.e., transnationalism) to refer to it. Although these researchers also believe that the back-and-forth movement by immigrants has always existed and that European immigrants at the turn of the last century were already engaged in intensive investments

and contact with their home countries in Europe, they tend to draw a dividing line between the past and the present. Portes (1997a) pointed out that present transnational activities are distinct from those that took place earlier in three respects: the number of people involved in transnational activities, the nearly instantaneous character of communication across space, and the fact that the cumulative character of the process makes participation “normative” within certain immigrant groups. In fact, those back-and-forth movements by immigrants have acquired “the critical mass and complexity necessary to speak of an emergent social field” (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999: 217). In order to differentiate from earlier immigrants, scholars now call contemporary immigrants “transmigrants,” which refers to those immigrants “whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state” (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995: 48). Also, these transmigrants “develop and maintain multiple relations---familial, economic, social organizational, religious, and political that span borders” (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992: 1-2; see also Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc 1994).

Those researchers who advocate transnationalism do not deny the existence of movements across borders that existed in earlier times, but they believe it is a lack of intensity, complexity and regularity that makes these activities ineligible to be called transnationalism. However, Foner (2001) argues that even in the current transnationalism literature itself, there are some hints that transnationalism is not altogether new. According to her, studies demonstrating differences in range, depth, density, or patterns between contemporary immigrants’ transnationalism and earlier immigrants’ activities

are actually only saying to the readers that the present is *different* from the past and that “different” does not necessarily mean “new” or “original.” Foner (2001) points out that transnational ties were simply “ignored or reviled” in the past but are now “a favorite topic at conferences and sometimes are even celebrated in today’s multicultural age.” She argues that, “the novelty of contemporary conditions should not be exaggerated... It may have been harder to maintain contacts across the ocean than it is today, but many immigrants in the last great wave maintained extensive, and intensive, transnational ties and operated in what social scientists now call a transnational social field” (p. 49).

The debate on transnationalism boils down to one issue, that is, whether the concept of transnationalism should extend itself to refer to the activities that earlier immigrants found themselves engaged in or be just limited to contemporary immigrants’ border-crossing activities. One thing is clear, however: both sides agree that transnational practices existed among earlier immigrants and both sides believe that contemporary immigrants’ transnational practices are different from their earlier counterparts’, although their arguments diverge whenever the “newness” or “novelty” of these practices is brought into discussion.

#### Reasons for Transnationalism

While many scholars see transnationalism as an alternative adaptation, and therefore a challenge to linear assimilation theory (Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002), Foner (2001) believes that the ties to countries of origin that immigrants maintain will gradually become fewer and thinner although they might not eventually disappear. The final result of immigrant adaptation will be assimilation. The excessive emphasis that scholars put

on transnationalism, according to Foner, may lead to a minimization of “the extent to which contemporary immigrants ‘become American’ and undergo changes in behavior and outlook in response to circumstances in this country” (p. 49). Whatever the final result of immigrant adaptation is, the question here is: why do immigrants engage in transnational activities? Also, not all immigrants are transnational, and even among those immigrant groups in which transnationalism is broadly practiced, there is still variation in the density of their border-crossing activities (Faist 2000; Portes 1999, 2003; Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002; Vertovec 2004). What, though, accounts for the variations both within and between immigrant groups?

Some researchers attribute the practice of immigrant transnationalism to contemporary immigrants’ failure in a global economy to find full incorporation in the host country possible or desirable (Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1995). Alicea (1997) argued that for Puerto Rican migrants, transnational practice is a strategy employed to offset the negative economic, political, and social forces they are confronted with in the United States. Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992) similarly observed that, due to the uneven distribution of resources within global capitalist systems, Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States have to maintain various connections with their home country in order to maximize their access to economic resources, social services, etc. They regarded their transnational activities as a form of resistance to their subordinate roles within the global capitalist systems. Lessinger (1992) also holds a similar argument in her study of Indian immigrants in the United States and believes that transnational practice is used by those Indian immigrants to resist race and class oppression. In this sense, transnational activities are a passive response to immigrants’

inability to incorporate rather than an initiative they take to actually challenge the notion of assimilation.

Portes (1999), in discussing what determines transnational activities and their variants, argues that the history of immigration and the modes in which migrants are received are the two most important factors that determine whether transnationalism will take place. Massive migration and migration motivated by political convulsions at home are likely to lead to a variety of transnational activities, since migrants usually “maintain morally tied to kin and communities left behind” (p. 464). However, transnational activities are more selective where “migration is a more individualized process, grounded on personal and family decisions” (p. 464). As a result, these activities lack “the normative component attached to them among participants in a political diaspora” (p. 464). In addition, Portes (1999) points out that the cultural resources that a particular immigrant group brings with it may also determine the character and scope of transnational activities.

### Criticisms of the Existing Literature on Transnationalism

In the twenty years since the concept of transnationalism was brought into migration studies, the transnational perspective of migration has rapidly ascended and gained a large number of researchers’ attention (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999; Vertovec, 2004). However, transnationalism is still a “fragile” though “promising topic of research” (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999: 218). There are some issues within the existing literature that researchers have to address in their future research.

As discussed earlier, transnationalism has been defined broadly as the ways in which “transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations---familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders” (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Blanc-Szanton 1994: 7). Defined as such, transnationalism includes not only those border-crossing activities such as visiting the home country and engaging in transnational entrepreneurship, but also activities that do not involve border-crossing, for example, sending back remittances and even making phone calls to those who still reside in the home country. The existing literature, however, is dominated by studies on mobility, which, according to Mahler (1998), refers to “movements of bodies across space, the physical translocation of migrants across boundaries dividing two or more nation states” (p. 76). Among different types of transnational activities studied, economic transnationalism, which is prompted by the expansion of capitalism worldwide in search of broader markets and cheaper labor, is the most commonly studied form (Portes, Haller and Guarnizo, 2002: 279). Transnational economic activities generally involve frequent physical mobility of migrants across borders. However, there are also other types of transnationalism which may not involve frequent border-crossing activities but can still transcend national borders. One example would be transnational families/households in which the mother and/or father work in the United States while their young children live with their kin in the home country until they reach a certain age (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001, 2005). In this case, what is crossing the borders is not the physical body but rather “affection, caring, and financial support” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997: 550).

In speaking of the importance of immigrant families, Vertovec (2004) observes that “[t]he everyday provenance of most migrant transnationalism is within families” and on many occasions family life “has been extensively modified in light of transnational practices” (p. 14). Like transnationalism in general, transnational families are not just a phenomenon for contemporary immigrants (Foner 2000; Ueda 1994); they existed among European immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today, this type of divided family life is still a common feature characterizing many contemporary migrant experiences (Lobel 2003). However, in the existing literature on transnationalism, discussions about politics, economics, culture, and identity are assuming a dominant role, while transnational families are not being adequately studied. As Schmalzbauer (2004) points out, the “literatures on transnational migration and on families are seldom in dialogue with each other” (p. 1318). As a result, Vertovec (2004) calls for more research on transnational family life and suggests a few topics to which he hopes researchers will pay more attention. These topics include the nature of parenting, gender relations and the situations of children.

Another concern with the existing literature on transnationalism is that although transnationalism has received a great deal of attention since it was brought into migration studies, researchers tend to focus on certain immigrant groups. For example, those of Latin American background are often given attention by researchers (Sørensen 2005). For Chinese immigrants, however, attention is only given to their economic transnationalism (Fong 1994; Saxenian 1999, 2000; Waters 2002), since it is a very common phenomenon among this immigrant group. According to data presented in a United Nations report published in 2004, investment by migrant communities is very

common in China, where approximately 70 percent of the total foreign direct investment originates in the Chinese diaspora. However, very little is known about another type of transnationalism among the Chinese immigrant communities. Chinese transnational families are not well known and studied, although they appear to be very common. The few cases that have made it to researchers' studies include Chinese "astronaut" parents, especially fathers (Fong 1994), and "parachute" kids (Zhou 1998). "Astronaut" parents refer to Chinese parents who live in the United States but make a living across the Pacific. "Parachute" kids refer to a highly select group of foreign students (usually from Asia) who were sent to the United States by their wealthy parents to seek a better education in American elementary or high schools while their parents remain in Asia. However, the focus of these studies is either on economic activities across the Pacific or on the outcomes/adjustment of those children in the United States. The divided family itself as a result of these transnational activities remains only in the background and is often not directly addressed.

Also, gender is oftentimes neglected in the transnational literature (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). According to a 2005 report published by the United Nations, currently about 90 million women reside outside their countries of origin, which accounts for half of the total international migration. Women have been playing a significant role in transnational migration and networks, however, the "absence of gendered analysis" in the transnational migrant literature is "surprising" (Alicea 1997: 598). Rio (1992) also points out that in future studies, researchers "need to factor in gender differences in the understanding of transnationalism" (p. 228). The questions are: how does gender affect men and women's interpretation of their experience with transnational activities, such as

transnational family life? Do they think in the same way or differently? These questions warrant further research in the area of transnationalism.

### Immigration and Family

The impact of immigration is multi-dimensional: it not only affects the demographic profile of the host society, its cultural diversity and labor force composition, but also transforms individual and family lives, creating both challenges and opportunities for those who intend to make the host country their new homes. For first-generation immigrants, the impact is particularly strong as these immigrants have left behind them the culture they are so familiar with and the social ties that they took so much for granted while at the same time struggle to settle, adapt and integrate into mainstream society. According to Foner (2009), a great deal of research has been done on immigrants in the labor market, in the educational system and in contrast “much less scholarly attention has been paid to what happens in the privacy of their families, although understanding family dynamics is essential for appreciating the first- and second-generation immigrant experience” (p. 1). Existing literature on immigrant families tends to focus on two major issues. The first issue is gender relations. Migration is oftentimes discussed as a process of women’s empowerment and a reconfiguration of gender relations (Espiritu 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kibria 1990; Spitzer, Neufeld, Harrison, Hughes, and Stewart 2003; Zentgraf 2002). This reconfiguration results from two aspects of changes brought about by migration. First, men suffer from social and economic losses in their transition from a dominant role in their own country to men of color in the United States; on the other hand, women’s enhanced employability after migration has increased their

economic power, which has then increased the resources they can use to negotiate traditional gender roles with their husbands in a new social and cultural context.

The second major issue addressed in the literature of immigrant families deals with the social and educational well-being of the second generation (Portes and MacLeod 1996; Rumbaut 1991; Zhou 1997a; Zhou 1997b). The second generation is defined as native-born children with at least one foreign-born parent or foreign-born children who were brought to the United States at an early age and have resided here ever since (Portes and Macleod 1996). Some studies refer to the former as the true second generation and the latter as the one and half generation (Rumbaut 1991; Zhou 1997b). This line of research is usually concerned with how well the second generation adapts to the educational system in the U.S.

In contrast, parenting in immigrant families is not well studied. Kibria's study (1990), although it mainly dealt with gender relations within Vietnamese immigrant families, did however briefly touch on the issue of parenting after migration. The decline of parental authority was what Vietnamese parents were confronted with in the U.S. Although women gained greater family power as a result of their economic independence from men, their challenge to men's power was limited since they still needed their husbands to help them maintain authority over their children. There are also other studies dealing with immigration and parenting (Gorman 1998; Moon 2003; Segura 1991). These studies have two things in common: first, they tend to focus only on mothers and study how immigration has affected mothering; immigrant fathers are generally ignored. Second, the types of families studied are all intact families, that is, families in which all members live in the same household unit. As discussed earlier, transnational families are

not adequately studied, and not only transnational families in general but also parenting (both mothering and fathering) in a transnational context is neglected in the existing immigration literature. The following sections present a review of research that has been conducted in the areas of mothering and fathering, with special attention given to how immigration has affected parenting roles.

### Mothering and Immigration

Mothering is defined as “a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people” (Forcey 1994: 357). It is important because it is “the main vehicle through which people first form their identities and learn their place in society” (Forcey 1994: 357). In general, mothering and motherhood has received a great deal of scholarly attention, with earlier scholarship tending to focus on the quality of mothering and its effects on a child while current research has become more and more interested in mothers’ activities, understandings, and experiences (Arendell 2000).

The prevailing motherhood ideology in the U.S. is that of intensive mothering. According to Hays (1996), intensive mothering is exclusive, wholly child-centered, emotionally involving, and also time-consuming. Mothers are encouraged to accept the responsibility of staying at home and raising their children full-time. Employment, or any other activities that might interfere with their domestic activities, is considered less important than their child-rearing activities. Mothers of this kind are idealized mothers whose life is always centered on their children and never on their own needs and interests. Self-sacrifice is advocated in this ideology. This intensive mothering has become a standard by which mothering practices and arrangements are evaluated (Arendell 2000).

However, many scholars have challenged the unitary model of mothering and indicated that the study of mothering should take into consideration cultural and economic contexts that play important roles in shaping mothering practices and arrangements (Collins 1994). According to these scholars, there is no given experience of motherhood and the meaning of motherhood varies across different social contexts.

As Jenkins (1998) points out:

The very term “motherhood” connotes a falsely static state of being rather than a socially and historically variable relationship. The experience of motherhood is highly complex and full of contradictions. It is not simply a biological phenomenon or the expression of nurturance and care. Motherhood is often a socially constructed identity. Ultimately, however, what being a mother means will depend upon a number of factors: socialization; the condition under which women become pregnant and give birth to children; the social and cultural context of child rearing; the beliefs and expectations that women hold about motherhood; and the intersection of race, socioeconomic status, age, sexual orientation and culture on these beliefs and expectations (202-203).

Mothering is never experienced similarly by all women, and even for the same woman the meanings she ascribes to mothering may also change over time. There are always mothers who do not conform to the intensive mothering ideology. Single mothers, minority mothers and immigrant mothers might all be examples of this deviancy since the intensive mothering ideal is a middle class model of mothering (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). For working-class women of color, this ideal is often impossible to achieve.

However, Hays (1996) argues that all mothers, no matter what their socioeconomic and cultural background is, ultimately share a recognition of the ideology of intensive mothering. Meanwhile, since all mothers live in a society in which child rearing is generally devalued and the primary emphasis is placed on profit and efficiency, they are oftentimes caught in the dilemma of being a stay-at-home mom that performs intensive mothering or being a supermom that is successful at work. Both types of mothers are led

to feel less than adequate in their daily lives. And both types of mothers have concerns regarding appropriate mothering. As a result, this pressure creates a “no-win situation” for all women of child-bearing years.

The focus of Hays’ work, according to Hays herself, is primarily on “middle-class notions of appropriate child rearing,” and she admits that the child-rearing ideas of new immigrant groups “have received relatively little positive press” (p.21). Arendell (2000) also recognizes the lack of research on immigrant mothering in her review of scholarship on mothering. In this review, she discusses four areas that call for more scholarly attention. These four areas, overlapping as they might, include identities and meanings of mothering; relationships, with both children and others; experiences and activities of mothering; and the social locations and structural contexts from within which women mother. She then observes:

At the heart of each of these thematic domains must be attention to and respect for the enormous multiplicity of mothering circumstances. Class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, and immigrant experience must be at the forefront of our considerations. Not only is American society increasingly diverse, but the experiences and perceptions of minority women—as legitimate and valuable in their own right and not as measures by which White, heterosexual, middle-class mothering is reified—have been given too little attention (p. 1201).

Immigrant mothers, as well as single mothers, welfare mothers, minority mothers and lesbian mothers, are considered by Arendell as “subjects of deviancy discourses of mothering” (p. 1195). Arendell admits that as subjects of the deviancy discourses, immigrant mothers are not given enough scholarly attention. Since they do not generally conform to the White, middle-class ideology of intensive mothering, one may want to ask: how do they actually feel about being mothers and immigrant mothers in particular?

What meanings do they ascribe to mothering? And how do they feel about the White middle class ideology of intensive motherhood?

While the very limited literature on immigrant mothering tends to focus on mothering in intact families, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) have studied a different situation in which immigrant mothers were not even living together with their young children: they were mothers who left their children behind when they migrated to the U.S. This arrangement, referred to as “transnational motherhood” by Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, has led mothers to rearrange the meanings of motherhood in order to accommodate the separation from their children. But their research is limited to only Latino mothers. What about transnational mothers from other immigrant groups? Are they different from or similar to their Latino counterparts?

There exists a need for us to hear from other transnational mothers about their own experiences, as the experiences of Latino transnational mothers might not generalize to transnational mothers from other immigrant groups, such as the Chinese. Portes (1997b) observes that transnational activities and experiences vary systematically with the national origins, socio-economic backgrounds, and modes of incorporation of immigrants. In addition to their difference in national origins, Latino immigrants also differ from Chinese immigrants in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) categorize immigrant groups into four different types: labor migrants, professional immigrants, entrepreneurs, and refugees or asylants. Latino immigrants, generally with low levels of schooling, come to the United States as unskilled laborers and belong to the labor migrant category, while most Chinese immigrants, comprised mainly of college graduates and therefore with high educational endowment, belong to the professional

immigrant category. These differences are likely to cause Latino and Chinese immigrants to have different life experiences and different interpretations of what they are experiencing in the United States. As for the mothering experience, reviews earlier in this section indicated that national origins, socioeconomic status, and immigrant experience are all considered important factors in affecting women's mothering experiences. These differences are all reasons to expect that Chinese immigrant mothers may have different experiences with mothering, especially transnational mothering, from their Latino counterparts. This, therefore, warrants further research into the topic of transnational motherhood, with special attention given to Chinese transnational mothers.

#### Fathering and Immigration

Immigration research used to be mostly organized around the lives and actions of adult men before feminist scholars began to document women's participation in the immigration and settlement processes (Daniels 1990). However, these men were usually treated as individual men, not as fathers or husbands. The latter situation was changed after women were brought into migration studies, but immigrant fathers are still constantly missing from the existing literature. This absence is not only true with immigrant fathers, but as a matter of fact, fatherhood research in general is not receiving the amount of attention it actually deserves. As Atkinson and Blackwelder (1993) point out, although some scholars observed that there had been an increase in the research of fatherhood in the past century, they "have virtually no evidence upon which to base such a claim" (p. 975). Given the situation with fatherhood research in general, immigrant fathers are no better off—they have received very little attention, if any, from scholars

(Cabrera and Coll 2004; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb 2000; Roer-Strier, Strier, Este, Shimoni and Clark 2005). To look at how migration affects fatherhood or father's roles, it is necessary to first examine the conceptualizations of fatherhood in general.

The conceptualizations of fathers are not constant and have always been changing. Pleck (2004) reviewed the history of father ideals in the United States and found that they changed from the earliest colonial father, to the later distant breadwinner, then to the involved dad, and finally to the contemporary co-parent father (which is also called the new father). The contemporary ideal father is as involved in the child's life as the mother is. Lamb (1986) identifies four central fathering roles in contemporary Western cultures. These four roles include breadwinning, supporting mothers in their role, being directly involved in household tasks, and interacting with their children. For the involved father, Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1987) identified three elements: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. However, no matter what the ideals are, there are always times in which fathers fall short of these ideals. Furstenberg (1988) divided contemporary fathers into two types, the "good dads" and the "bad dads". He defined a "good dad" as both a provider and a full and equal partner in the care of his children, while a "bad dad" is someone who denies paternity or, if he acknowledges it, refuses to support his children.

Societal changes have caused the conceptualizations of fatherhood to change over time. Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth and Lamb (2000) observed that four significant societal changes in twentieth-century America have forced adjustments in both popular and scholarly conceptualizations of fathers. The most important social change, according to them, was the dramatic increase in women's participation in the

labor force. As a result, the percentage of families in which the father is the sole breadwinner has significantly decreased. A second societal change is the increase of female-headed families (or father absence). In contrast, a third change is the increase of father's involvement in intact families. Finally, a fourth significant social change that has caused the adjustment in the conceptualizations of fathers is the high rates of immigration. The cultural diversity as a result of the changing racial and ethnic composition has introduced to the American society many different views of the appropriate roles and behaviors of fathers (as well as mothers).

In response to those significant societal changes that took place in the twentieth century, research on fatherhood has also changed. Roer-Strier, Strier, Este, Shimoni and Clark (2005) reviewed the recent body of fatherhood literature and organized it into three basic trends: the first trend of studies, which were conducted during the late 1970s and early 1980s, asked the question "where have fathers gone?" Studies in the first basic trend dealt with the physical as well as emotional absence of fathers in their children's life and were primarily concerned with the negative impact of this uninvolvedness on their children's well-being. The second trend of research asked the question "what do fathers actually do?" and started to move the focus of study from the negative impact of fathers' absence to the positive effects of fathers' involvement. The third basic trend of fatherhood research asked the question "what does fatherhood mean?" and investigated various aspects of fatherhood: cultural, economic, socio-psychological, etc. This line of research has made "a critical contribution to the understanding of fatherhood from a historical and cultural perspective" (p. 317).

There are several major approaches to the study of fatherhood. One is the deficit or role-inadequacy perspective, which, according to Hawkins and Dollahite (1997), views fathering as a “social role that men generally perform inadequately” (p. 3). This perspective posits that society has changed dramatically in the past half century. One of the changes, women’s increased labor force participation, has significantly changed women’s family roles and led women to share the breadwinning task with men. However, these changes did not successfully lead men to take their share of domestic labor (Hochschild 2003). The generativity approach, on the other hand, criticizes the deficit theory for its overemphasis on fathers’ inadequacies and instead conceptualizes fathering as generative work. Dollahite, Hawkins, and Brotherson (1997) provide a definition of generative fathering: “By *generative fathering*, we mean *fathering that meets the needs of children by working to create and maintain a developing ethical relationship with them*” (p. 18; italics original). In this framework, fathering is conceptualized as a kind of work in response to their children’s actual needs rather than in response to “a social role embedded in a changing sociohistorical context” (p. 21). Also, there are some scholars who challenge mainstream conceptualizations of fatherhood and refuse to view fatherhood as a stable identity. Instead, they view fatherhood as “a site of competing discourse and desires that can never be fully and neatly shaped into a single ‘identity’” and as involving “oscillation back and forth between various modes of subject positions even within the context of a single day” (Lupton and Barclay 1997: 16). To them, the meanings and experiences of fatherhood exist through specific socio-cultural processes (Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb 2000). This echoes previous discussions on mothering which challenges the unitary model of intensive mothering and suggests an

examination of cultural and economic contexts in order to gain a full view of mothering experiences (Collins 1994; Jenkins 1998).

As discussed above, major societal changes in the U.S. warrant further research on the topic of fathering and fatherhood. Immigration is one of these societal changes which have had a significant impact on immigrant fathers. Hernandez and McGoldrick (1999) point out that immigration usually brings about a series of changes to all aspects of immigrant parents' lives. This is because when immigration takes place, their economic, social and familial support systems are oftentimes undermined. As a result, parents have to force themselves to adjust to their new life in a new country. Existing research tends to focus on the negative consequences of immigration for families and parenting. For instance, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) believed that immigration has a negative effect on immigrant fathers as it undermines a man's fathering role. Kibria (1990) discussed the decline of parental authority that Vietnamese immigrant parents (fathers as well as mothers) are confronted with as their children are gradually assimilated into the American lifestyle. Roer-Strier, Strier, Este, Shimoni and Clark (2005), however, challenged the widely held belief that immigration is a risk factor for fathers. They instead believe that immigration has provided men with an opportunity to reassess the meanings associated with being a father. To them, immigration is more a positive factor that helps expand immigrant fathers' understanding of their own roles than a negative element that poses daunting challenges to these fathers.

## Chinese Families

Since this dissertation examines the transnational family arrangements of a specific immigrant group, Chinese immigrants in the U.S, it is necessary here to briefly review some relevant issues within the cultural context of Chinese families. This section will include discussions of mothering and fathering in China, the strong intergenerational ties and the grandparents' involvement in their adult children's lives, and finally, a general discussion of Chinese families in the West.

### Mothering and Fathering in the Chinese Context

In traditional Chinese society, a father's role was primarily that of an educator-disciplinarian as well as a provider, whereas a mother's role was primarily protective and nurturant (Ho 1987). According to Ho, although education and discipline were not exclusively a male responsibility, as mothers were also involved in the tasks sometimes, "nurturing the young was almost exclusively a female function" and the father "was not expected to have much to do with the care of infants or young children". He then continued:

The perception of parental roles was succinctly captured in the popular expression, "Strict father, kind mother". The father was typically characterized as a stern disciplinarian, more concerned with the demands of propriety and necessity than with feelings, who was to be feared by the child; and the mother as affectionate, kind, protective, lenient, and even indulgent (pp. 230-231).

Therefore, like in the U.S and other western societies, mothering has been mostly associated with the caring of children and fathering with providing for the family.

Although the ways mothers and fathers care for their children or provide for the family may have changed over time, what seems to remain constant is the ideal of mothers as

caregivers and fathers as providers. These parenting expectations, however, have been challenged in recent decades as the majority of Chinese women are now in the labor force and therefore are sharing the provider role with their husbands.

Women's labor force participation rates in China are among the highest in the world. According to Lu, Marcia and Maume (2000), 90 percent of urban Chinese women aged 16-54 were employed in the 1990s while among U.S women in this age group only 67.5 percent were in the labor force. Many scholars have attributed the high labor force participation rates in China to Socialist ideologies which regard women's labor force participation as the key to women's liberation and gender equity (Croll 1983; Stockman, Bonny and Sheng 1995; Short, Chen, Entwisle and Zhai 2002). After it was established in 1949, the Chinese government actively pushed for gender equalization programs that aimed to mobilize women into the work force. And the Maoist slogan "women hold up half the sky" also played an important role in encouraging women's labor force participation and promoting gender equality in the labor market (Short, Chen, Entwisle and Zhai 2002).

The high female labor force participation rates carry significant implications: with a vast majority of women working outside the home, work and family issues should be more acute for Chinese families than for American families (as discussed above, the labor participation rates for U.S women were much lower). Indeed, studies have found that despite women's labor force participation, gender egalitarianism within the private sphere, i.e., the home, is still far from being achieved and that housework and childcare duties are still overwhelmingly women's work (Chen 2005; Harrell 2000; Short, Chen, Entwisle and Zhai 2002). That is, although women have shared the provider role with their

husbands, men, on the other hand, have not yet taken on much of the caregiver role. As a result, married women in China have to handle double burdens: their job outside the home as well as their domestic responsibilities such as housework and child care.

Although working women worldwide might all have their own work and family issues to deal with, these issues seem to be harder to deal with for Chinese women given their high labor force participation rates.

### The Grandparents and the Intergenerational Ties

Scholars have also noted that despite the more acute work and family issues that confront Chinese families, the strong intergenerational ties play very important roles in helping married women balance the dual demands of work and family. The extended family is a common living arrangement in China and other East Asian countries, and it is usually considered one of the evidences of strong relationship between parents and their grown children (Chen 2004; Logan and Bian 1999). Family sociologists have attempted to explain the extended family support system and the coresidence of parents with their adult children in two ways. The cultural explanation attributes this widespread phenomenon to cultural norms and traditional values. Indeed, in Chinese society there exists “a historical tradition of extended family and a strong norm guiding intergenerational relationship” (Chen, Short and Entwisle 2000: 586). The practical explanation, however, looks at coresidence as a way “by which parents and children provide for each others’ needs in anticipation of reciprocity when they need help” and this “[r]eciprocal help itself is considered normative” (Logan and Bian 1999: 1254). The grandparents who co-reside with their adult children help with housework and childcare,

which can significantly reduce a working mother's workload in the house (Chen 2004; Chen, Short and Entwisle 2000; Short, Chen, Entwisle and Zhai 2002). Since daycare services in China are targeted more to toddlers and older pre-school children than to infants and quality childcare often falls short of demand (Chen, Short and Entwisle 2000), obtaining help from the grandparents is considered very crucial for working mothers.

Even if the grandparents live apart, the supportive exchange relationships still exist and the contact they maintain with their adult children is much closer than would be the norm in most Western societies (Chen, Short and Entwisle 2000; Unger 1993).

According to Logan and Bian (1999), recent trend in urban China is that older parents and their adult children prefer to live near one another instead of together. Despite this non-coresidence, however, the intergenerational linkages are by no means weakened. High levels of exchange between the generations are still being reported (Bian, Logan and Bian 1998; Unger 1993).

### Chinese Families in the West

According to Foner (1997), although immigrants do not exactly reproduce their old cultural patterns when they migrate to another country, these patterns "continue to have a powerful influence in shaping family values and norms as well as actual patterns of behavior that develop in the new setting" (p. 962). And studies focusing on Chinese immigrant families have indicated that the Chinese cultural values play a very significant role in shaping their family life in the host country (Dion and Dion 1996; Lam 1994). Chinese families in the United States have been noted for their low rate of divorce, delinquency, and welfare dependency. In addition to the title of model minority, Chinese

Americans as well as groups from other Asian countries such as the Koreans and the Japanese have also been considered as having ideal families. Researchers often attribute the successes of these Asian Americans to the traditional values and cultural norms that they brought with them from their home countries and then passed down to later generations: the family-centered values, the strong bond between parents and children, and the strong emphasis that these groups put on education are all considered important factors contributing to their success stories (Ishii-Kuntz 1997).

While cultural explanations might sometimes seem sufficient, some researchers argue that cultural factors alone can not tell the whole story. In his critique of existing studies of Chinese American families, Glenn (1983) pointed out that these studies “focus on purely cultural determinants, tracing characteristics of family life to Chinese values and traditions” and as a result, structural factors, which most research on black and Hispanic families would consider, are oftentimes ignored by researchers studying Chinese American families. He suggested that institutional approaches should be applied to the study of Chinese American families as well because the seemingly culturally-determined practices actually have other determinants hidden under the surface. According to Glenn, “characteristics often interpreted as products of Chinese culture actually represent strategies for dealing with conditions of life in the United States.” (p. 35). Therefore, only by examining both cultural and structural factors can researchers obtain a complete picture of Chinese families in the U.S.

## Current Research and Relevant Suppositions

In this current study I attempt to fill the gaps identified in the above literature review by examining the transnational family experiences of professional Chinese immigrants. In doing so I am able to achieve the following goals: first, to bring together two important literatures, transnationalism and family, that do not come together as often as they should; second, to enrich the limited literature on transnational families which has heavily concentrated on immigrant groups of Latin American background; and third, to bring immigrant fathers into the study of transnational families and decision making, and to help resolve the situation that gender is often neglected in the literature on transnationalism.

Based on the above discussions, I have developed the following suppositions:

1. Transnational family arrangement is a family strategy to offset the hardship and difficulties that accompany immigration. It is a response to structural constraints that limit immigrants' opportunities in the host country.
2. Like the transnational parenting practice of Latino immigrants, the transnational family arrangements for Chinese immigrant families may also comprise some cultural elements (e.g., the strong intergenerational ties and the grandparents' involvement in the caring for the grandchildren).
3. Family decision making (e.g., work and family, child rearing) in the context of immigration is a difficult and complicated process involving the consideration of various factors and the optimization of limited resources available to these immigrant families. Gender dynamics, i.e., the relationships and interactions

between men and women, may facilitate the family decision making process or make the process even more difficult.

4. The meaning of mothering may undergo changes in the transnational context where caregiving has to be done from a long distance with the child being absent from the family. This caregiving arrangement may result in the caregiver (or the mother) having different understanding of their mothering role.
5. Given different cultural expectations about mothers' and fathers' parenting roles, there may exist gender differences in how transnational parents feel about their practice of transnational parenting. Transnational mothers may be more likely than fathers to feel the pain and guilt of not assuming the caregiving role and conforming to the conventional family arrangements.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology that I use to address my research questions, which is to be followed by three empirical chapters discussing major findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In order to study the practice of transnational parenting among Chinese immigrants in the U.S, I conducted qualitative interviews with a non-random sample gathered through snowball sampling. This chapter provides a general discussion of my study design and methodology. First I discuss the advantages of qualitative interviewing and the reasons why it is the most suitable method for answering my research questions; then I move on to talk about the sampling strategy used for this study, followed by discussions on how my study sample was identified and how data were collected. Toward the end of this chapter I also discuss my interview questionnaire and data analysis procedures used in this study.

#### **Qualitative Interviewing**

In-depth interviewing is the most suitable method for my project because it allows me to elicit detailed and close-up information from transnational parents about their parenting experiences and views of parenting. Quantitative methods (such as surveys) generally have fixed items and pre-categorized responses. As a result, respondents are usually limited to the answer choices provided by the researchers. As Weiss (1994) pointed out, the information researchers obtain from their respondents through quantitative methods is “fragmentary” and made up of “bits and pieces of attitudes and

observations and appraisals” (p. 2). And this is the price that quantitative studies often have to pay for their standardized precision.

However, oftentimes researchers want to obtain from their respondents much more information than what can be provided by surveys full of standardized questions. They want a full story of what has happened to their respondents and how they interpret their experiences. This is true with this current study on the practice of transnational parenting. In order to better understand why many Chinese immigrant parents let their young children live with the grandparents back in China while they still remain in the U.S and what this separation means to both mothers and fathers, I need to listen to these parents’ full stories and thus obtain richer and more detailed information from each of my respondents. Although it lacks the uniformity of survey questioning, one of the greatest advantages of qualitative interviewing is that it allows researchers to “gain in the coherence, depth, and density of the material each respondent provides” (Weiss, 1994: 3). With its ability to elicit in-depth information, qualitative interviewing is the most appealing research method to my study. It allows me to obtain rich data exploring transnational motherhood and fatherhood from the participants’ perspectives.

Qualitative interviewing has its own limitations, however. Generalizability is one of the things for which qualitative research is often criticized. Given the relatively small sample size and the oftentimes nonrandom nature of sample selection, findings from qualitative research cannot be safely generalized to a larger population. For my current study, since it is local-based with all Chinese immigrant families interviewed coming from Nashville, Tennessee, it is probably not safe to generalize the findings of this study to all Chinese immigrant families in the United States. However, as one of the rapidly

globalizing cities of the U.S interior, Nashville may share many similarities with other U.S interior cities which in the past decade have become “new destination cities” for immigrants and refugees. Compared with “gateway cities” such as New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, these “new destination cities” may not have what the former have to offer, such as highly developed ethnic enclave and socially-supportive immigrant communities, and the context of reception in these U.S interior cities might be quite different as well. For these reasons, adjustment among first-generation immigrants, which is never an easy thing to deal with, might be even more difficult in these interior cities than in those traditional gateway cities. Although generalizing the findings of this study to all Chinese immigrant families in the U.S is risky, this current Nashville-based study may shed light on family life and decision-making among first-generation immigrants residing in other “new destination cities” in the U.S interior. In addition, while statistical generalizability to all Chinese immigrant families in the U.S is problematic, “theoretical generalizability” is possible with qualitative interviewing (Weiss 1994), as, in the case of my current study, this research methodology allows for an understanding of how immigration affects family life and therefore makes it a possibility for future studies to build on this current study and investigate further into the impact of immigration.

### Sampling Strategy

The sample I use for this current study is a convenience sample gathered through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a method in which the researcher begins with a small number of respondents known personally to him or her and then expands outward

using referrals from these and later respondents (Babbie 2004). This method, despite its limitations as compared to a random sampling, best suits my research project on transnational parenting. The reasons why a random sampling method is not chosen are discussed below.

First, the subjects of my study are those Chinese immigrant parents who have experienced or are right now experiencing transnational parenting. Compared with those parents who take care of their children here in the U.S. all by themselves, or with the help of other people such as the visiting grandparents, domestic workers or daycare service providers, parents who sent their children back to China in care of their children's grandparents or other relatives are "atypical" parenting cases. This is because in addition to the significant involvement of other people (in most cases, the grandparents) in caring for the child, transnational parenting is also characterized with the complete separation of the parents and the child across two different countries, which is not a "typical" or even an acceptable parenting arrangement to many people. Although many Chinese parents are or have been engaged in transnational parenting, they are still relatively "rare" within the whole Chinese community in the U.S and are less visible as compared to "typical" parenting cases, i.e., parents at least live with their children, although they may not always assume a major role in caring for their children. As a result, a random sampling of all Chinese immigrant families in Nashville is not meaningful as it would not help me very much to locate those "atypical" cases that I have hoped to look into. Second, given the relatively small percentage of transnational parents within the Chinese community, a random sampling of those transnational parents are not meaningful either. For one thing, it is not easy to find out exactly how many Chinese immigrant parents are engaging or

have been engaged in transnational parenting. For another (and most importantly), since my intent is to gain rich understanding of the transnational parenting experience, in-depth knowledge of the experience appears to be more important than the representativeness of it. For those reasons discussed above, a snowball sampling method is chosen over a random sampling method to achieve the purposes of my research.

### Study Sample

This section describes the procedures by which data for this study were collected. As discussed above, I conducted in-depth interviewing with Chinese immigrant parents who had the experience of transnational parenting or were experiencing it at the time of the interview, and the sample for this study was a convenience sample gathered through snowball sampling, a technique that is very frequently used in qualitative research and best suited for my research project.

I started with Chinese immigrant parents I personally knew who, at the time of the interview, were experiencing or had experienced transnational parenting. These parents included those whose children were still in China and those who had already brought their children back. There were altogether eight families that I personally knew, and all but one family participated in my study. The only family that did not participate agreed to participate at first but later decided to not do so before an interview was scheduled, because they still did not feel comfortable talking about their transnational parenting experience. The total number of families recruited from my personal acquaintances was therefore seven.

At the same time I was inviting parents whom I personally knew to participate in my study, I also contacted people who were deeply involved in the Chinese community in Nashville and asked them to refer to me Chinese immigrant families they knew that might be interested in talking with me about their transnational parenting practice. Those people contacted included leaders from local Chinese churches, editor-in-chief of a local Chinese newspaper, and a few other people who were also very familiar with Nashville's Chinese community either because they had lived in Nashville for many years or they lived in places where there was usually a large concentration of Chinese immigrants. Families referred to me this way had some overlap with those that I personally knew, but this still added significantly to the pool of participating families. A total of 16 families were referred to me this way. Four families were already included in the families that I personally knew, two families later declined my invitation to participate in the study, and another family only conditionally agreed to participate as they requested that I only ask general questions but not go into any details during the interview. I later decided to not include this family in my sample. The remaining nine families completed the interviews.

A third source of participating families came from referrals by those families I had interviewed. At the end of each interview, I asked my subjects if they knew of any other Chinese families in Nashville who had also sent their children away. Another twelve families were recruited to my study this way. This brought the total number of participating families to 28.

## Data Collection Procedures

All in-depth interviews were conducted in a place chosen by the participants. Given the likelihood that my respondents could be very emotional when discussing their separation from their children, when I called them to schedule an interview I asked them to select a place where they would feel most comfortable talking about their experience. Most participants selected either their home or their office. Other places chosen by the participants included local parks, a coffee shop at a local mall, a local Chinese church, and even my own home. There were also fourteen interviews conducted over the telephone (see discussions later in this chapter for reasons why this was done). Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Before the interview started, I explained to my participants what I planned to study and the purpose of my study. Then I went over the consent form with them and assured them that their participation was completely voluntary and that all information would be kept confidential. I also told them that if they felt uncomfortable with some questions or even the whole interview, they could decline to answer or withdraw from the interview at any time they wanted. Interviewing then started after the participants signed the consent form and had no more questions to ask about my research. All participants gave me permission to tape-record the whole interview. Given the fact that these first-generation Chinese immigrants are more fluent in Chinese (Mandarin) than in English, all interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Mandarin, which is considered the standard Chinese, is the official language of China. It is spoken by the majority of the Chinese population, even by those who speak Cantonese as their first language. For this reason, the use of Mandarin in the interview did not in any way limit my study subjects to some certain groups of Chinese immigrants.

Also, the use of Chinese rather than English in the interview was to make sure that “language would not be a barrier to self-expression by the participants” (Roer-Strier, Strier, Este, Shimoni and Clark 2005: 319), given the fact that the first-generation Chinese immigrants are more comfortable speaking their own native language than English.

For the purposes of this study, within each family both parents were interviewed separately. This was to ensure that I could listen to what each parent really had to say about their choice of transnational parenting, without the side effects that the presence of the other parent could bring. In most cases, the two interviews for each family were scheduled on different days. This was because husband and wife tended to have very different schedules, which made it very hard to finish both interviews within one day or on one single visit to the participants’ family. During the interview, both parents were asked about their values, expectations, role definitions, and beliefs related to being a father or a mother. Including fathers in the study allows me to study the kind of roles that fathers play in the issue of transnational family arrangements from these fathers’ own perspectives. While mothers are oftentimes the subjects of study on family relations or gender roles in the family, Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb (2000) regarded asking fathers themselves about their family roles as a “novel and significant” research initiative (p. 1174) as fathers are not as frequently heard as mothers are. For the twenty-eight families recruited to my study, a total of 48 interviews were conducted. Eight parents either declined my invitation to participate in my study or could not be reached due to separation or divorce although their spouses agreed to be interviewed and also completed the interview in the end.

While most interviews were conducted in a face-to-face situation, a total of 14 interviews were conducted over the phone. Three interviews were completed this way because participants preferred not to have a face-to-face talk. The remaining 11 interviews were either due to the fact that these participating families used to be residing in Nashville but just recently relocated to other states, or because one parent left Nashville due to work or study while the other parent was still residing in Nashville. When this was the case, a face-to-face interview was conducted with the parent who still lived in Nashville while a telephone interview had to be scheduled with the other parent who had moved to another city or state. When I had to complete a telephone interview, I emailed my participants the consent form and asked them to print it out, sign it, and then mail it back to me. I later reimbursed the postage. Phone interviewing was conducted over the computer with Skype<sup>3</sup>, a program that allows people to make phone calls from their computer. These interviews were also tape-recorded after obtaining permission from my participants. These telephone and face-to-face interviews did not have much difference in terms of the average length of the interview and the amount of information obtained.

To compensate for my respondents' time and thank them for their participation, I gave each family \$20 at the end of the interview. Although Weiss (1994) points out that incentives might not always be necessary (especially for those respondents in good socioeconomic status), I believe that by agreeing to be interviewed and to share their personal stories with me, my respondents have actually contributed a great deal to the completion of my research project. And the compensation that I gave out was just my

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<sup>3</sup> After downloading free software from skype's web site and signing up for a free account, users can make unlimited computer-to-computer calls for free. They can also make unlimited calls to phones or mobiles from their computer after paying a small annual fee.

token of appreciation for their help and also for their trust in me. One of the 28 families I interviewed declined the compensation, however, because they believed that I was actually doing them a favor by giving them a chance to talk about their own experiences with transnational parenting.

### Interview Questionnaire

The questions that I asked during the interview (see Appendix A) were grouped into five sections. First, I asked my respondents about their background such as when they came to the United States, why they decided to migrate, how many children they had, and what their socioeconomic status was like before and after migration. The demographic information collected here helped me to better understand my respondents. In addition, it also provided me with bases on which I could compare the experiences of different transnational parents and see if these demographic variables might affect the way my respondents interpreted their practice of transnational parenting. Also, asking this kind of questions at the beginning of the interview helped both my respondents and me to relax and get familiarized with each other a little more (especially when I did not personally know the respondents) before we jumped into serious and hard questions concerning parenting and separation from their children. Towards the end of this section, I asked a few questions concerning my respondents' understanding of parenting roles in general. This served as a transition from collecting background information to asking detailed questions about parenting transnationally, which was the major component of the interview.

After background information was collected, my questions switched to transnational parenting. By asking these questions I attempted to find out details about my respondents' transnational parenting experiences. Generally there were three major stages involved in the whole transnational parenting experiences: the very first was the decision-making stage in which the immigrant mother and father came to a consensus on sending their child(ren) back to China after a period of negotiation and struggling. Here I hope to learn how the decision was finally made, and if the mother and father had an equal say in deciding where and with whom their child(ren) should live. The second major stage involved parents making transition to being transnational parents. During this time, most of these parents still lived with their children in the United States, but they already knew for sure that they were going to separate from their children in the foreseeable future. By asking a series of questions about how parents made the transition to being "childless" or partially "childless," I hope to find out whether or not mothers and fathers reacted differently toward the impending separation. The final stage started from the time when separation took place, that is, right after their children were sent back to China. After separation took place, these parents became real transnational parents. Here I hope to examine how mothers and fathers interpreted their transnational parenting roles and whether there was any gender difference in the actual practice of transnational parenting. By breaking the transnational parenting experience into three major stages (four stages for those parents who had already brought their children back to the U.S after a period of separation), I am able to examine two important things: first, how my respondents' understanding of their transnational parenting roles might have developed and changed over time; second, whether or not mothers' and fathers' interpretations of

their roles were different throughout the three different and significant periods of time. For those parents who had experienced transnational parenting but had already brought their child(ren) back to the U.S by the time of the interview, I also asked these parents some questions about the return of their child(ren) and therefore the reunion of the family. Questions were also adjusted accordingly to accommodate the situation of some single-parent families (caused by divorce or separation).

Discussions about transnational parenting on popular Chinese web sites, such as [www.mitbbs.com](http://www.mitbbs.com) and [www.wenxuecity.com](http://www.wenxuecity.com), served as a context which I consulted often during the process of questionnaire design and data collection. Both hosted in the U.S, these two online forums are very popular among overseas Chinese, especially those Chinese residing in North America. Mitbbs.com claims that it has hundreds of thousands of registered users, most of whom are overseas Chinese, and that 85% of their internet traffic is generated from within the US. Wenxuecity.com, however, claims to be the largest overseas Chinese community portal in the world.

### Data Analysis

The approach that I took in my research was the constructivist grounded theory approach advocated by Charmaz (1995, 2000 & 2001). This is different from the traditional grounded theory which requires that the researcher enters the field of inquiry without any preconceived ideas. By taking the traditional approach the researcher is able to “remain sensitive to the data by being able to record events and detect happenings without first having them filtered through and squared with pre-existing hypotheses and biases” (Glaser 1978: 3). The constructivist grounded approach, however, treats

researchers themselves as co-producers or authors. The underlying assumption of this approach is that the interaction between the researcher and participants “*produces* the data, and therefore the meanings that the researcher observes and defines” (Charmaz 1995: 35; emphasis in original). In one of her later works, Charmaz (2000) also points out that, “Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the ‘discovered’ reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts” (p. 524). For my research on transnational parenting, the approach I took was not the traditional grounded theory approach. This is because I already had some ideas about variables to examine and themes that might be important before I entered the field, and in the course of my research I either proved or disproved the ideas that I had brought in. By taking this approach I let the data speak for themselves in revealing emergent patterns and categories (Charmaz 2000). It also means that I need to collect data and analyze them all at the same time. The purpose of doing this is to revise the research process if needed as new ideas emerge from my data.

## CHAPTER IV

### TRANSITION INTO PARENTHOOD

#### Introduction

This chapter examines how immigration to the United States has affected transition into parenthood among Chinese immigrants -- in the case of this current research, those Chinese immigrant parents who later became transnational parents. Examining the transition into parenthood among this group of immigrant parents helps to address the following issues: how did these immigrants decide to become parents in the first place and why did they choose to do so at the time they did? Was not becoming a parent ever an option? Did those transnational parents consider themselves “ready” when they had their children? Did international migration affect their parenthood decision and timing? And most importantly, did this timing of parenthood have anything to do with their decision to become transnational parents several months later, given that most of the children sent back to China were only infants? Although all Chinese immigrant parents are likely to have been faced with the issue of parenthood timing, the current research only focuses on transnational parents. And answers to the above questions are expected to provide some sort of background information about these transnational parents and may shed some light on why they subsequently became transnational parents.

Becoming a parent is one of the fundamental expectations of adulthood and is oftentimes accompanied by an adult’s pursuit of other life goals (Erikson 1968; Hogan and Astone 1986). As a result, transition into parenthood is oftentimes a very

complicated issue which could be affected by various factors. In the United States, women have increasingly delayed their transition to parenthood since the early 1960s, and this purposeful delayed parenthood is oftentimes considered one of the strategies employed by women to obtain more education and career development (Edwards 2002; Rindfuss, Morgan and Swicegood 1988).

In addition to the pursuit of more education, economic stability and career advancement, international migration, which is often associated with a rapid and dramatic change in the migrants' life, is also an important factor affecting an immigrant couple's decision on parenthood (Carlson 1985; Stephen and Bean 1992). International migration is found by many studies to have a disruption effect on immigrants' childbearing behavior and oftentimes cause delayed parenthood (Ng and Nault 1997; Stephen and Bean 1992). Other studies indicate that international migration also has a stimulating impact on childbearing behavior and as a result the period shortly after migration often witnesses elevated birth rates among immigrants. This was interpreted as a response to postponed or interrupted childbearing before or during international migration, a catching-up behavior to make up for the time lost before migration was completed (Ford 1990). Given the complexity of becoming a parent, what then were the stories behind transition into parenthood among the group of Chinese transnational parents whom I interviewed for this study? Did international migration to the U.S affect their parenthood decisions? If so, how were their parenthood decisions affected? The remaining of this chapter is devoted to the discussion of the above questions.

## Immigration and Becoming a Parent

Among the twenty-eight families I interviewed, only three families had their first child in China before they migrated to the U.S. The remaining twenty-five families all had their first child in the United States. According to these families, immigration had affected their family planning in two major ways. First of all, the number of children they can have is one of the most important things affected. At the time of the interview, these 28 Chinese families either already had more than one child or indicated that they wanted to have more than one. None of them said that they wanted to have only one child. A few families even indicated that one of the reasons why they migrated to the U.S. was that they wanted to have the freedom of deciding for themselves how many children they wanted to have. While according to the majority of the families the ideal number of children was two, a few said that they hoped to eventually have three children. This finding echoes that of the study by Hwang and Saenz (1997) who examined the fertility of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. and found out that as a result of emigration from China, Chinese immigrants tend to reclaim their reproductive freedom suppressed by Chinese government's strict one-child policy and choose to have more than one child. And this is what Hwang and Saenz (1997) called the "fertility emancipation" (p. 51). For the 28 Chinese immigrant families I interviewed for my study, the increased number of children they can and also hope to have has made timing of parenthood more significant an issue to consider. This is because unlike their counterparts in China who are allowed to have only one child and therefore only need to make a one-time decision on when to have their only child, these Chinese immigrants in the U.S. usually have to make multiple decisions on parenthood timing—one for every child they want to have. Therefore, the timing

issue has become more complicated for these immigrant families than for those families still in China.

Second, while immigration has allowed Chinese immigrants to reclaim their reproductive freedom and choose to have as many children as they want, at the same time it has also shattered the social support networks that they very much took for granted before immigration. In China, raising a young child usually involves the extended family as a social support network of care, and one of the traditional roles that the retired elderly play in China is their active involvement in their adult children's life by assisting them with child care (Salaff and Greve 2004; Xie, Defrain, Meredith and Combs 1996). Despite the importance of the support networks, however, one of the issues with migration is that these Chinese immigrants cannot always bring their support networks along with them when they migrate to the United States. Consequently, the rupture of kinship, together with limited access to social resources in the U.S, oftentimes poses great challenges for immigrants' family life (Da 2003). And this has inevitably added to the complexity associated with becoming a parent for these first-generation immigrants. As Liang<sup>4</sup>, father of a three-year old boy, indicated during the interview:

We have to admit that we have left so much behind us [when we migrated]. Those we relied so much on while we were still in China, like our parents, our friends, are not available here. We are now totally on our own. But there is nothing you can do about it, because you just cannot choose to have it all. We are only the first-generation immigrants. What should we expect?

Liang was not alone in this feeling of loss caused by migration. A common sentiment my respondents expressed during the interview was that they were just first-generation immigrants, the almost "uprooted" generation, and it was this situation that had accounted for many of the problems they are confronted with in the U.S. Almost all

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonyms are used in the whole dissertation to protect the identity of my respondents.

Chinese immigrants I interviewed stressed their first-generation status and as the first generation to leave their home country they had to endure hardship that came along with immigration, with the hope that the next generation would be better off and therefore would not have to go through the same hardship. Unlike their counterparts in China, these immigrant parents are left to handle all family situations themselves, most of the times without the assistance of their previous support networks. And this situation seems to be accentuated by the fact that Nashville, as one of the new destination cities, does not have as much to offer to new immigrants as those traditional gateway cities in terms of highly developed ethnic enclave, socially-supportive immigrant communities and favorable context of reception. All of these, i.e., first-generation immigrant status, the non-importable support networks left behind in their home country, and the lack of local communal social support, might have contributed to the feelings of loss and social isolation harbored by these Chinese immigrants I interviewed for this study.

Due to the possibility of multiple decision-making on parenthood (as a result of “fertility emancipation”) and the lack of social support networks in the U.S (especially in one of the new destination cities like Nashville), parenting has become a more complicated issue after migration. Therefore, given the hardship and difficulty as a result of immigration, under what conditions is remaining childless a workable option for these immigrants? Have these Chinese immigrants ever considered this option? Surprisingly, the answers they gave to the above questions were a unanimous “no”: none of the Chinese immigrants I interviewed said they ever thought of giving up their right to become a parent.

There were four major reasons why they would not consider remaining childless: first, all of these Chinese immigrants indicated that children were an essential part of their lives and a life without any children was not considered complete and fully lived. Although not having any children does not seem to be too serious a problem when they are still young, it is going to become a big issue when they get old, because they will feel lonely and regret for sure, but then it will be too late for them to have any children at all. One of the mothers, Chen Xin, mentioned that several of her American colleagues did not have children and were not even planning on having any. She said:

I could never understand why they wanted to have no children. I don't know whether they had problems getting pregnant or simply chose to not become parents at all. For me, if I had problem bearing my own children I would adopt one or two. But remaining childless? No, this never crossed my mind.

When asked the same question, one of the fathers, Qiu Sheng, simply quoted Mencius's famous saying "of the three heinous unfilial acts, failure to produce offspring is the worst"<sup>5</sup>, indicating that remaining childless is not acceptable in Chinese culture and that becoming a parent is rather an important social responsibility for an adult to fulfill than a personal matter.

Second, about half of the couples interviewed mentioned a very important reason why they should not only *have* any children but also have more than just one. They indicated that just because they as the first-generation immigrants lacked support networks in the U.S, they should become parents and have more than one child. In so doing they will be on the way to rebuilding their new networks here in the U.S. Not only will the parents themselves benefit from the support networks when they get old, but also

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<sup>5</sup> Mencius (Chinese: 孟子; 372 – 289 BC) was a Chinese philosopher who was considered the most famous Confucian after Confucius himself. The original saying in Chinese is 不孝有三，无后为大。

their children will have siblings to rely on when they need them. They believed that by choosing to have more than just one child they were actually doing both themselves and their own children a big favor. As Li Dong, father of a two-year-old girl, indicated during the interview:

It's not that we are here [in the U.S] for a short visit. Instead we are here to stay. So we need to have a good plan for ourselves. By having children I am building my own big family here and when I get old I have my children to rely on. Not only that, but I remember I read this somewhere and it goes somewhat like this: the best gift that parents can ever give to their children is to get them siblings. I couldn't agree more. I think my children will be grateful to us when they grow up, especially after we die. Blood is thicker than water. We all know this so well.

For these immigrant parents, having children was like an investment for the future, so hardship at the present time should not in any way interfere with their big plan for a better life later on.

Third, on the issue of parenthood there was also pressure coming from the extended family. Just as raising a young child in China involves efforts from the extended family, making the decision to become a parent is also a big family matter. Although the extended family will not decide for the couple when exactly to have children, they will make sure that they do not remain childless and that their parenthood do not come at an age considered by them as being too late. Some of my respondents who had their first child after 30 said as they approached 30 and were still childless, their parents and parents-in-laws started to hint that it was about time. They did that in different ways, some by informing the young couple that their friends were now grandparents and enjoyed taking care of their grandchildren, others by advising the couple not to focus too much on their career but shift some of their attention to their family, and in another interesting case, simply by mailing to the couple a package full of baby clothes.

A fourth reason mentioned by couples I interviewed was peer pressure. A couple tended to feel somewhat left out when friends around them started to have their children. Cao Min said she felt the pressure of becoming a mother herself when two of her best friends became mothers in one single year:

All of a sudden they showed interest in nothing else but babies. We used to enjoy shopping together, but then after the babies were born, they only wanted to shop in the kids section; when we sat down to chat, our topic always shifted to babies within 10 minutes. They would also email pictures of their babies to me from time to time, and even sent me Christmas cards made with their babies' pictures. I said to myself: maybe I should also become a mother now. I mean, I like kids, so what's the point of still waiting?

As a result of peer pressure, some Chinese couples I interviewed for this study started to feel obligated to “catch up” so that they could still remain in their circle of friends or avoid being questioned why they still remain childless.

Since remaining childless is never a workable option for the Chinese immigrant families I interviewed, when to become a parent has become a very significant issue to consider here. As discussed above, parenthood in the U.S is complicated for first-generation Chinese immigrants as a result of migration. Issues involved include when to become a parent for the first time, how many children to have, and if they choose to have more than one child, what the ideal spacing between children should be – to space them close together or further apart, etc. When asked what they thought the best timing of parenting was, or when they thought they should be ready for parenthood, the majority of those transnational parents I interviewed indicated that “readiness” sounded like an easy term but in reality was very difficult to define. Their answers were very much like what Jiang Xue said during the interview:

Is there such a thing as best timing? Or is there a time when you can say to yourself, “OK, now everything is ready and I'm going to have my baby.” I don't

think so. You are never ready. That's what I want to say. The best time is when you can afford a big house? Or find a job that pays you over 200 Grand a year? Or when you get citizenship? If reaching these goals is considered best timing, then by the time you reach these goals, it's very likely that you are no longer young. Is that still a good timing? By choosing to have babies at an older age you are not responsible for your babies and not doing them a big favor at all because everybody knows that older age means higher risk for both the baby and the mom. Is that still a good timing? If I kept waiting for that perfect time to come, I would probably end up never having any children at all.

However, saying that one is never ready in terms of becoming a parent does not necessarily mean that parenthood is never planned for. Instead, for those transnational parents interviewed for this study parenthood was not at all a random decision. This was contrary to what had been claimed by those non-transnational parents who firmly believed that unplanned parenthood was the origin of the sinful act of transnational parenting and all the later sufferings on the part of the parents (as indicated in Chapter One). Instead, for transnational parents, since "readiness" in becoming a parent was something that was never achievable, the decision was usually made after a careful examination of various factors involved in their situation. When the best combination of conditions could not be obtained, parents tended to value some factors more than others. The following sections examine how parenthood decision was actually made by this group of immigrant parents and how they responded to the remarks of those non-transnational parents who dismissed their parenthood decision as simply a random one without any serious consideration of their "readiness".

### Parenthood as Response to the Age Pressure

In the United States, there has been a trend for delayed parenthood in the past several decades due to a couple's (especially the wife's) pursuit for more education and

career advancement. However, there is always a limit on the length of time a woman can postpone births. Unless a couple has decided to never have any children at all, the concerns about health risks that late-timing parenthood may cause to both the mother and the child have often forced the couple to shift their attention from their pursuit of other life goals and start to think about fulfilling their childbearing intentions (Rindfuss, Morgan and Swicegood 1988). Therefore, parenthood in the end is oftentimes a response to the aging anxiety. The same pattern is found in this current study of Chinese transnational parents in Nashville.

As discussed previously in this chapter, remaining childless was simply not an option for those transnational parents in this study. These parents believed that parenthood was an essential part of a person's adult life, and it was something that had to be obtained after he/she reached a certain age, even though at that time there were unfavorable factors involved that could make parenthood quite difficult a task. During the interview, age was frequently brought up as one of the most important factors a couple had to consider when they were planning for their parenthood. Its importance was repeatedly stressed, especially by mothers. Qin was a mother of a three-year old girl. She said the following about the relationship between age and parenthood:

You do certain things at a certain age. You start to attend school when you are 6 years old and go to college at the age of 18. Then you graduate from college, find a job, and get married. What follows is to have children. You do your age-appropriate business. This is quite natural. To me, still remaining childless at the age of 40 is as wrong as having children when you are only a teenager.

Qin had her first child at the age of 32, six years after she came to the United States. For those families (25 out of 28 families) who did not have their first child before they came to the United States, international migration had obviously delayed their parenthood.

Over half of my respondents initially came to the U.S either on student visas to pursue graduate studies after completing undergraduate or even graduate degrees in China, or on work visas which gave them authorization to work right after arriving in the U.S.

Although the remaining respondents initially came to the U.S on dependent visas (as spouses to student and work visa holders) most of them managed to obtain student visas by getting admitted into graduate school. During the first few years my respondents had to concentrate on their work or graduate studies or application for graduate school admission. Meanwhile, as first-generation immigrants to the country they also needed to overcome all kinds of barriers (such as language and culture) as they struggled to adapt themselves to their new surroundings. Therefore the first few years in the U.S was almost always difficult, and by the time they felt relatively comfortable with their life in the U.S and started to consider having a child, they were usually several years older than the age at which their counterparts in China had their only child. For the majority of them, becoming a parent at this point of time has become a somewhat urgent matter. Qin said she was the only person among her friends to come to the U.S and was also the very last person to become a parent. Qin talked about what her situation was like when she decided to have her first child:

By the time I got my PhD and found my current job, I realized that I was no longer young but I was still not a mother yet! My husband and I discussed our situation many times. At that time, I just started my current job. But my husband was still jobless, and he was thinking of going back to school again. Compared with those families with two income earners, we were really not in good shape. But the thing is: we were getting older and older, so ready or not, we just couldn't afford to wait.

Like Qin, most other mothers indicated that they had their first child at a time when they thought they could not afford to wait any longer. They felt that they had to become a

mother in order to catch the “last bus”, that is, to not push the limits of their biological clocks too hard. And their concerns seemed to have been accentuated by their status as first-generation immigrants still struggling to integrate into the host country. A majority of the mothers interviewed believed that the ideal age to have one’s first child was before age 30, but if this could not be accomplished before 30, then 35 was definitely the cutting point. Once they reached 30 years of age, more weight should be given to the age factor when a couple was considering having a baby. About half of the mothers interviewed had their first child before 30 and all mothers had their first child before 35. However, aging is more of an issue to women than to men as fathers interviewed for this study tended to put a higher limit on age to become a parent: most of them indicated that they could afford to wait till 40, but as a matter of fact none of the fathers in the sample had their first child that late, largely due to the fact that their wives did not want to postpone childbearing until such a late age.

#### Parenthood as Means of Self Recognition and Measure of Achievement

As discussed previously, parenthood is considered one of the fundamental expectations of adulthood and is often accomplished in the pursuit of other life goals (Erikson 1968; Hogan and Astone 1986). Therefore, it makes sense to assume that the fulfillment of parenthood would be regarded by most adults, if not all, a major achievement of adulthood, just like educational attainment and career advancement are. In the case of many transnational parents I interviewed for this study, parenthood seemed to be especially important in helping them (especially women) reclaim their sense of

achievement and self recognition, which, unfortunately, were often damaged in the process of immigration and settlement.

International migration caused many of my respondents to give up their previous career, income and social standing in China and often resulted in their downward social mobility in the U.S (at least for the first few years). After they migrated to the U.S., many had to start from almost the very beginning by either going back to school to receive further education or by taking a low-paying job with the hope of gradually moving up the career ladder. As a result, it was very common for these immigrants to have a very strong sense of loss, so becoming a mother at this time was often considered a means of self recognition, a way to alleviate this feeling of loss and failure. Ping was a mother of two children aged four and two respectively. Her younger child was sent back to China when she was about one year old. Ping used to be a doctor in China but after she came to the U.S she had to work in a medical center as a laboratory assistant while her husband worked as a postdoctoral fellow in the same center. She said she felt very depressed at the beginning:

It was a huge change for me, I mean, from being a doctor in China to being a lab technician in the U.S. I have wanted to go back to practice medicine here in the U.S, but I understand that this is very difficult. There are so many difficulties, foreseeable or unforeseeable. I felt very depressed for a while, then it occurred to me that although there are many things that I can't control, there are still things that I can. So I became a mom and had two children in a row. I know at least this is under my control. Now I am finished with my child-bearing tasks and feel very good about these accomplishments. Let me just forget about my doctor dream for a while.

Ping's words were echoed by another mother Jun who also had two children. She worked as a college teacher in China before she had to follow her husband to the U.S where her husband worked as a post-doctorate fellow at a university. Jun stayed at home

for one year and then decided to return to graduate school to get her PhD. At the time of the interview she had been in the program for over five years but graduation was still not in sight. What comforted her most was that she had both her children while in graduate school. When asked about her experience, Jun said:

I just wanted to concentrate on one thing at a time. My friends back home are already enjoying their established career, but I came to the U.S only to see myself entering graduate school again. In my department a PhD degree usually takes about five or six years and it is really tough stuff. So after much consideration I decided to pick something much easier to do at first, that is, to become a mom. With this already accomplished, I now feel much more confident to deal with my degree program. I think this is better than being stuck in the program with nothing accomplished, I mean, no degree, no child.

Here becoming a mother has become an effective strategy for some women to alleviate the anxiety and loss that accompany their migration. At a time when they had to struggle to re-establish their career on a foreign land, these women, by becoming a mother, managed to defeat the feeling of loss and at the same time achieve a sense of self-fulfillment.

#### Parenthood as Means to Improve Marital Relationship

Immigration can oftentimes put strain on a marital relationship. Among those Chinese transnational parents I interviewed, some also chose to become parents because they hoped that a child would help to mend the problems in their marital relationship. This usually happened to families in which the wives had to stay at home because their visa status did not allow them to seek employment in the U.S. These wives usually had a decent job in China before they followed their husbands to the U.S. From a white-collar professional in China to a housewife in the U.S, this big change could very easily produce

tension in a marital relationship while both husband and wife were struggling to adjust to their new life following migration.

Qiao worked for a large foreign company and earned a very decent salary before she came to the U.S. But when she came to Nashville in 2002, one year after her husband arrived, she found that she had to stay at home because her visa status did not allow her to seek legal employment in the U.S. Life was very easy and relaxing for her during the first two months as she finally could take a break after years of hard work in China. But two months passed when she began to feel very uncomfortable about having to stay at home. Problems began to occur and she and her husband began to quarrel over trivial things. Several times Qiao considered permanently returning to China. Following the suggestion of a family friend who was doing family counseling at that time, Qiao and her husband Feng sat down to discuss what they should do about their relationship. After much discussion they finally decided that they should have a child, which they hoped would make them put family at the first place and devote more attention to family relationships. And this strategy seemed to work for Qiao and her husband.

As discussed above, some parents decided to have children because they felt the age pressure, some, especially women, treated parenthood as a means of self-fulfillment, and still others had their children because they wanted to mend the problems that existed in their marital relationship as a result of migration. However, no matter what their original purpose was, none of the parents interviewed ever regretted having their children at the time they did, even if subsequently they had to send their children to live in China. They did not believe that they were having their children just for fun, but it was to fulfill an

important task in their lives and to also fulfill a purpose. And this was done after careful and serious consideration of their situation.

Fang was one of the parents who had her child because she thought she had reached an age when parenthood was a must. At the time of the interview she was a mother of a two-year old boy. She sent her son back to China when he was about one year old. She would not say that her sending her son away resulted from her earlier decision to have her child when she was not “ready” and neither would she consider her parenthood decision to be “irresponsible”. Instead, she said,

This *was* indeed a very responsible decision-making, and the decision was made after careful examination of our situation. Economic situation was an important factor to consider, but age was equally important. I’m so happy I didn’t wait till I’m over 35 when we would be better off. Late pregnancies put both mom and baby at risk. We all know this so well.

Fang said she never regretted having her first child at the time she did, even if she later had to send her child away to live with her parents in China. She said she had a friend who had her first child at the age of 38. The reason why her friend waited so long was that she insisted on not having her child until both she and her husband attained tenured faculty positions as she wanted her child, once born, to live in a very stable and comfortable environment. Now her friend and her friend’s husband earned a six-figure total salary. They hired a live-in nanny and spent a lot of money on the child. “People do things differently,” Fang said, “In my friend’s case, they waited until they thought they were financially secure, but I wouldn’t think they were doing their child a big favor. It is hard to imagine that when they are in their fifties, their child will still be a teenager.”

Other parents who treated parenthood as a means of self-fulfillment or a way to save their marriage thought in the same way. Qiao and her husband Feng had their child in

order to mend the problems in their marital relationship caused by migration. When asked whether he thought the timing of parenthood had caused them to send their child away later on, Feng said the following:

We can only plan for one thing or solve one problem at a time. There is no way we can foresee what things will be like in several years because life is not predictable, especially for immigrants on a foreign land. So we deal with one thing at a time. Although later situation forced us to send our son away to China, it is the result of this later situation. The timing of parenthood is never to blame for what happens later on.

Feng's remarks were echoed by other parents in a similar situation. Mei said she and her husband had their first child also because they wanted to save their marriage. Their purpose was fulfilled and their marriage was saved. But when their daughter was eight months old, they had to send her away to China. She said she and her husband never regretted having their daughter at the time they did. As for having to separate from her when she was less than one year old, she said firmly, "That is a totally different story. It has nothing to do with having her in the first place."

### Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, this chapter provides some background information about transition into parenthood among the group of Chinese immigrant parents who subsequently became transnational parents -- how the parenthood decision was made and what they thought of its timing. Immigration has brought about significant impact on these Chinese immigrant families: while they are no longer restricted to having only one child (as they would have been if they had not migrated due to the government's one-child policy), the support networks that they took for granted before immigration were left behind and cannot be relied on to deal with issues (such as raising a child) that first-generation immigrants are

usually confronted with in the host country. With low levels of social capital these first-generation immigrants in the U.S are somewhat socially isolated in the U.S, especially in an U.S interior city where the Chinese community is not as highly developed to offer support to newly arrived immigrants as in those traditional “gateway cities”.

For the group of Chinese immigrants interviewed for this study, their transition into parenthood was concurrent with their efforts to adapt to the host society. As a result, parenthood was oftentimes their response to issues brought about by international migration. For example, migration and the subsequent adjustment process caused many of them to not consider parenthood until an older age, as compared to their counterparts still in China. Eventually delayed parenthood became a way to eliminate their aging anxiety, the feeling that they could not afford to remain childless any longer. Also, parenthood was considered a means of self recognition and measure of achievement, especially by women, in order to alleviate their feeling of loss and lack of achievement caused by migration. The immediate downward social mobility brought about by immigration caused many immigrants to seek alternative ways to reclaim their sense of achievement and recognition, and becoming parents could sometimes fulfill this purpose, although women were more likely than men to think it this way. In some cases, parenthood was also a means to improve marital relationship, which deteriorated as the couple struggled to adapt to life in the host society.

However, none of these transnational parents believed that it was due to their bad timing of parenthood, or their “unreadiness” in becoming parents, that they had to send their children to China to be raised there, which is contrary to the common beliefs held by many non-transnational parents. What then were the real reasons behind transnational

parenting in addition to perhaps the hardships encountered by first-generation immigrants?  
And how was the decision on transnational parenting made? The next chapter will  
address the above questions.

## CHAPTER V

### TRANSNATIONAL PARENTHOOD: MAKING THE DECISION

#### Introduction

Married couples have to make decisions on various domestic and career-related issues which may include timing of parenthood, division of household labor, work-family issues, and many more. As Moen and Wethington (1992) indicate, being active participants in the larger society, families and households are “flexible, decision-making units, actively choosing various patterns of behavior” and “responding to, reworking, or reframing external constraints and opportunities”. According to them, family strategies are therefore “the actions families devise for coping with, if not overcoming, the challenges of living, and for achieving their goals in the face of structural barriers” (p. 234). Due to women’s increasing participation in the labor force, combining family responsibilities and paid employment has posed significant challenges to many dual-earner families. Meanwhile, family decision making and family strategies to cope with work-family conflicts have also attracted a great deal of scholarly attention and become an important line of research in the work-family literature. Career-prioritizing decisions often have to be made and certain degree of compromise has to be reached between the husband and the wife (Pixley 2008; Pixley and Moen 2003). Inside the home, however, decisions also need to be made on domestic chores and caregiving—who takes care of the housework and children and how. Oftentimes dual-earner families have to seek ways to relieve the double burden of paid and domestic work, and outsourcing domestic chores

and caregiving tasks is often employed by many dual-earner couples as an effective strategy to resolve work-family conflicts (De Ruijter and Van der Lippe 2007; Hochschild 1997).

However, two things are generally missing in the existing work-family literature. First, studies tend to focus on factors affecting couples' work and family decisions and the effects of their decisions (whatever the decisions are) and ignore the process of decision making and negotiation between the husband and the wife. Second, families examined in these previous studies tend to be "typical" mainstream families and very few studies have investigated family decision making in the context of immigration. In this chapter I attempt to fill the gap by discussing the process of decision making that happens in immigrant families. Family decision making is oftentimes not an easy thing to accomplish, and for immigrant families it could be even more difficult as these families not only have to deal with situations (such as work and family, childcare, etc.) that generally arise in a family but also need to handle them in the context of immigration, which, more often than not, could make these situations more complicated.

In the case of Chinese transnational families, the focus of the current study, childcare was not only outsourced but also outsourced internationally to these immigrants' home country. What have caused these transnational families to consider outsourcing child care in the first place and then how did they decide where to outsource it? Did they examine outsourcing alternatives available in the U.S before they reached their decision to outsource child care to China? Also, what kind of gender dynamics, if any, existed in the decision making process? In this chapter I investigate the process of decision making among those Chinese transnational families and attempt to discover the

“stories” behind their transnational family arrangements. I first of all discuss why these Chinese immigrant families had to seek an outsourcing alternative, which is to be followed by a discussion of the process of decision making on international outsourcing.

### Outsourcing Caregiving and the Intensive Mothering Ideal

According to Hays (1996), despite their backgrounds, financial circumstances, and labor force participation, mothers all share a similar vision of what makes a good mother. They believe that good mothers should have a willingness to expend a great deal of physical, emotional, cognitive and financial resources on their children. This intensive mothering ideal holds the mother primarily responsible for child-rearing, dictates that the process should be child-centered, and that children's needs take precedence over the individual needs of their mothers (p. 46). In other words, when it is needed the mother should sacrifice her own needs and life options to assist with the child's healthy growth and development, as mothers, with their inborn ability to mother, are considered the ones best able to meet children's needs (Walzer 2004). Arendell (2000) in her review of research on motherhood also indicated that intensive mothering ideology “remains, despite cultural contradictions and diverse arrangements and practices, the normative standard, culturally and politically, by which mothering practices and arrangements are evaluated” (p. 1195). Despite the fact that in contemporary society intensive mothering is still the dominant mothering ideal, women's increasing labor force participation has made it very difficult or even impossible for working mothers to achieve this ideal. When the mother has to work outside the home and is therefore not able to attend to the daily needs of the child, the child is usually left in someone else's care (daycare centers, baby sitters,

etc) while the mother is at work. Whatever the arrangement is (i.e., intensive mothering or not), however, under normal circumstances the bottom line is that the mother lives together with her child, especially during the child's early years. While it is not a hard thing to understand why a couple chose to have children at the time they did (discussed in the previous chapter), as becoming parents is quite natural a process for married couples no matter what the timing is, sending their own children away to live with the grandparents or relatives in another country for an extended period of time is not that easy to comprehend, since it is against the common practice of parenting to not keep their children with them, especially when the children are at a very young age (infants or toddlers).

Sarah Hart, a British therapist, writes in her new book *A Mother Apart: How to Let Go of Guilt and Find Happiness Living Apart from Your Child*, "Mothers who do not live with their children are regarded at best an oddity, at worst unnatural and selfish<sup>6</sup>." Odd or unnatural as it might be, in the case of Chinese immigrant families being studied in this research project, however, one of the most important questions that demands an answer is why the separation between parents and their young children had to take place. As discussed in the previous chapter, contrary to the beliefs held by many non-transnational parents, transnational parents interviewed for this study did not believe that their timing of parenthood was in any way inappropriate or was what to blame for their decision to send their children away. They did not accept the argument that it was their

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<sup>6</sup> *A Mother Apart: How to Let Go of Guilt and Find Happiness Living Apart from Your Child* (Paperback), by Sarah Hart, Publisher: Crown House Publishing (May 5, 2008). Sarah Hart is a British therapist. When Hart was young and divorced, she sent her four-year-old daughter to South Africa to be raised by the child's father while she kept her 18-month-old son.

“unreadiness” in parenthood and their lack of plan for themselves that had resulted in the later irresponsible act of letting their children live with the grandparents in China.

Also, an examination of criticisms against transnational parents posted in online forums reveals an interesting pattern that mothers were more likely to be targeted than fathers. These mothers were oftentimes dismissed as “bad mothers” or “irresponsible mothers” because to those who criticized, these mothers did not want to take the responsibility to care for their own children. Instead, they cared too much about their own personal needs, without the willingness to make any sacrifice for their children’s growth and development. However, on the other hand fathers were seldom called “bad fathers” for not keeping their children with them. This pattern is interesting but not inconsistent with traditional gender role expectations, that is, mothers should be primarily responsible for the care of children and be available to them whenever needed (Hays 1996; Riggs 1997; Rothman 2001; Russo 1976), while fathers are expected to provide for their family and to be the breadwinner (Coltrane 2004; Marsiglio 2000; Riggs 1997). Here it seems that the basic assumption under all these criticisms is that the parenting burden is not shared equally between the mother and the father as the mother is considered the primary caregiver of the child. Therefore, when these Chinese immigrant mothers failed to fulfill the gender-typical social role – not only did they fail to conform to the intensive mothering ideal but they also chose to not care for their own children, the role ascribed to them, they then became examples of deficient mothers and subjects of criticism. Transnational fathers, on the other hand, were relatively safe from those criticisms since as fathers they were not expected to assume major responsibility in caring for their children. However, if mothers are held responsible for caring for their children,

then in the case of Chinese transnational parents, was the decision to send their children away primarily made by the mothers? Or was it made by whoever brings home more income? Also, is the intensive mothering ideal the standard against which Chinese immigrant mothers' parenting practice is judged as well? If so, how did parents (especially mothers) think of this ideal and how did they reach a decision to send their children away, a practice that not only falls short of the intensive mothering ideal, but is also against the common practice of parenting? Was it a hard decision?

While criticizing those transnational parents, non-transnational parents in online discussions also tried to offer solutions to those who were still considering sending their children away. They argued frequently that transnational parenthood could be avoided if parents were not that "selfish". By selfish, they meant that transnational parents cared so much about their own career or the so-called self fulfillment that they would rather sacrifice the well-being of their own children in order to satisfy their own needs. One of the solutions they offered was that when there existed conflict between family and career, especially when there were young children in the family, one of the parents should definitely put top priority on family and children, and this parent, under normal circumstances, should almost always be the mother. They believed that if mothers were willing to stay at home for a period of time to care for their children, then no child would have to be sent to China and this would surely put an end to the practice of transnational parenting as well as those nasty accusations in online forums. For transnational parents, however, the questions here are: was this intensive parenting mothering a workable solution? Did they ever consider resolving their family and career conflict this way? During the interview, all transnational parents were asked whether they had considered

staying at home with their children for a period of time instead of sending them to live with their grandparents in China. An analysis of the in-depth interview data revealed that being a stay-at-home parent (most of the times a stay-at-home mother) was not always a personal matter. Oftentimes there were many other factors involved in parents' decision making. The next section discusses major reasons why intensive parenting (mothering) remained an unachievable ideal for those Chinese transnational parents.

#### Pressure from Immigrant Status

One of the most important reasons why many Chinese immigrant families did not consider full-time parenting (mothering) was very practical. They claimed that it was the pressure from their immigration status in the U.S. While about one fourth of those Chinese immigrant families interviewed in this study had already achieved their permanent residency status ("green card"), a majority of them were still in the process of applying for such status. These families tended to have a very strong sense of insecurity even though both the husband and the wife held a very decent job. This is because their immigration status (mostly H-1B work visa status and some with F-1 student visa status) does not allow them to seek employment freely in the U.S until their application for permanent residency is granted, which usually takes several years from the day they submit their applications. Before permanent residency is obtained, however, work authorization for those work visa holders has to be employer-sponsored and has to go through a series of immigration procedures. A change of employer would require another petition filed by the new employer before employment is terminated with the previous one. Otherwise, the person will be "out-of-status" the day his/her employment ends with

the previous petitioner. The penalty for "out-of-status" is that the individual is ineligible for changes or extensions of status or may be denied future entry into the U.S. Without any "grace period" to provide a buffer between two jobs when the previous job is lost but the next one has not been secured, those immigrant families in which there is only one person working while the other person is holding a dependent's visa (i.e., this person is not working or studying but has to depend on his/her spouse's legal status in order to stay in the U.S legally) therefore cannot afford to lose the only job. But if both the husband and the wife have their own independent visa status, then in case one is laid off, he/she can still depend on his/her spouse to maintain his/her legal status, that is, to temporarily change to a dependent visa for the transition.

This issue of immigration status weighed so heavily on many of those Chinese families interviewed that when they had to choose a workable solution to deal with the difficult family situation from the limited options available to them, they just could not afford to ignore their immigration status. For this reason, being a full-time parent was viewed as a disadvantage in face of adverse situations and oftentimes was simply not an option for families who have not really "settled" (which, according to many of my respondents, meant "obtaining the green card"). During the interview, the majority of the families mentioned that they had to maintain two independent visa statuses to be "double insured". This way, if one lost his or her job, the whole family could still rely on the other person to maintain their legal statuses. These parents usually held jobs in a company or worked as a postdoctoral fellow, which they did not consider to be stable, even though some of them were earning a very decent salary. Yang was a father of two (aged 6 and 2) and he worked as a software engineer for a local IT company. Although

he earned a good salary which was “enough for the whole family to live on”, he was still not able to relax. He said that he had two friends who used to have the same type of job as he did but were later laid off almost during the same year. One of them was the only person in his family who held a job. His wife quit her job to stay at home to care for their children. The other friend’s situation was a little different in that his wife was working at the time when this friend lost his job. The outcomes were so different. The first friend’s whole family lost their legal statuses once he was laid off and in the end they had to leave the U.S right away. The second friend managed to maintain his legal status by changing his work visa to a dependent visa, thanks to his wife’s independent visa status, and while on a dependent visa he found another job. Yang said:

I did not want to take the risk. Although financially I can afford to have my wife stay at home, but immigration wise, this is not a wise decision. Layoffs do not just happen to other people. It could happen to me as well, and it could happen at any time. You just never know when you are going to be laid off. Before we get our green cards, I wouldn’t consider letting my wife stay at home. My wife and I do not even need to discuss it. It is just not an option to us.

Yang and his wife managed to keep their first child with them but had to send their second child to live with his parents in China. He explained that when they had their first child, both he and his wife were graduate students and as students they never had to worry about being “laid off”. Even though at that time their financial situation was not as good as when they had their second child, they still managed to keep their first child in the U.S, with the help of his parents who stayed in the U.S for about one year to help with the child care.

Yang’s family strategy was common among Chinese immigrant families whose permanent residency had not been obtained. These families tended to believe that keeping dual wage earners was one of the most important family strategies they had to

adopt as new immigrants to the U.S (with transnational family arrangement being another important strategy). In addition to double-insuring the family's legal immigration status in the U.S, having both husband and wife work outside the home also served another purpose: it could help improve the family's financial situation, which would then facilitate the family's social and economic integration into the host society and "benefit the next generation" (as many parents claimed), since better economic situation would make it possible for their children to receive better education and therefore better chances for them to excel in this foreign land. Having only one income earner, however, would very likely slow down this settlement and integration process. Another important reason why the double-income strategy had to be adopted was due to immigrants' late entry into the U.S labor market. Many Chinese immigrants initially came to the U.S to attend graduate schools to receive further education, oftentimes after completion of graduate school or even after working for several years in China. Returning to school to obtain U.S degrees was regarded by them as an effective way to secure employment in the U.S as foreign educational credentials were not always readily recognized and accepted. However, the extra years of education in the U.S at the same time also delayed immigrants' entry into the U.S. labor market. As a result, many families felt the urge to "catch up", and maintaining two incomes obviously worked faster than having just one. With no parent staying at home to care for the children, however, immigrant parents had to seek alternative arrangement, and for many parents this inevitably led to transnational family arrangement.

Many Chinese immigrant families interviewed tended to believe that as a response to their immigrant status in the U.S, their family survival strategies such as double

income earners, no stay-at-home mothers and even transnational parenting should not be judged against a “standard”, especially that of the American mainstream society. Li Dong, father of a two-year-old girl, said it was meaningless to compare immigrants with the Americans. He made the following remarks when asked why his wife would not consider staying at home with their daughter like many American mothers would do but instead chose to send her to his parents in China:

We are only the first-generation immigrants, so there are not actually a whole lot of options for us to choose from. In terms of childcare arrangement, do not compare us with the Americans. They are not immigrants. There are too many things they can do that we can't. There are also too many things that work for them that won't work for us. We are just so different.

Although Li Dong believed that a stay-at-home mom offers the best care a child can ever receive, he understood that at this moment and with their current immigration status, it was not realistic. He continued to illustrate his point:

It is like buying a car. Everybody knows that a Mercedes Benz is more comfortable than a Ford, or a Chevrolet. But should everybody buy it no matter what just because it is a better car? No, we should first of all consider whether we can afford it. Not everybody can. Whether to be a full-time parent is just like this. That's my point. Those people who believe that our unwillingness to be a full-time parent and therefore to sacrifice for our children is the evil origin of parent-child separation are like those rich people who, after learning that many poor people were starving to death, asked the stupid question of “why wouldn't they eat?”

Yang and Li Dong's remarks revealed the situation which many Chinese families were confronted with after they migrated to the U.S. There could be various reasons why there were no stay-at-home parents among these transnational families, but the consideration of immigrant status was probably the most practical one. When job security was not guaranteed, keeping two independent visa statuses was obviously one of the most effective strategies to offset difficulties and uncertainties that might have come along

with international migration and life on a foreign land. For these families, survival always came first. And when survival on this foreign land was the top priority, the couple usually had no difficulty reaching an agreement to have both of them work outside the home. In Yang's case, he said it was not necessary for him and his wife to even discuss this issue: "We both knew what we should do. We as the first-generation immigrants are not here to enjoy ourselves but to work hard and build a secure financial base for the next generation so that they will not have to struggle like we did. I'm sure many other Chinese immigrants would agree with me. "

### Personal Development

When it comes to stay-at-home parent, most of the times the person who serves this role is the mother, as mothers are considered best able to care for the children while fathers have to take the breadwinner role (Riggs 1997). Several Chinese immigrant mothers interviewed indicated that they would not consider staying at home and becoming a full-time mother as long as there were still alternative solutions available to handle their family situation and childcare arrangement. Even if their husbands were able to bring home a paycheck big enough to support the whole family and had no problem with them not working outside the home, they still believed that being a full-time mother was not their calling. To them, staying at home was only their very last resort, and if there was any possibility that they could handle their family situation otherwise, they would definitely choose this alternative solution. However, an interesting thing is that none of these mothers would label themselves as career-oriented either, since they thought that for women the term "career-oriented" denoted a somewhat negative meaning

which was oftentimes associated with unsatisfactory performance of the woman in the family as a wife or a mother or both. They would not want to be treated as inefficient mothers just because they sent their children away so that they could concentrate on their work or study plans. These mothers believed that even if for a period of time they tended to focus more on their work or study than on their family, the eventual goal was always the family. Therefore, a focus on career was only the means, but not the end.

Xiaoying had her son when she was still in business school. She said she knew from the very beginning that she would have to let her parents help with the childcare. What had not been decided was whether her parents would come to the U.S to help or she would have to send her son to China. When her parents' visa applications were declined, she knew for sure that there was only one solution left, that is, to send her son to her parents in China. She said she never considered quitting school in order to look after her infant. She chose to have her first child while at graduate school because she felt that she was getting old (at the age of 31). In addition, life in graduate school was more predictable than at work. If she waited till after graduation, then there would be too many uncertainties which would result in further delay in her family planning. She said the following about why she did not want to quit her program or at least take leave of school for a period of time:

The job market was good at that time, so I wanted to graduate soon and then find a job. I could have quit graduate school and stayed at home as many American mothers do, and my husband had no problem with that, but I was not willing to do so. I know many stay-at-home moms return to work when their children are old enough, but most of them have to settle with a low-paying or part-time job. This is not what I have wanted. I wanted to have a career, not just a job, and I had worked toward this goal for so many years already. If I had quit my graduate school, then my years of hard work would have been wasted, and several years later I would have to start all over again.

Xiaoying sent her son to China when he was only two months old. While her son was away, she finished business school and found a high-paying job. After working for one year she became more comfortable with her work, so she brought her son back. By then her son had been with her parents in China for almost three years. At the time of the interview, both Xiaoying and her husband held a very decent job and they were planning on sending their son to a private school. Xiaoying said she was very satisfied with her family's current financial situation and felt very good that she made a big contribution herself:

Stay-at home moms contribute to their families as well, but I measure contribution in a different way. I always believe that having my own job is where my social value lies. To depend on other people is pathetic. I remember I read this somewhere. It said for a woman to achieve real happiness, she needs to achieve economic independence first. This is what I have been working on in the past several years.

Xiaoying's husband Yufei said he did not mind her wife not working at all and as a matter of fact he even tried to persuade her to stay at home for a few years, maybe till their son reached school age, but it was not successful. He said, "She just did not want to. She told me she would not consider doing so even if I earn one million dollars a year. She has her own plan. And I had to respect her choice."

Weiqing was another mother who did not want to be a full-time mom. Her situation was different from Xiaoying's in that she had her child while staying at home but at the same time trying to get admitted into graduate school. She graduated from a top school in China and located a very good job in a bank which, according to Weiqing, paid her such a high salary that all her friends were jealous of her. After working there for three years, however, she had to quit her job and follow her husband to the U.S where her husband first worked as a postdoctoral fellow at a research institute and then an engineer

in a company. Before migration, Weiqing thought her credentials would allow her to find a job very easily in the U.S, so she did not regret quitting her high-paying job in China. But soon she found out that finding a job in the U.S was not an easy thing, especially for people like her who were foreign educated. From holding a decent job before migration to not being able to find a job after migration and therefore having to stay at home, the big difference depressed her and as a result her marital relationship also suffered. She had her first child during the two years when she was staying at home. Her husband had hoped that she would still stay at home after their child was born, but Weiqing said she had had enough of being jobless and if she simply changed her role from a stay-at-home wife to a stay-at-home mom instead of returning to school to obtain a U.S degree, which was very critical to her finding a job in the U.S, she would end up staying at home all her life. She said:

Staying at home is not something that every woman wants to or can do. At least it is not for me. I stayed at home for two years, so I know what it is like. My husband is generally supportive, so my determination to not stay at home any more after my daughter was born was not that he didn't want me to but because I didn't want to myself. I enjoyed spending time with my daughter, but being a mom should not define the whole me.

Weiqing stayed at home for 6 more months after her daughter was born. Then she started to attend graduate school and work toward her goal of returning to her career. Before school started, she flew back to China with her daughter and left her with her parents. At the time of the interview, Weiqing's daughter had been in China for about one year. She did not plan to bring her back anytime soon.

There was also another case in which the wife insisted that she should work outside the home despite the fact that her husband himself could earn enough for the whole family to live a decent life. Cao Min and her husband Sun Yu both received their

master's degrees in computer sciences in the U.S. At the time of the interview they had worked as IT professionals for over six years and had a combined family income of more than \$150K. They also owned a big house in one of the best areas in Nashville, which was very much envied by their friends. And more importantly, they already obtained permanent residency. In the eyes of many other Chinese immigrants, Cao Min had every reason to keep their second daughter with them in the U.S: high family income and a very supportive husband. She could stay at home as they did not really need a double income like many other families did. In addition, since they had already obtained their permanent residency, even if they both lost their jobs, they would not have to worry about being "out of status" in the U.S. However, while her husband indicated that it was up to her to decide what she wanted to do with herself, Cao Min said she would not consider being a full-time mom, even for just one year, as she had been educated that women should be economically independent if they really wanted their worth to be recognized by the society they live in:

To stay at home or not, sometimes this is really not a personal matter. Even if I don't mind, or my husband doesn't mind, there are still people around me who do care. My parents would feel that I am wasting the talent I've been given and the so many years of education they had invested so much money in. To them, it doesn't take a master's degree to be a housewife. Also, my friends... They would say, 'Hey, Cao Min, we don't understand why you made such a decision. You have been such an independent woman, and now you have to totally depend on your husband?' They would say that for sure. Even though I don't care what they would all think of me and decide to stay at home anyway, maybe not for the rest of my life but till my daughter is old enough to attend elementary school, how then am I going to handle the gap in my career? It's going to be a big problem for me when I'm on the job market again.

Cao Min believed that for women, having their own career was to realize their own value through themselves while full-time moms did so only through others, i.e., their children and their husbands. According to her, for Chinese full-time moms in the U.S most of the

times they became full-time moms not because they were willing to, but because they were forced to—they either could not find a satisfactory job or they had nobody to help them with childcare. “The thing is,” Cao Min said, “I am able to find a job, and I have been very successful in my career. I don’t see why I should quit.” When she had her first daughter, Cao Min’s parents and her husband’s parents took turns coming to the U.S to help take care of the child, so she was not “forced” to stay at home, however, when she had her second daughter, her parents could only stay here for less than one year while her husband’s parents could not come at all. So in the end her husband Sun Yu had to fly back to China with their second daughter a few days after she celebrated her first birthday and left her with his parents.

In the cases discussed above, mothers were caught in the conflicts between their personal development and their responsibilities for their family and children. And they found that they had to maintain a balance between their two identities (as an individual vs. as a mother and a wife). Although none of these mothers would say that they were career-oriented, they tended to believe that their personal development was equally important and that it should not give way to their children once they became mothers. Also according to these mothers, despite the seemingly conflicting nature of their career development and their family responsibilities, holding a successful career would in the end benefit their children instead of affecting them in any negative way.

During the interview fathers were also asked whether they had considered quitting their job or study and staying at home for a period of time to handle their family situation. When asked this question, most fathers showed a kind of facial expression that looked as if this was really an awkward question, or it was a redundant question that should not

have been asked. Only one father indicated that he had no problem with himself staying at home with his children. Other fathers believed that if someone had to stay at home, it should be the mother but not the father. It seems that most of these fathers were attempting to conform to their gender role expectations, especially the male breadwinner/female caregiver ideal, and were being careful not to violate the fatherhood mandates. However, three of the fathers interviewed actually had the experience of staying at home. Two of them did so because they were between jobs while the third father quit his job to take care of his children because his job paid him very little money while his wife earned much more. Zhou Jie was the father who said he had no problem staying at home with his kids, but in reality he was never a stay-at-home dad, not even for a single day. When he and his wife Chen Xin had their son in 2005, the couple both had a job. His wife did not want to quit her job because she thought once she did, it would be very difficult for her to return to her field later on. Zhou Jie said he did not mind quitting his job and becoming a full-time dad so that they would not have to send their son away. But then he realized that if he did so, his wife would be the only person working in the family, and the burden of financially supporting the whole family would fall upon her, which he believed would be too much and too unfair for a woman. Also, he said even if he did not mind staying at home, it did not mean that his wife did not mind either. Although Zhou Jie and his wife never seriously discussed this arrangement, he said he knew she would not be happy about that:

There are going to be problems for sure, because no wives would be willing to let their husbands stay at home with the kids and take no responsibility in financially supporting the family. They believe that men's position should be outside the home. I know of a lady who put a lot of pressure on her husband when he was unemployed. She just wanted him to find a job at that time. When he found a part-time job, she pressured him to find a full-time one. When he found a full-

time job, she still put a lot of pressure on him because this time she wanted him to find an even better job. So I think the wife is the key person in the whole stay-at-home dad issue. If she doesn't care, then things should be much easier.

Being the only person among all husbands interviewed who did not mind being a full-time father, however, Zhou Jie never quit work and was never a stay-at-home dad. His son was taken to China by his parents who stayed in the U.S for one year to help them with childcare.

The three fathers who had the experience of staying at home had been full-time fathers for 8 months, 14 months and 18 months respectively. Lin Qian was the one who quit his low-paying job and stayed at home for 8 months which allowed for his wife to still work full time. He did not hesitate much and quit his job when his boy was about two months old. He said he quit without much hesitation not because he was so willing to stay at home but because his job was paying too little and it was a boring job on top of that. Although he did not say directly how much he got paid, he mentioned that he earned barely enough to pay for his rent.

For a man, holding such a job and earning so little carries as much stigma as having no job at all. I quit so that my boy wouldn't have to go to daycare when he was only about two months old. What is the point of holding such a low-paying job while hiring somebody else to look after my child? I wouldn't say I don't mind being at a full-time dad, but at that point of time this was probably the best I could do for my family.

Lin Qian stayed at home until his son was about eleven months old. Then he was sent to live with his grandparents in China. When asked why he no longer wanted to be a full-time dad, he said:

As I said just now, I wouldn't say that I don't mind staying at home. I still believe that men should be working outside the home and be the breadwinner. Women are different. They can have a choice of either staying at home or working outside the home, but men should only be working. Full-time parent is not for a man, at least not for me. In order to not be a full-time dad any longer, I

need first of all time and energy to concentrate on my job search. So sending my son to his grandparents was almost the only option for me.

After sending his son to China, Lin Qian switched his attention to obtaining professional certifications which might help him with his job search. He hoped he would soon be able to find a better job which would pay him much more than his previous one. At the time of the interview he was still staying at home, but no longer a “stay-at-home dad” because he did not have his son here to take care of.

The other two fathers (Feng Jun and Li Ming) stayed at home because they were not able to find a job immediately. Li Ming used to hold a full-time job but then was laid off two years later; Feng Jun was never able to find a job after he received his master’s degree in economics. Both of them returned to graduate school after staying at home for over a year. Their children (18 months and 21 months respectively) were sent to live with their grandparents before they went back to school. Since their previous degrees were not able to successfully locate them a job, getting another degree was probably the best way to get them out of the home. These two fathers became full-time dads not because they chose to but because they had no choice. Li Ming said he was not comfortable with himself having to stay at home. When friends around him all started to worry about his unemployment and began to offer advice and suggestions, he knew that he must do something to end all of this. According to him, although returning to school was not going to bring him a job immediately, at least he was working toward it, but staying at home was not going to get him anywhere. He believed that for men staying at home was not considered doing anything. Although he may not have thought that way at the beginning, people around him would teach him to think that way.

## Objections from Spouse

In addition to the consideration of their immigration status and their career advancement, another important reason why many Chinese immigrant mothers were not staying at home to care for their young children was due to objections from their spouse. In these cases, unlike those mothers discussed earlier in this chapter who would not consider quitting work for the sake of their children even if their husbands had no problem with them staying at home, these mothers, however, were very willing to become a full-time mom so that their children would be taken very good care of by themselves, but it was their husbands who were against (either directly or indirectly) this childcare arrangement. For some families, the extra income that a working mother could bring home was really needed when the father was not earning enough to support the whole family. Out of practical consideration, the husband hoped that the family's tough financial situation could be alleviated by the wife working outside the home as well. In these cases, although the wife wanted to stay at home with her child, she felt pressured to not do so. By also taking a job, the wife could contribute to the family's financial well-being. And when making ends meet was the number one issue, other issues did not seem as important to these families. Staying at home to care for own children had therefore become too much a luxury.

However, money was not always the central issue here. For many families interviewed, their family financial situation was good enough and therefore did not require a double income to make ends meet. But the wife still felt urged to work outside the home. Gender relations and the husband's gender role ideologies played major roles in these cases. Among those fathers interviewed, there were those who were very

involved in the house and those who were much less involved: those involved fathers believed that husband and wife should have an equal share of housework and childcare, and in reality this was also what they did as a husband and a father. However, there were also fathers who were much less involved in the house. Consciously or unconsciously, these fathers tended to believe that housework and childcare were primarily their wives' responsibilities. However, the irony was that at the same time these husbands also held high expectations for their wives: they expected that their wives would accomplish more than just their domestic duties. As a result, tensions often existed in their gender relations, and several families even suffered from very serious marital problems. In these cases, sending their young children to live in China served more or less some type of relief to the tension.

Zhang Fan and her husband Ye Hong were both doctors in a famous hospital in China before they came to Nashville in 2003. Here they both worked as postdoctoral fellows at a local medical center. They had their son in 2005 and then sent him to live with his grandparents in China in 2006 when he was about one and a half years old. Ye Hong was a very supportive husband and an involved father. Although he was also very busy with his work, for a period of four months after his son was born, he woke up every night to feed the infant. He also did his share of the housework such as cooking and cleaning, sometimes even more than that, without any complaint. Zhang Fan said her husband was almost a perfect husband and they never had any problem in their marital relationship. Probably the only time they did not agree with each other was when she wanted to stay at home for a period of time so that she could spend more time with their son. She admitted that due to their years of hard work as doctors before migration, they

did not have much financial pressure while living in the U.S. So financially speaking, if she did not work, they would not have any problems. While she had no problem being a full-time mom, her husband Ye Hong hoped that she would continue with her research, the work that she had been enjoying so much, and eventually achieve her career goal, which was to return to the practice of medicine in the U.S. He explained why he did not want his wife to quit her work:

I did not want my wife to stay at home. This was not because I wanted her to bring home an extra paycheck, but because I have always believed that she is a very talented person. She had worked so hard to become what she was before we came to the U.S, and I think she could do even better here. It would be a waste of her talent if she chose to stay at home and work only around me and our son. I wouldn't want that to happen, although I appreciate the sacrifice that she wants to make for our family.

Ye Hong wanted his wife to use her talent to the fullest potential so that she would not feel regretted for not doing so later on in her life. And Ye Hong himself was also working toward returning to the practice of medicine in the U.S. This was not an easy thing to do for foreign-educated doctors, as both of them admitted. So that was why they had to work very hard. According to Ye Hong and his wife Zhang Fan, many Chinese immigrants who used to be doctors before immigrating to the U.S had to work as postdoctoral fellows for their first few years in the U.S and prepare for their physician board exams only in their spare time. The whole process is very difficult and success is not guaranteed, but Ye Hong believed that this was the very reason why they had to work hard instead of just quitting.

In addition to the consideration of the wife's career advancement, several fathers, also supportive and devoted, wanted their wives to remain in the workforce or continue with their school work instead of quitting what they had been doing in order to take care

of their children full time. These fathers believed that their children “not only need someone to spend a great deal of time with them, especially when they were very young, but as they grew up they would also need some kind of role models from within the family”. Although a stay-at-home mom can offer her child plenty of time and attention, which is very critical to the child’s well being, this is not sufficient. When their children are older, their role as a stay-at-home mom will become insufficient. For this reason, some fathers interviewed believed that mothers should also have their own career so that when their children need their role models from within the family, there are both mothers and fathers available to serve these roles. Yu Wei was also an involved father and supportive husband. He said he did most of the housework including cooking because his wife’s Ph.D study was more demanding than his job. And this was confirmed by his wife. At the time of the interview, his two-year old daughter had been with her grandparents in China for over one year. He said that he had seen too many cases around him in which the wife gave up her career goal and became a full-time mother instead. The consequences were that these mothers would eventually be isolated from the big society outside the home as their world dwindled. And according to Yu Wei, this was especially bad for immigrants to this foreign land:

We are only first-generation immigrants. Our world is very small to begin with here in the U.S, so we cannot afford to see it become smaller. That is why I did not want my wife to give up her career for the sake of our daughter. I never denied the importance of a mother’s care for the child, but in the long run, a mother isolated from society will not do any good to her children. I think this is especially true for immigrants.

However, although there is a possibility that mothers who quit their work to stay at home can later on return to the workforce, these fathers tended to believe that the career gap caused by these mothers’ staying at home would be detrimental to their future career

development. Also, since many immigrants had to obtain U.S degrees in order to secure employment in the U.S, the first several years (three to five years according to two of the fathers) in the U.S are very critical to first-generation immigrants, men and women alike. If they can grasp the opportunity, then they will be well on the way to realizing their career goals. These fathers believed that for immigrants a successful career is extremely important for them to settle and integrate into the host society.

However, not all fathers interviewed were as supportive and devoted as those discussed above. In one fourth of the families interviewed, gender relations became problematic after they migrated to the U.S. Then things deteriorated even more after their children were born, and according to them this was the most important reason why they chose to send their children away. In these families, the husbands, different from those who had no problem sharing housework and caring for their children, were as a matter of fact not willing to do their share. They tended to view housework and childcare as solely women's responsibilities. However, at the same time, these husbands also hoped that their wives could be working outside the home as well so that they would contribute to the family's economic well-being. It was this double demand for their wives' work (both domestic and outside the home) that had caused tensions in their marital relationship. For two families, the problems became so serious that the couples were on the verge of filing a divorce. During the interview the wives also became very emotional and needed some time to calm down before they could talk more about their situation. Since these seven families already suffered problematic gender relations before their children were born, the birth of their children only worsened the situation as the addition of an infant brought a great deal of more work to the family.

Sheng Yuan and her husband Jin Ping came to Nashville in 2004. Jin Ping worked as a postdoctoral fellow at a medical center. Sheng Yuan had originally wanted to attend graduate school and obtain a U.S degree, but her application for admission was not successful. So she ended up having to stay at home. But she never gave up her plan to return to school. Sheng Yuan said she did not remember when they started to quarrel, but her husband seemed to be more and more dissatisfied with the fact that she had to stay at home. He began to “purposely” tell her stories about his friends’ wives who were able to secure good jobs after they received postgraduate degrees in the U.S and at the end of these stories never forgot to ask when she could even be admitted into graduate school. At the same time he also complained about her not doing good housework because one of his friends never had to do any housework at all, but his wife could still manage the household very well and never complained. Sheng Yuan said her husband made her feel that she was good for nothing but quarrelling with him to make his life miserable. He yelled several times at her saying something to the effect that it was he who brought her to the U.S and that it was also he who was earning money to make her life easy in the U.S, and for this reason she should be thankful instead of complaining about his nastiness toward her. Sheng Yuan said:

He thought that he was my savior and therefore deserved to be worshiped. I was nothing, not being able to get into graduate school, not even a good housewife according to his standard. I felt so depressed. My life was not supposed to be in such a big mess. When we were in China, our life was not like this, and I never expected it would be like this.

Sheng Yuan said she made two big wrong decisions. One was probably quitting her high-paying job in China and coming to the U.S together with her husband. She said she could have waited one year or two till she had more work experience. That way her

husband would also have had enough time to adjust to life in the U.S and learn how to handle housework all by himself. The other wrong decision was probably her decision to have a child in order to improve her marital relationship. Having a child in itself was not wrong, according to Sheng Yuan, but what was wrong was her naïve thought that her family mess could be fixed by a child. Following the birth of their daughter, their relationship improved only for a very short period of time because at that time her parents came to the U.S to help. Since her parents took care of almost all housework while they were in the U.S, Sheng Yuan and her husband never had to quarrel over this issue. However, after her parents returned to China, everything went back to “normal”. Then the situation worsened because now they also had to quarrel over caring for their daughter. Sheng Yuan managed to keep her daughter with her for another three months after her parents left. Then she returned to China with her daughter and left her with her parents. She did so because she wanted to handle her marital problems herself and therefore did not want her daughter to be involved. Sheng Yuan came back to the U.S and found a job at a local Chinese business. Her visa status did not allow her to work legally in the U.S, but Sheng Yuan said she did not mind having to work illegally because she believed that by financially contributing to the family’s economic well-being, she would be able to deal with her family mess more effectively:

At least I’m also working outside the home, and if I get lucky I could earn more than he does. Now he should not complain about me not earning any money. Also, I hope to earn enough money to pay for my tuition as I now plan to study accounting. I don’t have to depend on him any more. I could use my own money. Gaining economic independence is really important to me at this moment. As for housework, I’m not a housewife any more, so he should not expect too much from me.

Sheng Yuan said this seemed to work. Although her husband still did not do much housework, she no longer cared as she had found out that it was almost impossible to change a person who grew up in an environment where men seldom did any housework. Sheng Yuan and her husband did not quarrel as much. But she felt sad that this was achieved at the price of her not being able to care for her daughter herself.

Lu Qing was another mother who had to separate from her daughter because of her problematic marital relationship. Her case was different from Sheng Yuan's in that she and her husband were filing a divorce at the time of the interview while Sheng Yuan still believed that she could do something to save her marriage. Also, when Lu Qing and her husband Xing Wu first experienced tensions in their marital relationship, they were both graduate students working toward their PhDs. According to Lu Qing, her husband expected too much from her. While both of them were working hard toward their degrees and did not have much time at home, her husband still expected that the house be clean and tidy and that his meals be cooked for him. There were times when Lu Qing returned from her lab very late at night she still had to cook although her husband came home much earlier. She said he would just sit there and wait for her to come back to cook. Her husband did cook or help with housework occasionally, however. But Lu Qing said he would then feel that he had done her a great favor by doing what she was supposed to do herself, and next time they had any problem over housework, he would remind her that she had not been doing her work satisfactorily, so he had to step in to help. Because of her husband's unsupportiveness and his little involvement in housework, Lu Qing did not have her first child until the last year of her PhD study when she felt that she could relax a little after years of hard work. Her parents came to the U.S to help with the

new baby. Her husband still did not help much. Lu Qing said he never changed a diaper and he did not even know how to do it. During the first two months their daughter cried a lot, so her husband slept in another bedroom. When their daughter was about 4 months old, her husband pushed her to start her job search although she wanted to postpone graduation so that she could spend more time with her daughter. They fought over this timing issue, but in the end she had to give in. Then after she started her job search, they also fought over the type of job she should be looking for. When Lu Qing found a job six months later, she let her parents return to China with her daughter so that she could concentrate on her new job and also her marital problems. But according to her, things kept getting worse until only a divorce could bring her out of her family mess. Lu Qing was saddened when she said the following:

I think that women's emancipation in China in some sense did a bad thing to many women, and the slogan "Women can hold half of the sky" also put women in an awkward situation. One of the consequences is that men are now not what men are supposed to be, and women are not women are supposed to be either. Women tend to overwork – they have to work, and at the same time they have to take care of the family. But men think that this is what women are born for. To me, that's where it is tragic. I have no problem sharing the burden of raising the family. But if men believe that women should equally share the burden of providing for the family, they should at the same time share the domestic responsibilities and not expect to see in their wives the so-called traditional virtues. But some men are obviously looking for a perfect wife so that their responsibilities for the family could be reduced.

Like Sheng Yuan and Lu Qing, the other five families also experienced problems with their marital relationships. For these families, due to the husbands' gender role ideologies, the wives had to avoid staying at home to prevent further escalation of the conflicts within the family. Sending their children to China was also part of their plan to keep the situation from getting worse, if not to improve it. Interestingly, this group of Chinese families had the lowest response rate from men. While wives from these seven

families all participated in the study, only three husbands completed the interview. For the remaining four husbands, two directly turned down my invitation for participation, saying that his wife's interview should be sufficient; the other two could not be reached because their wives preferred that their husbands not be interviewed and were reluctant to give out their husbands' contact information. One believed that it was unnecessary to interview her husband while the other asked me not to contact her husband because she did not want him to find out that she had already talked with a stranger about their marital problems. To respect their wishes, efforts to reach these husbands to complete the interviews were not pursued.

For the three husbands who did participate in the current study, Sheng Yuan's husband Jin Ping admitted that they had some problems with their marriage, but he said it was all because they just got married before they migrated to the U.S (so they were still adjusting to their marital life) and life in the U.S was not as easy as they had expected. As a result, problems did occur. But they were trying to fix these problems. Another husband, Qiu Sheng attributed their marital problems to the fact that his wife Zhou Ran stayed at home for over two years doing nothing before she started to apply for college admission. He said when he went back home feeling exhausted from a hard day's work, his wife just had a boring day doing nothing but watching TV and surfing on the Internet. They had very different states of mind, so it was no surprise that problems finally occurred. He did not think that a life as a stay-at-home wife and mom was best for his wife: "A full-time mom is not something for her. Actually not every woman can be a good stay-at-home wife or mom. It's just like not everybody can become a good teacher." His wife Zhou Ran later was admitted into a program at a local college. Their

son was sent back to China two months before Zhou Ran started her first semester. Jin Hui was another husband who participated in the study. He did not deny the fact that he pushed his wife Cui Juan to return to school after she was unable to find a job. He said it sounded funny to him when he heard people say that women should have the freedom to choose the kind of life they want (i.e., to stay at home or work outside the home):

“Doesn’t that mean their husbands would have no freedom to choose, because they would have no choice but to either work like a dog or to win a lottery if their wives are so happy to choose staying at home?” He said they were not here to enjoy life, at least for the first several years, because they were just first-generation immigrants and life was still very tough for them. Interestingly, while all wives interviewed complained about their husbands’ little involvement in housework, as this played a very important role in their decision to send their children to China, none of the three husbands interviewed for this study admitted that they actually had any problem with their wives on these issues, nor did they hint that domestic work should mostly be their wives’ responsibilities. They tended to emphasize that their wives should also work so that they could equally share the burden of raising the family.

#### Childcare Arrangement—Sending Own Children Away

As discussed in the first half of this chapter, for various reasons intensive parenting (mothering) was not a possibility for those Chinese immigrant families interviewed in this study. However, the question here is: why did these families, unable to have one parent stay at home to care for their children full time, eventually choose to not live with them at all? To many people this may seem like a big leap from one extreme to the other,

from spending every single minute with the child to not being involved in the child's daily life for an extended period of time. People may find themselves wonder why these Chinese transnational parents would not want to choose a childcare arrangement that falls in between, that is, an arrangement which would allow parents to still keep their children with them although they are not able to care for them full time. People may also wonder how these parents have reached such a decision to send their children away, and what these transnational parents think of this unusual arrangement. Before these questions are addressed, a discussion of alternative childcare arrangements in the Chinese immigrant community will provide some useful background information and facilitate the understanding of transnational family strategies.

#### Common Childcare Arrangements in the Chinese Community

There are several common childcare arrangements in the Chinese immigrant community. One of the most common arrangements is to have the grandparents come over to the U.S to look after the child, that is, to "import" the support networks from China. As discussed in the previous chapter on parenthood timing, raising a young child in China is usually a big family matter in that it does not only involve the child's parents, but also the child's grandparents on both sides and sometimes even other relatives. When families migrate to the U.S, their support networks do not automatically migrate with them. So later on when they are in need of these networks, these families will have to "import" them. In order to do so, two conditions need to be satisfied. The first condition is that the support networks in China are still available for import. For many Chinese immigrant families, the grandparents might have already deceased, are unable to come to

the U.S due to their health conditions, or are not yet retired (therefore not able to care for their grandchildren); the second condition that needs to be satisfied is that Chinese immigrant families in the U.S should be able to actually “import” the networks. A visitor’s visa to the U.S is not easy to obtain and applications are oftentimes turned down for various reasons or for no reason at all. When this is the case, even if there are support networks available for import, those immigrant families are still not able to take advantage of them in the U.S. However, due to limitations on the duration of stay for visitor visa holders, the grandparents are only allowed to stay in the U.S for a limited period of time. They are usually given six months to stay at the port of entry, with up to two extensions. So even for those immigrant families which have successfully brought the grandparents to the U.S, they will still have to think about childcare arrangements after the grandparents return to China. There are usually several outcomes: first, grandparents take the child to China when they leave the U.S and therefore the transnational family arrangement takes place; second, the child starts to attend a daycare center full time; third, the child’s parents manage to look after the child themselves (for families in which full-time parenting is possible). In extreme cases, the grandparents choose to outstay their visas and live in the U.S illegally in order to look after the grandchild so that the child will not have to be sent back to China or attend a daycare center at a very young age. From my own knowledge of the Chinese community and from information gathered from the interviews with transnational parents, this last arrangement is not uncommon.

However, for Chinese immigrant families which do not have support networks available to “import” or for various reasons are unable to bring the networks to the U.S,

there are also several possible childcare arrangements: the child has to be sent to a daycare center at a very young age (i.e., only a few months old, usually after the mother's maternity leave), one of the parents (usually the mother) stays at home to care for the child full time, or the child has to be sent back to China to live with the grandparents for an extended period of time. Whether the grandparents can come to the U.S to help but have to leave several months later or the grandparents cannot come at all for various reasons, in both situations full-time parenting, the use of daycare centers, and sending the child to live with the grandparents in China are common solutions to the childcare issue among Chinese immigrant families. However, as discussed in the first half of this chapter, full-time parenting is not a workable solution for those Chinese families interviewed in this study. Then how about daycare centers? Have parents ever considered this solution? If so, why did it not work out for them?

#### Daycare Centers as Childcare Arrangement

None of the Chinese immigrant families I interviewed for this study believed that sending their young children to daycare centers were an effective childcare arrangement. For various reasons, the majority of the Chinese families (n=22) never had any experience with daycare services in the U.S; the remaining six families all had very brief experiences with daycare centers (with their children's enrollment in daycare ranging from two to five months) but later decided to withdraw their children because they felt that day care centers did not meet their expectations. The cost of daycare was one of the factors that affected some parents' decisions about childcare arrangements. A total of eight families clearly indicated that they could not afford to send their children to a

daycare center. Usually in these families at least one parent was still a student living on a small stipend when the child was born. For the majority of the families interviewed, however, money was not an issue that had prevented them from sending their children to daycare. Instead, they had other concerns.

One of the major concerns they had was that their child was too young to be put in daycare. Childcare centers in Nashville usually accept children as young as 6 weeks old. The timing also marks the end of the mother's maternity leave (if the mother has a job and also intends to return to work after the leave). However, for those transnational parents interviewed (mothers and fathers alike), sending a 6-week-old infant to a childcare center was one of the cruelest thing parents could do to their young child. When asked whether they had considered using daycare services for childcare arrangement, one of the mothers immediately said, "Daycare center? For an infant only a few months old? No no no... that's a crazy idea!" Fathers and mothers tended to agree with each other on the issue of using daycare services. One of the problems they had with daycare centers was that they did not like the way children were taken care of in the daycare. Here cultural differences in child care probably played a very important role. Although the majority of the parents did not have any experience with daycare centers, they seemed to have obtained a great deal of relevant information from friends and colleagues. For example, they complained that when caregivers did not have a better way to soothe a crying baby they would leave him/her crying until he/she got too exhausted to cry any more. This, according to many Chinese parents, was too harsh and simply not acceptable. Another thing they often complained about was that caregivers changed diapers every 2-3 hours like "a programmed machine", whether or not a diaper change

was needed. Also, the child was not kept warm enough, so he/she got sick very often, etc. Zhou Jie, father of a three-year-old daughter, told me that he heard many stories from his Chinese colleague who, unable to get her parents or parents-in-law to the U.S to help them with child care, had to let her child attend daycare since he was only 6 months old:

She told me that after her son was sent to that daycare, he became sick on a regular basis. You know, when there are so many little kids together and when they are not taken good care of, they get sick very easily. And every time he was sick, she or her husband had to take a few days off from work in order to look after him at home. Both the child and the parents had to suffer. And when this happens too often, their bosses won't feel happy either.

Zhou Jie also mentioned that one day when his Chinese colleague went to pick up her son she found that he was playing there alone. His face was very dirty and he had runny nose, but nobody was there to help him. The mother felt so miserable at that moment and she cried in front of her son. "I think I would feel miserable as well if I saw my child in that situation. You would really have to be tough-minded to not feel that way," Zhou Jie continued to say, "so I decided that I would not let this happen to my child. I don't think I need to experience daycare in order to understand that it is not undesirable." The way children are cared for in daycare centers does not meet the expectations of these Chinese parents regarding the kind of care a child should be receiving at a very young age. And it was for this reason that even if affordability was not an issue here, many Chinese immigrant parents still did not want to consider using any daycare services. However, they tended to believe that daycare centers were acceptable for children 3 years of age or older. But before they reach this significant age landmark, daycare centers are obviously too harsh for them.

As discussed above, although most Chinese immigrant families did not have any experience with daycare centers in the U.S, they obtained relevant information from other

immigrant families in the Chinese community. Here social networks were relied on when parents had to decide on childcare arrangements. The importance of social networks has been well studied in the literature of migration. As discussed by Boyd (1989), networks in the migration literature refer to personal relationships based on family, kin, friendship, and community. And research on immigrant social networks indicates that these networks have significant impact on immigrant adaptation and incorporation in the host country (Hagan 1998; Massey, Alcaron, Durand, and Gonzalez 1987). In the case of Chinese immigrant families interviewed for this study, social networks played an important role in circulating information and keeping these families informed. The information circulated through the networks was considered by Chinese immigrant parents as coming from reliable sources and therefore greatly affected their decision to dismiss daycare centers in the U.S as an acceptable childcare arrangement.

#### Childcare by Grandparents

While childcare services offered by daycare centers are either not affordable or do not meet parents' expectations, the grandparents in China, however, have much more to offer to these immigrant families who are still struggling to settle in the U.S<sup>7</sup>. They are usually retired, have plenty of time, and more importantly, are willing to help them with childcare. As discussed in the previous chapter, caring for a young child is a big family matter in China and grandparents are usually actively involved (Salaff and Greve 2004; Xie, Defrain, Meredith and Combs 1996). This is a significant element of the Chinese culture, as all parents interviewed have agreed. However, after these Chinese families

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<sup>7</sup> In only two cases the children were being cared for by their aunts. The grandparents were not able to perform any childcare because of their health conditions.

migrated to the U.S, the grandparental involvement in the caring for the grandchild is somehow interrupted. Although grandparents can manage to obtain a visitor visa to the U.S and still assume the role of the caretaker, restrictions on the visitor visa prevent them from staying in the U.S for an extended period of time. In addition, there are still many grandparents who cannot obtain a visitor visa. For those grandparents who do not want to overstay their visas as well as for those who cannot obtain a visa at all, the grandparental involvement in the life of their young grandchildren is seriously limited or even impossible if there is no other arrangement for the grandparents and the grandchildren to live together (such as sending the child back to China to be raised by the grandparents) for a period of time.

Although for various reasons parents interviewed for this study were not able to perform intensive mothering, it does not necessarily mean that these parents did not identify with this parenting ideal. As a matter of fact, they believed that it was their identification with this ideal that had led them to consider transnational parenting instead of keeping their children with them in the U.S. This may sound somewhat difficult to understand, but according to these transnational parents, just because they could not live up to the intensive mothering ideal by spending a great deal of time with their children and attending to all their needs, they thought of somebody else who could, in this case, the grandparents, whose home provides a safe place for the young grandchildren where family life is still intact and not affected by immigration. In this sense, the practice of sending their children back to China to live with the grandparents is rather a *fulfillment* of the intensive mothering ideal than its breaking down, with the grandparents being the surrogate parents for their grandchildren.

For parents who were busy pursuing their career goals and therefore full-time parenting is not a possibility, grandparents could probably provide the most desirable care their children could receive. Zhang Fan and her husband Ye Hong were both doctors in China before they migrated to the U.S. Their hope to return to the practice of medicine made it impossible for any one of them to stay at home for an extended period of time to care for their son. Ye Hong's parents were doctors in China as well, and Zhang Fan's parents were both teachers. They were either retired or semi-retired, so they had plenty of time to dispose of. Zhang Fan said sending her son to China was also her parents and parents-in-law's idea because they believed that her son would be taken better care of in China living with his grandparents than in the U.S with his own parents. She said the grandparents on both side were so willing to care for their grandson, and the four grandparents kept asking them why they wanted to send the child to daycare while back in China he could receive much better care from his grandparents. At first Zhang Fan and her husband insisted that they take care of their son themselves, but then they realized that what they could offer as parents at this moment was so limited. Zhang Fan said:

My husband and I are so busy every day. We spend a lot of time in the lab. Oftentimes we even have to work over the weekends. But back in China my parents and my husband's parents are retired or nearly retired. They have plenty of time and resources needed to take good care of our son, and they are so willing to do so. We could have sent him to daycare. That could solve the childcare issue, but it still wouldn't allow us to spend a lot of time with our son. Evening was the only time when we could actually spend some time with him, but we came home late very day and we were oftentimes exhausted. He needed our attention and our time, but we just couldn't offer him much. So even if we had kept him with us, he still couldn't have been happier. Now he is with my husband's parents. We miss him very much, but we feel so much comforted that he has been receiving much better care than what we could have offered him.

Zhang Fan's parents came to the U.S to help with childcare when her son was born. They stayed here for six months. Then her parents-in-law came and also stayed 6 months. By

the time her parents-in-law had to leave the U.S, her son was already one year old. During the one year when the grandparents were here, since Zhang Fan and her husband could not spend as much time with their son as the grandparents did, her son was already more attached to his grandparents than to his own parents. So when her parents-in-law brought him to China, he did not experience any difficulty adjusting to the new environment without his parents being around.

For those couples who had been experiencing marital problems, sending their children away to their grandparents in China not only solved the childcare issue but also gave the parents some time to deal with their own relationship problems. In these cases, grandparents' home was a place where the children could be taken good care of as well as a haven where the children would not be harmed by problems between their parents.

Xiong Jing sent her son to her parents in China when he was over two years old. She and her husband were filing a divorce at that time for some irresolvable issues existing in their relationship and her husband was not living with them. Xiong Jing said she had managed to keep her son with her because she believed that a mother should not separate from her child until there came a time when she found that she could no longer persist.

She described what had happened to her:

My son was in daycare when I worked during the day. He was there for about 5 months. During these five months he got sick several times. Whenever he came down with something, I had to stay at home until he was all right, but my job was so demanding. I wouldn't have much free time even if he was all right. Last time he was sick things were very bad. He had a high fever and he vomited all the time. Then I got the virus myself and was also very sick. During that one week I had to hire somebody to look after both of us. Those days were so miserable that I really hate to look back. Also, my husband and I were filing a divorce at that time. We used to quarrel a lot, and after he moved out we still did so over the phone. My son was always scared. He was all innocent, but he was suffering with us.

In order to let her son receive the type of care and attention he at this young age should be receiving, Xiong Jing let him live with her parents in China. The separation was very hard for both of them because her son was already two years old at that time and in the last two years she had been the primary caregiver of the boy. But she said that she knew for sure that her son would be happier away from her.

Despite the fact that they let their children live with the grandparents, transnational parents interviewed for this study still held the belief that parents offer the best care for their children. However, they also believed that if for various reasons parents were not able to take care of their children all by themselves or cannot offer the type of intensive care that their children needed, the grandparents would be the people to rely on. Even if leaving the childcare with the grandparents means that they have to separate from their own children, these parents still would not want to sacrifice the intensive care their children could receive from the grandparents for the limited time they would be able to spend with their children and the much less desirable care they (or the daycare) could offer if they managed to keep their children with them in the U.S. They still tended to identify with the intensive parenting (mothering) ideal, but since life after migration had made it difficult or even impossible for them to conform to this ideal, they turned to their own parents for help with the fulfillment of this ideal. As Jiang Xue pointed out,

Children at this young age need a lot of attention from their adult givers. It would be best if their own parents could provide the amount of time and attention that they need. I never denied this. But when the parents cannot do so in the U.S, we all know what life is like for us first-generation immigrants here, while the grandparents in China can and are willing to, is it still for the benefits of the children to keep them in the U.S? I may sound like a cruel parent when I say this, but it took me a while to figure this out. To me, the best arrangement is what will allow my child to receive the type of care that a child at his age should receive.

Like Jiang Xue, all other transnational parents I interviewed indicated in one way or another that their major consideration was for their young children to receive the best care available to them when they themselves happened to not be the best care giver, at least at that point of time. This transnational parenting arrangement, therefore, is rather a family strategy adopted by these Chinese immigrant families to offset the difficulty and hardship that have come along with migration. Parents who adopted this strategy tended to take into careful consideration the interests and needs of all parties involved, but most importantly those of the young children's, before they reached their final decision. To them, transnational parenting was probably the best solution available to them based on their family situation after alternate solutions were examined.

In addition to the consideration of their children's well-being, many parents interviewed for this study also indicated that letting their children spend some time with the grandparents was a means for them to compensate their own parents for their absence from their life as a result of immigration to the U.S. This echoes a similar finding discussed in Hagan's study (1994) of Maya migrants from Guatemala who sent their U.S.-born children back to their home country to be raised by the grandparents and other relatives because, among other reasons, they wanted their children to accompany the aging grandparents in compensation for their absence due to international migration. Being thousands of miles away from their home country and their aging parents, these Chinese immigrant parents hoped that the presence of the grandchildren could help alleviate the empty nest syndrome that many grandparents experienced when their adult children left them. In these cases, the adult children not only left them, but also migrated to another country, which made visiting each other a very difficult thing to do. While

these first-generation Chinese immigrants struggling to settle in the U.S were in need of reliable child care, the grandparents, on the other hand, were feeling lonely and in need of their children's company or at least they needed their children to not be too far away. As a matter of fact, both sides were trying to adjust to the reality brought about by international migration, which had posed challenges to the extended family and limited the grandparents' involvement in the lives of the younger generations. To many Chinese immigrant parents, sending their young children to China to be raised by the grandparents, therefore, had double significance: first of all, the grandparents as surrogate parents made intensive parenting a possibility which for various reasons the children's own parents were unable to perform in the U.S; second, these children acted as an agent between the parents and the grandparents to help alleviate the parents' sense of guilt caused by the fact that they left the grandparents behind when they immigrated to the U.S. This sense of guilt was experienced by a majority of the Chinese immigrants I interviewed, especially by those who were the only child of their parents. During the interview, many immigrant parents quoted a famous Confucius saying "while your parents are alive, do not journey afar<sup>8</sup>" and indicated that they felt very uneasy about having done the opposite by leaving their aging parents behind. Xiao Hong was one of the transnational parents who felt this burden heavily. She came to the U.S with her husband after working in Beijing for two years. She was not the only child of her parents. She also had a brother three years younger than she was, but she had always believed that she should be the one to live close to her parents as she did not think men were as emotionally close to their parents as women were. Before she migrated to the U.S, her plan was to bring her

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<sup>8</sup> In Chinese, it is 父母在，不远游。

parents to Beijing and buy them a house near where she lived. However, it turned out she had to migrate to a foreign country with her husband and leave her parents far behind. She said although her parents did not openly object to her migration, she could tell that deep in their hearts there was a very strong sense of loss:

My parents came over to visit us when my daughter was born. We had a happy time together. But they could not stay here forever. After staying here for about one year, they had to leave because they could not get another visa extension. My parents were both retired. Before retirement they had plenty of things to work on, but then they were retired and all of a sudden they found themselves not having much to do. Most of their friends moved to be close to their children to help with the child care, but my parents had nothing to do. My brother had no plan to have any children any time soon. In order to bring some joy to my parents, we decided to let my daughter spend some time with them in China. I hoped she could accompany my parents for me and bring some joy to them. At the same time, my daughter could also be taken good care of by my parents. We couldn't have offered her anything close to what she had been receiving from my parents.

Xiao Hong was not alone in thinking that the child sent to live with the grandparents could act as an agent between the parents and the grandparents, compensating to some degree for the time the parents could not spend with the grandparents and bringing the grandparents back to the child-caring process in which the grandparents usually play an important and active role. As many parents indicated in the interview, involving the grandparents in this process is part of the Chinese culture. Immigration has caused immigrants to be far away from their extended family and at the same time also led them to gradually acculturate away from traditional behaviors, but the extended family still manages to play an important role in bringing up the younger generation, and efforts are still being made on the part of the immigrants to reconnect with the extended family left behind. Although for the group of Chinese immigrant parents interviewed, re-involving the grandparents was not the primary reason why their children were sent to China, when the parents were not able to provide the type of intensive care their children needed,

however, the thought of compensating for their absence from the grandparents oftentimes helped to finalize the decision on who to care for the children, as the care by the grandparents obviously outweighed what could be offered by a daycare center or any other people.

Grandparents, on the other hand, are also very willing to be involved in raising the younger generation by offering their time and their child-care skills when all of these are needed by their immigrant children. As a matter of fact, for a majority of the 28 families interviewed, it was the grandparents who first brought up the idea of bringing the child to China to be raised there. Although the grandparents were not interviewed in this study, according to the parents interviewed, the grandparents believed that letting them take care of the child in China was something that could benefit everybody in the family. Zhang Fan, who used to be a doctor in China, said because she and her husband were so busy with their work and the preparation for the exams to return to the practice of medicine in the U.S, her parents suggested that they send their son to China to live with them or her husband's parents for a period of time. Her parents believed that this way the child would be receiving much better care (the grandparents had plenty of time, and they were teachers and doctors in China), she and her husband could concentrate on their work, and it was also a great comfort to the grandparents to be with the child since she and her husband were so far away from China. To them this was a win-win situation for all.

But which side of the grandparents the child should live with oftentimes involves consideration of many factors involved. Unlike Mexican immigrants who tended to view the maternal grandmother to be the best substitute for parental care (Dreby 2006), in the case of Chinese immigrant families, parents would examine the health, economic

situation and living condition of the grandparents on both sides and then select the grandparents who could provide the best care for the child or who had sufficient resources for the child's mental and physical development. Generally speaking, if the four grandparents were all available but one side of the grandparents lived in the countryside while the other side lived in the city, then the child would usually live with the latter. The bottom line was that the child should receive the best care available to him or her. However, if grandparents on both sides had similar situation, then the child would usually live with the grandparents on the father's side. In Zhang Fan's case, although her parents wanted so much to look after her son in China, they had to respect the child's paternal grandparents because in Chinese culture grandchildren are considered to belong more to the father's family than to the mother's family. But fortunately the four grandparents lived very close, so Zhang Fan's parents could see the child very often. Several other families also indicated that if the paternal grandparents hope to care for their grandchildren, then the maternal grandparents should give away this "privilege".

### The Final Decision

The decision-making regarding whether or not to send one's children to China to be raised by the grandparents was not always straightforward. Although those Chinese immigrant parents interviewed for this study all tended to believe that when they were not able to provide the best care for their children, they could be taken better care of by their grandparents than by anybody else, the issue that really made these parents hesitate was that the grandparents were not just living in a nearby city but instead in a country thousands of miles away. For these immigrant parents, despite all the benefits of having

their children cared for by the grandparents in China, separating from their own children was a very painful thing to do. The decision was never an easy one, but the whole process was more painful for some parents than for others. From the time when the idea of sending the child to China was brought up to the time when the child was sent back it could take up to one year. For some parents, there had been a great deal of back-and-forth from deciding to send the child to China to deciding to keep him/her in the U.S and then back to deciding to send him/her to China. The findings of this study indicated that several factors had contributed significantly to the variation in the decision-making experience.

First, fathers made a big difference in how the decision-making process went. If the father was an involved father and a supportive husband, then he would also be more involved in the decision making process than those fathers who were less involved in their children's life and less supportive to their wives. Involved fathers tended to spend more time examining their situation to make sure that sending their children to live with their grandparents was indeed a workable solution and that their children would really benefit more from this arrangement than from living with them in the U.S. They did not simply jump to a conclusion to either send their children away or keep them in the U.S. These fathers were also more likely to seek advice from other people, most of the time from other Chinese immigrant families living around them that they know. A few fathers also admitted that they went on the Internet to seek advice from people they did not know. Meng Dong was one of these fathers. When his parents suggested that they take care of their 8-month-old son in China so that he would not have to attend daycare, he and his wife started to talk with other Chinese families who had had the experience with

transnational parenting. He also checked out books from the library to learn what kind of impact the separation could have on his son. In the end, after he and his wife decided that their son could be better off living with his parents than with them at that moment, Meng Dong flew back to China with his son and stayed there for two weeks to make sure that his parents could care for the child the way he wanted. With fathers' involvement in the decision making and their support for their wives, the whole decision making was usually less painful and the transition to transnational parenting was also smoother than for those families in which fathers were generally not involved in the house and in the caring for the children. In these cases, the burden of painful decision making oftentimes fell on the mothers.

Sheng Yuan and her husband Jin Ping sent their daughter to China because they were having some marital problems. Sheng Yuan's parents suggested that she let them take care of the child for some time so that she could concentrate on her problems. When she told her husband that her parents planned to help with the child care but they would have to send their daughter to her parents in China, her husband immediately said no.

Sheng Yuan complained:

He said that he would not consider this arrangement and that our daughter had to live with us. But the thing is: he never wanted to help me with housework and child care. He only took care of his job and then nothing else. I had thought he would want to help more after I told him that we might have to send our daughter to China because we could not take good care of her, but there was no difference. He wanted to keep her here. As a mother, I wanted to be with my child all the time. But how could we manage everything if he didn't want to help? He only wanted me to do everything perfectly but didn't care how I would do it. I was already not a good wife. Then I couldn't even be a good mom.

Sheng Yuan said at that time she felt very painful. For one thing, she felt that her marriage was already on the verge of breakdown; for another, she had to make this hard

decision on what they were going to do with their daughter. Her husband was not helping much in caring for the child. He wanted to keep her in the U.S, but at the same time his little involvement in housework and child care did not change much to convince Sheng Yuan that he really wanted to keep the child with them. During the interview with Jin Ping, he admitted that he was at first against sending his daughter to her grandparents in China. When asked what he was thinking when he said no, he said he just wanted to handle their relationship problems all by themselves without getting the grandparents involved. Also, he was worried that people around them would think that they were selfish parents since they did not want to raise the child themselves. But Jin Ping said in the end he realized that keeping the child with them could only make both of them suffer more from the marital problems they had. So he no longer objected to his wife's plan. Their daughter was sent back to China when she was about 10 months old, only 3 months after Sheng Yuan's parents left the U.S. Sheng Yuan was the one who prepared necessary travel documents for her daughter's travel to China. She was also the one who flew to China with her daughter. Her husband said he was too busy with his work to do this himself.

Second, in the decision-making process it also mattered if the couple had friends whose children were living in China or had had the experience living with the grandparents in China. Once again, social networks within the Chinese community played an important role. Other families' experience not only showed to those parents still looking for reliable childcare arrangement that transnational parenting was a workable solution, but sometimes advice and suggestions from other transnational families could also make transnational-parents-to-be feel that they were not doing their

children any favor by keeping them in the U.S when their situation did not allow them to do so. Sometimes these advice and suggestions exerted some kind of pressure on these parents and pushed them to finally reach the decision on transnational parenting. When Yu Min had her daughter she was still a graduate student working toward her PhD. She lived in a big apartment complex where there were at least ten Chinese immigrant families. When she was expecting her first child, some people around her started to suggest that she send her daughter to China after she was born so that she could concentrate on her PhD and graduate soon. These suggestions came from some of the transnational families as well as from those visiting grandparents who came to the U.S to help care for their grandchildren. After her daughter was born, she still received similar suggestions. She described what her situation was like at that time:

They said “why not let your parents care for the child in China since they are not able to stay here long?” They said this in a way as if it was such an easy thing for them to do. I don’t know. I said it’s a painful thing to separate from my child, but they said “then you will be able to graduate soon and bring her back soon.” They kept saying that until in the end I felt that I would be really selfish if I insisted on keeping my daughter here and let her suffer with us in order to avoid the pain of separation on my part. You know, with both of us being graduate students, we wouldn’t be able to offer her much time and attention.

Yu Min and her husband managed to keep their daughter with them for 5 months (their daughter was born during the summer when school was not in session). Shortly after the new semester started, Yu Min let her parents-in-law (who came to the U.S to help with the new baby) bring her daughter back to China with them. According to them, other people’s suggestions played an important part in their final decision.

But advice and suggestions were not always ready for transnational-parents-to-be to consider as in Yu Min’s case. For most parents, they had to seek advice from others if they wanted to know what other people would do in their situation. This was the case for

those parents who had friends with transnational parenting experience as well as for those who did not have such friends. The difference was that the former could find some kind of support group around them which would make the decision-making process easier and less painful, while the latter had to either make the decision alone or seek other channels for advice and suggestions. The majority of the Chinese families sought advice from other people before they sent their children to live in China. These families sought advice from friends, colleagues, people from local Chinese churches, or even people on the Internet that they did not know. People who were asked to give advice were all Chinese. As indicated by many Chinese families, this was because they believed that their situation could be better understood by their fellow Chinese (who shared the same cultural background with them and were also immigrants in the U.S). For those parents who did not have other Chinese transnational parents around them or those who did not want other people to know that they were planning on sending their children away, Chinese online forums provided some kind of confidentiality. Two Chinese families interviewed mentioned that they tried two popular Chinese online forums where they asked whether in their situation they should consider transnational parenting. In addition to some advice they received from other Chinese immigrant parents, however, they also received criticisms and were labeled “selfish and irresponsible parents”.

When the advice parents received from other people (either online or in real life) was against sending their children to China, the length of time it took for them to reach the final decision was usually longer, as the unfavorable advice tended to cause parents to hesitate even more over the issue of transnational family arrangement. This was especially the case for those Chinese parents who became Christians after they migrated

to the U.S. Sheng Yuan was an active member of a local Chinese church. When she had to make a decision on whether her daughter should live with her parents in China, the first person she went to talk to was the pastor of the church she attended. She said her brain went blank when the pastor told her that she should keep her daughter with her in the U.S despite the difficulties she was confronted with, because “children are a gift from God to parents” and “there are both privileges and responsibilities resulting from this gift”. As a Christian herself, she felt what the pastor said was the most severe criticisms against her “selfish” thought of sending her daughter to China. Another mother, Xiong Jing, who was also a Christian, said that many people from her church (Chinese as well as Americans) told her it was against God’s will to separate from her son. Both of Sheng Yuan and Xiong Jing reported that they were in a deep dilemma at that time—their Christian beliefs on one side and their personal and family difficulties on the other. And the person caught in the middle was their child. For this reason, both of the two mothers experienced a fierce inner struggle. In Sheng Yuan’s case, even when travel documents and flight tickets were all ready for her daughter to fly to China, she was still praying for God to provide guidance to her if God’s will was to not let her send her daughter to China. She had hoped that something would happen that would improve her situation a little so that she would be able to keep her daughter here, but nothing happened. This led her to think that maybe it was also God’s will to let her daughter live in China for a period of time so that she could focus on her own marital problems as God would want to see them happily married as well.

A third factor that affected the decision-making process was whether or not the parents themselves had the experience of being raised by the grandparents when they

were a child. About one fourth of the parents interviewed indicated that their grandparents were their guardians for at least six months (in two cases, over 3 years) when their own parents were not able to look after them due to various reasons. These parents indicated that as a result of this experience they were emotionally very close to their grandparents and tended to view them as very important members of the family, even after they got married and had their own families. Liang, father of a three-year-old boy, said he lived with his grandparents until he was old enough to attend elementary school in the city where his parents lived. His grandparents were such important people in his life that he listened to them more than he did to his own parents. When it came to letting her son live with his parents in China, he said that it was probably much easier for him to accept this arrangement than anybody else because of his childhood experience. Like Liang, some other parents also indicated that they hoped the same kind of emotional bonds would also be established between their children and their own parents, that is, between the grandchildren and the grandparents. However, when they chose to migrate to the U.S, they had to leave their parents behind, which made it difficult for the two generations to spend some meaningful time together. So when their situation in the U.S needed them to find a better childcare arrangement for their children, these parents were more likely to view this as a good opportunity for the two generations to bond. For this reason, transnational parenting was more acceptable an arrangement to this group of immigrant parents.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, this chapter discusses family decision making in the context of immigration. I examine why the intensive mothering arrangement was not a possibility for those Chinese transnational parents interviewed for this study and why child care outsourcing had to be sought for. Although these parents also identified with the intensive mothering ideal, in reality, resistance to the practice of this parenting ideal came from several sources which included the parents' immigration status in the U.S, their goals for career advancement, and oftentimes their spouses' objections (direct or indirect). Being unable to perform intensive parenting (mothering), these immigrant parents tended to view transnational parenting as a workable and efficient solution. Here the responsibility to perform intensive parenting was transferred to the grandparents who, usually retired and with plenty of time to dispose of, acted as surrogate parents for their grandchildren. Grandparents' involvement in caring for their grandchildren is common in the Chinese culture. But under these circumstances, it also had its special significance in addition to solving the childcare issue among immigrant parents who as first-generation immigrants usually have lower levels of social capital in the U.S. Immigration caused immigrants to leave their extended family behind and also limited the involvement of the grandparents in caring for the younger generation. However, sending their young children to China to be raised by the grandparents was considered by those transnational parents as a very important way to re-connect with the extended family left behind and to re-involve the grandparents in the life of the younger generation.

Benefits associated with transnational parenting include the following: first, the younger generation can be taken better care of; second, the parents are able to concentrate

on their study, work or even marital problems; and third, the grandparents can have the grandchildren's company to compensate for the fact that their own children left them behind when they migrated to the U.S. Despite the benefits, however, the decision making was never an easy one because immigrant parents were not sending their children to a nearby city but to a country thousands of miles away. Several factors are discussed in this chapter that could affect a couple's decision making. Gender dynamics played a very important part in the decision making process. Other factors such as having friends with transnational parenting experience and immigrant parents' own experience of being raised by the grandparents could all make a difference in the final decision on transnational parenting.

Immigration has not only complicated immigrants' transition into parenthood (as discussed in the previous chapter), but it has also added to the complexity of family decision making, as immigrant families not only have to deal with all kinds of family situations that almost all families are faced with, at the same time they also have to handle challenges and difficulties that accompany immigration, and the process of settlement in a foreign land oftentimes demands immigrants to adopt various strategies, individual or family, to adjust to the new environment and overcome all kinds of barriers that may prevent successful integration. Family adaptive strategies are especially important and complicated to formulate as members of an immigrant family must coordinate the needs of each person involved and oftentimes they have to negotiate with each other to reach a final decision. While families are all in need of some type of strategic planning at some point in time, the planning is of particular significance to immigrant families during a time when they are struggling and managing to mobilize all

resources available to settle and integrate into mainstream society. In the case of Chinese transnational families, prioritizing career, or further education likely leading to a career, over family seems to be a strategy adopted by these transnational families to settle and integrate into the host society faster. And outsourcing caregiving internationally to China serves not simply as “a strategy to relieve the double burden of paid and domestic work” (De Ruijter and Van der Lippe 2007: 206), but also a way to offset adverse situations (such as marital tensions) that occurred after immigration.

Two major factors contribute to the adoption of transnational family arrangements. First of all, they are a response to structural constraints that limit these immigrant families’ options and opportunities in the host country. As Foner (1997) indicates, structural constraints and conditions that immigrants confront in their new environment could “shape the kinds of family arrangements, roles, and orientations that emerge among them” (p. 962). In the case of Chinese immigrants, these structural constraints manifest themselves in a number of issues: barriers to permanent residency and decent employment, lack of recognition of immigrants’ foreign-earned qualifications, Nashville offering a less favorable context of reception due to the fact that it is one of the new immigrant gateway cities, etc. Parenting is never an easy ride, and the experiences of parenting for first-generation immigrants are oftentimes exacerbated by the very fact that they are immigrants in a foreign land. Their struggles to settle and integrate, combined with their social isolation, lack of support networks and more often than not, their limited English language skills, have all posed significant challenges to these immigrant families. Unlike transnational parenting arrangements among Latino immigrant families which is oftentimes fostered by hiring and labor force control practices (Hondagneu-Sotelo and

Avila 1997; Mummert 2005), the practice of transnational parenting adopted by professional Chinese immigrants, as examined in this study, is rather a result of their struggle to overcome the temporary downward mobility accompanied by immigration and to achieve the kind of socioeconomic status that at least matches their pre-immigration status, than a response to the selective immigration policy that favors either male or female workers (as in the case of Latino immigrants). For professional Chinese immigrants to the U.S, their international migration is oftentimes associated with significant downward mobility, as their foreign credentials are not always readily recognized and accepted in the U.S (Jones-Correa 1998; Yaish 2002; Zentgraf 2002). By temporarily giving up part of their parenting responsibilities and privileges and outsourcing childcare to the grandparents still in China, very much the same way as white middle-class families handing over their caregiver tasks to domestic workers or other alternative childcare providers, these immigrant parents are able to relieve some pressure on them and thus concentrate on their career or further education which may build the foundation for a successful career. The eventual goal of this voluntary separation between parents and their young children is to fight against all odds to achieve upward mobility and successful integration into the host country.

Second, the practice of transnational parenting adopted by professional Chinese immigrants also comprises some cultural elements. The cultural values that immigrants brought with them from their home countries play a significant role in the formulation of family adaptation strategies. As Hareven (1991) indicates,

Strategies were not guided exclusively by economic needs but rather by the interaction of economic and cultural factors... Even under conditions of economic marginality, the strategies of immigrant families were guided by their cultural

values, which were sometimes in conflict with middle-class values in the dominant culture (p. 117).

For first generation immigrants, when situations arise in the host country that prompt them to make important decisions or take quick actions in response to that situation, they often choose to resort to their cultural resources, such as extended family and kinship networks, for assistance. Like Latino families, Chinese families are also known for placing strong emphasis on kinship and family values. The grandparents' involvement in caring for the grandchildren is very common in China and in order to help with childcare, arrangements are often made for the grandparents to co-reside with their adult children. One issue with international migration is that it limits or even completely forbids the grandparents' involvement in caring for the younger generation while at the same time it overwhelms immigrants themselves with various challenges. In many cases, transnational family arrangement becomes both a solution to Chinese professional immigrants' work-family issues and a strategy to re-involve and re-connect with the grandparents still in China. Simply put, the transnational parenting practice is in some sense a result of the very fact that the grandparents, who are important figures in the child caring process, happen to be in China and have to remain there due to various reasons. And by adopting transnational family arrangements those Chinese immigrant families involved also managed to maintain some degree of cultural continuity in the face of international migration.

## CHAPTER VI

### PARENTING FROM A DISTANCE

#### Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, mother's and father's roles each come with a set of role expectations, with mothers expected to be the primary caregiver of their children while fathers the provider of the family (Coltrane 2004; Hays 1996; Marsiglio 2000; Riggs 1997; Rothman 2001). Despite the increasing participation of women in the labor force and their significant share of the provider role, they still feel caught between their commitments to work and their children at home, as the ideal of mothers as caregivers and fathers as providers weighs heavily on these professional mothers (Hochschild 1997). And it was probably due to their identification with this ideal that non-transnational parents were more likely to target transnational mothers than fathers when they fiercely criticized the practice of transnational parenting in Chinese discussion forums on the Internet. Since transnational parents are no longer involved in the daily care of their children, how they parent in the transnational context becomes a question of interest here. Also, given the different gender role expectations, one would expect that transnational mothers and fathers may think differently about separation from their children and their non-conventional parenting arrangement.

In the previous chapter I also discussed that none of the transnational parents I interviewed for this study believed that their transnational parenting arrangement was an imprudent decision or simply a convenient arrangement for them to escape their parental

responsibilities. Instead, most of these transnational families went through a painful and sometimes lengthy decision making process. Many factors were considered during this process while parents attempted to balance everything that was deemed important to them as first-generation immigrants: career, immigration status, family relationships, and even connections with the extended families left behind. However, no matter what each family's situation was like that had led parents to consider transnational parenting, these parents all tended to put top priority on their children's well-being: when for various reasons intensive parenting (mothering) was not a possibility, intensive surrogate parenting by the grandparents was an ideal arrangement to seek for. Despite the reasons behind transnational parenting, after the decision was finalized each family had to prepare for the upcoming separation from the child and make the transition to the temporary "childlessness" or "partial childlessness" (i.e., reduced number of children for those families in which not all children were sent away to the grandparents' home, or at least not all at the same time). In this chapter I am going to discuss how families made the transition to transnational parenthood, how transnational parents parented from a distance, how they emotionally responded to the separation, and whether there existed any gender differences in how these parents practiced and interpreted transnational parenting.

### Making the Transition

From the time when the decision was finalized to the time when the child was sent to China, it could take somewhere between two months and one year. The variation in the length of time was usually caused by the fact that parents had to find the best schedule for returning to China. If it was the child's parents who travelled with the child to China,

then the timing depended on when one or both parents could get a leave from work. In case one or both parents were students still taking courses, then the travel time was usually during the summer or winter break. For those families in which grandparents came to help with the child care, the timing usually depended on how long the grandparents could still legally stay in the U.S. In most cases, the grandparents did not choose to return to China with the grandchildren until they reached the limit of days they were permitted to stay in the U.S.<sup>9</sup>. They did so because it would allow the child to spend as much time as possible with his or her parents before he or she had to leave with the grandparents.

During this period, parents had to make necessary preparations for the child's departure. This came in two ways: one was to physically prepare for the child's international travel such as obtaining the passport, visa or travel permit, flight tickets, etc. The other was to emotionally get ready for the upcoming separation. In most families it was the mother who applied for documents needed for international travel. Only two fathers said they actually did the whole thing. For most families, the child's American passport was usually obtained not long after the child's birth. This was done for the convenience of domestic or international travelling, not necessarily related to their plan to send the child back to China later on. However, visas or travel permits were usually not obtained until a final decision was made on transnational family arrangement. The same was with flight tickets and other things needed for international travelling.

Emotional preparations, on the other hand, varied among transnational parents, and there were gender differences as well. In most cases, it was the grandparents already in

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<sup>9</sup> On visitor visa they are usually given 6 months to stay at the entry. If they request a visa extension and the request is approved, then they will be allowed to stay in the U.S for up to six more months.

the U.S looking after the child who travelled with the child back to China. In five cases it was the child's mother and in only two cases it was the father. There was still another case in which both parents accompanied the child to China. No families let people other than the child's parents or grandparents bring the child to China (as was the case for many undocumented Chinese immigrants according to studies and relevant media coverage). For those parents who were travelling to China together with the child, there was usually not much difference in their parental behaviors during this period as compared to before the decision on transnational parenting was finalized. This was because the child's departure from the U.S did not immediately mark these parents' separation from the child. They usually had at least a few weeks to spend with their child in China before the real separation took place and transnational parenthood occurred. So for these parents their emotional adjustment did not start until they were back in China.

However, no matter where the emotional adjustment took place (in the U.S or in China), mothers tended to prepare themselves for the separation in two different ways, although there were still a few mothers who said that their parental behaviors were no different from before. Some mothers said that they chose to gradually "distance" themselves from their children and at the same time let the children's new primary caregiver(s) get more involved in their life. In Xiong Jing's case, she withdrew her son from the daycare center where he was enrolled for five months and let her parents, who came to the U.S for a short stay, take over the task of caring for him. She also purposely spent less time with her son while at the same time let her parents spend more time with him before they took him to China with them. She said this was to prepare both her and her son for the days when they would not be with each other. According to mothers like

Xiong Jing, this was a very painful thing to do, especially when the new caregiver(s) was not previously caring for the child, since this made these mothers feel as if they were giving away their own child to complete strangers, although the new caregiver(s) might just be the child's grandparents. But if the grandparents were previously involved in the child's life, such as coming to the U.S to care for the child, then this transfer would be somewhat easier on the part of the mothers.

Fang was one of the mothers who flew back to China with her son. Her mother was in the U.S to help with the child for several months, but when she went back to China she had to leave her son with her husband's parents who had never seen the child before. She had to do so because for one thing, her widowed mother's health condition made it difficult for her to care for the child on a daily basis and for another she said that in the place where she came from a child was considered a member of the father's extended family instead of the mother's, so it was regarded as both the paternal grandparents' responsibility and privilege to care for the child. She described what she did in order to prepare both her son and herself for the upcoming separation:

I left my son with my parents-in-law. Because they had never seen the child before, in the first week I stayed in their home to make sure that the grandparents knew how to handle him. In the second week I only visited him during the day. Then in the final week, I went to see him every other day. In the two days before I had to return to the U.S, I only went to see him when he was taking a nap. You can't imagine how painful that was. I wanted to say good-bye to him and tell him that I would be gone, but I couldn't do it. I just didn't have the courage. Then on the flight back to the U.S, my tears were running all the time.

Mothers Like Xiong Jing and Fang who took this distancing approach in preparing their children and themselves for the upcoming separation believed that in so doing both parties would suffer much less pain than from a sudden separation.

However, there was also another different approach to emotional preparations before complete separation took place. Instead of trying to “distance” themselves from their children, some other mothers chose to “intensify” their parenting behavior during this transition period. These mothers tended to spend more time with their children than they previously did because they felt that this could help them alleviate a little the guilt of having to send their own children away. Qiao said the following when talking about her parenting behavior before her son was brought back to China by her parents:

I knew this might not be the best way to get both my son and myself ready for the upcoming separation. But I just couldn't help it. I felt as if I was going to lose my baby, so I just wanted to hold him all the time and spend every single minute with him while I still had him. This made me feel better in some way and worse in another. I thought I could make up a little bit for my absence from his life in the near future, but still, what I did could not change the fact that we had to separate for a while.

This kind of “intensive” mothering behavior, although according to Qiao would probably not be able to prepare anyone for the separation, was a way for mothers like her to temporarily release their feelings of guilt caused by their transnational family arrangement. Despite the potential benefits for the child to live with the grandparents in China as compared to living with his or her own busy parents in the U.S, these mothers still felt the pain of not being able to bring these benefits to their children themselves.

In contrast to mothers' parenting behavior, however, most fathers reported that there was no change in their parenting behavior during this transition period. They seemed to be less “involved” at this stage than mothers who engaged themselves in the preparation, either physically or emotionally, for the upcoming separation. As mentioned previously in this chapter, only two fathers said it was them who actually prepared the documents needed for their children's international travel. Emotionally, these fathers did not report

doing anything special to get either themselves or their children ready for the separation. They tended to believe that the decision making was the most difficult part in the whole process, and if they experienced any emotional upheavals, it was during that stage. However, once the decision was finalized, they usually became relatively calm. As Meng Dong said, it was not a time to display their sentimentality toward separation because “it was no use to anybody involved---the child or the parents themselves”. According to fathers like Meng Dong, they did everything they were supposed to do just as usual. Only three fathers said they managed to spend a little more time with their children before separation.

### Parenthood Reconstructed

Separation from their children marked the beginning of transnational parenting for those parents interviewed for this study. With them remaining in the U.S while their children living with the grandparents back in China, these parents were no longer routinely involved in the caring for their children, as distance prevented them from parenting in a normal way. Oftentimes labeled “parents who do not parent” by those non-transnational parents, transnational parents had to overcome the distance barrier and manage to reconstruct their parenthood after their children left them. Questions that will be addressed in this section include: how do transnational parents parent in the absence of their children? How do they reconstruct parenthood after the separation? And are there any gender differences in the way how these parents carry out their parental responsibilities in the transnational context?

My interview data revealed that the first few weeks after separation were reported to be the most difficult time for both transnational mothers and fathers. During this period, both mothers and fathers tried to recover from the separation and adjust themselves to the state of “childlessness” or “partial childlessness”. However, mothers’ reaction toward separation tended to be much stronger than fathers’. Most mothers reported that they cried very often and were unable to concentrate on their work or study during this period.

Zhao Ran described her situation this way:

[During the first few weeks] I often woke up in the middle of the night and then was unable to fall into sleep again. I would lie there and silently cry. In my mind I kept asking myself, “What did I just do to my baby? Did I do a right thing? What is she doing now? Does she miss mom? Does she know where mom is?” I kept thinking about her until in the end I hated myself so much. I never doubted that she would be taken very good care of by my parents, but that feeling of pain was really killing me!

Another mother, Ping, reported that she “had to take two days off from work” in order to adjust herself to the separation. And Cui Juan reported that she “couldn’t do anything” and “didn’t want to go anywhere” during the first week. The majority of the fathers, however, only reported that they felt sad during the first few weeks without going into details about how they actually experienced the first few weeks after separation. When asked how he felt, Yu Wei, father of a two-year-old daughter, simply replied, “Of course I felt sad. Everybody in this situation would feel sad. It is not something to celebrate after all.” When I asked further whether his daily activities during the first couple of weeks were in any way affected by separation, he said “no, I just felt sad.” Most other fathers gave similar answers. It seemed that these fathers did not really go through the same intense emotional upheavals as mothers did, or it might simply be that they were somewhat “reluctant” to describe their feelings in any detail.

In addition to differences in emotional responses to separation, the recovery period seemed to be much longer for mothers than for fathers. When asked how long it took for them to “return to normal”, over half of the mothers replied that they never went back to normal because their life would never be the same again before their children could be brought back to the U.S. As Lu Qing replied to my question about going back to normal:

Normal? I think it all depends on how you define “normal”. For me, as long as my daughter is still in China, I won’t consider myself a normal mother. Mothers are not supposed to send their children away, but I just did that. I would say my life won’t return to normal again until she comes back to me, even if she has to return to a broken family... As for my marital mess... that’s a different story. No matter what the outcome is, it should not change the nature of our mother-daughter relationship.

Some mothers expressed their sentiment of incompleteness as transnational mothers who had to mother from a distance; others revealed their feelings of guilt for not being there to witness the growing up of their children. But despite the feelings that prevented them from regarding their life as being normal until their families were reunited, these mothers also indicated that their strong emotional reactions did begin to subside after a period of time, which usually ranged from one to three months. While the feelings of guilt and incompleteness might still haunt them, they reported that they no longer cried much and that they could finally concentrate on what they were supposed to do. Fathers, on the other hand, tended to return to their “normal” emotional states much faster. Unlike those mothers who claimed that their life would never be the same again before their children were brought back to the U.S, most fathers claimed that they returned to “normal” within 2-3 weeks after the separation. Li Ming described how his life went back to normal:

Before my daughter went back to China, a great deal of my energy was spent on her. Kids at her age demand a lot of attention. We all know that. After she left, all of a sudden I didn’t know what to do, and at that time I felt bad about her absence as well. I think the first week or two was kind of chaotic as I was trying

to find things to do to fill in the time I used to spend with my daughter. Then my coursework got heavy and I had to spend a lot of time in school. I gradually got used to my daughter's absence and things began to get back in order.

Another father, Ye Hong, indicated during the interview that life being back to normal or not was just a state of mind and it all depended on how parents looked at separation and their lives without their children living with them:

If you keep thinking that “oh I'm a bad parent because I sent my child away”, then this sentimentality will always haunt you and you'll never live a normal life. For me, I sent my son to China and I made that decision after much consideration. Once I sent him away I never wanted to look back and asked myself “should I be doing this?” Sure, I felt sad about this separation and that's quite natural I believe. But the thing is: I never wanted this feeling to control myself. I only looked forward, managed to get myself used to the separation and then moved on to work towards my goals. My life went back to normal pretty quickly – it all depends on whether you can look at the whole thing positively.

The findings of this study indicated that mothers and fathers defined “normal” quite differently. While fathers tended to define “normal” as a stage when their work or study was no longer affected by the separation and when they became fully adjusted to the “childlessness” or partial “childlessness”, mothers, however, tended to define “normal” as when they could parent with their children being with them, that is, when they no longer had to parent from a distance.

After separation, parenting also took on new forms. Since distance prevented them from being directly involved in their children's daily life, parents had to find alternative ways to keep in touch with their children living in China. Fortunately, modern technology has made it possible for people to remain connected no matter where they are and distance is no longer a big problem as it used to be. Transnational parents in this study reported employing different methods to stay in touch with their children in China. These included but were not limited to making traditional phone calls, using the Internet

as an alternative to traditional telephones, making video calls through Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger, Skype or other instant messaging systems, and emailing photos or video clips back and forth between China and the U.S. As a matter of fact, when parents were making decisions about which grandparents their children should live with in China, the convenience of communication was one of the most important factors they had to consider, and this was also one of the reasons why city was chosen over the countryside, as parents preferred that their children live with the grandparents who resided in a place where there were more resources to rely on. According to Qin, this was because she wanted to re-establish her parenthood from a long distance and not to let it only stay on the paperwork (i.e., the birth certificate which serves as an official announcement of her parenthood) after her child was sent away. She said:

I feel that I *have* to see my baby and let her see me as well. Although I cannot be physically reached, at least she can see me from a computer screen and know that she has a mom... somewhere. Otherwise I would feel that I am completely left out of her life. That sounds too scary to me as a mom, as it is almost the same thing as telling me that I'm not her mom any more.

Like Qin, other parents had similar concerns that if they were not able to communicate conveniently with their children in China they would feel totally deprived of their parenthood. Therefore, frequent contacts were considered essential to maintain their parental status, and if they failed to do so their children would forget about them given their very young age at the time of separation and would eventually regard them as complete strangers, which for these transnational parents would pose a serious challenge to their parenthood.

Most parents reported making frequent video calls to China through the Internet. This method of communication allowed parents and their children to see each other while

talking. For those grandparents who did not have Internet access in China, however, parents had to make traditional phone calls. This was the case for only a few families interviewed. During the first few weeks following separation, the frequencies of communication were much greater than later on. Parents made numerous calls to China to make sure that everything went right for their children (a few parents even reported calling China 4-5 times a day), and the conversations were oftentimes very emotional, especially for mothers. After the initial recovery period, however, the schedule of communication became much more regular and the conversations much less emotional. Most parents reported talking to their children or the grandparents (if their children were too young) for at least one hour each time and at least 1-2 times each week. Mothers and fathers were equally likely to initiate the calls, but mothers tended to talk more and stay longer on the phone (or Internet) than fathers. According to Xiao Hong, every time she and her husband started a video call to her parents whom their son lived with in China, she always had endless things to talk and ask about. Her husband, however, oftentimes ran out of things to say after the first 20-30 minutes and ended up sitting there watching them talk or walking away from the computer. Fathers reported the same pattern and believed that this was one of the places where men and women parent differently.

In addition to new forms of parenting, parenthood also took on new meanings after the separation. For many parents interviewed for this study, work and parenthood were in conflict with each other before they had to send their children to live with the grandparents in China, as devoting too much time to work would almost always result in less satisfactory parenting performance, or vice versa. This was especially true for mothers. And it was due to this career and parenting conflict that many mothers had to

consider transnational family arrangement (see discussions in Chapter 5). However, things began to take a new turn after their children were sent to China, as mothers were no longer involved in the daily caring for their children and thus the conflict between career and motherhood began to become less significant or even disappear. At this moment, they started to view their career as an indispensable part of their parenthood instead of a conflicting element against it, and they tended to believe that any accomplishment in their career goals would be considered a significant move toward “better” motherhood. In other words, career achievement could make up for the fact that they were not mothering in a normal way which, despite the many benefits for the child to live with the grandparents, still weighed heavily on these immigrant mothers. Moving toward their career goals would also help to justify the kind of sacrifices that the whole family made for the transnational family arrangement. According to these transnational mothers, it was also an effective way to boost their motherhood and make them feel more competent as mothers. Xiao Ying was still a graduate student in business school when she became a transnational parent. She said after her son was sent to China she started to work even harder because she wanted to graduate early and then find a decent job:

That was the only thing I cared about at that time. I already put myself in the “less competent mothers” category by sending my son away. If I didn’t work that hard to accomplish what I had planned for myself, that is, to graduate early, find a decent job and therefore create a better life for my son, then I would never have the chance to stand in the “good moms” category. Nobody was going to forgive me for what I failed to achieve as a mom. But fortunately I made it in the end. I graduated and I found a very good job. Now my son is living a very comfortable life here and I’m also very satisfied with what I have offered him as a mom.

Xiao Ying’s emphasis on her career as a means to make up for her caring role as a mom was not uncommon among Chinese immigrant mothers interviewed in this study. Some other mothers mentioned their successful application for an important research grant,

their completion of a graduate degree program or their moving one step further toward returning to the practice of medicine in the U.S, etc. as some type of gifts to offer to their children or as an indication that they were not really “bad moms”. The tendency of these transnational mothers to emphasize their career is interesting because as discussed previously societal expectations mandate mothers to be caregivers rather than providers and tend to define mothers by their caring role rather than by their career performances. But when circumstances arose that prevented these mothers from performing their caring role, as in the case of Chinese transnational family arrangement, they had to turn to their work and redefine their motherhood through their career, which, instead of being a conflicting element against their mothering role, had become a means for transnational mothers to make up for their less satisfactory performance as mothers who did not choose to live with their children.

The situation was different for transnational fathers, who tended to view work as always an essential part of fatherhood. Separation and transnational family arrangement did not seem to affect the way fathers looked at the relationship between work and fatherhood. As a matter of fact, the provider role was considered so important that the three transnational fathers who stayed at home for a period of time all reported in one way or another that they were under tremendous pressure during that time to seek employment. Although having no job allowed them to spend a great deal of time with their children, it also made them very uncomfortable. One of these three fathers, Lin Qian, said the following:

What’s worse than not being able to find a good job to support my family but having to stay at home? I took very good care of my child while I was staying at home. But that’s far from being enough. People would think that I’m not a good father, or at least not good enough, because I’m a father and I’m jobless. They

would judge you by the type of job you do. Having no job at all? Then that's even worse. I do feel bad about separating from my child, but I think I should be more worried about myself still being unemployed.

Like Lin Qian, the other two fathers who once were stay-at-home fathers also expressed their embarrassment for not being able to fulfill the provider role during the period of unemployment. They indicated that people around them began to be concerned and kept asking them how their job hunting went, which put some extra pressure on them. These fathers believed that unemployed fathers carried a serious stigma as they failed to take their provider role. Transnational fathers who did not have the experience of staying at home, however, also indicated that they were under the pressure of conforming to the fatherhood mandates and acting as a good provider (thus a good father). In response to my questions about how he would define a good father, Sun Yu, an IT professional, said the following:

For a father, you just have to work and be a provider. That's your responsibility, and there is no excuse. If you earn big, then you can afford to let your wife stay at home with the kids but not the other way around. I like to share housework with my wife and when my daughter was still in the U.S I also helped her care for our daughter. People would say that I'm an involved father, but if I'm not first of all a good provider, then I'm still nothing despite my participation in domestic chores.

Like Sun Yu, many parents (mothers and fathers alike) also indicated either directly or indirectly that a father's caring activity was somewhat like a bonus on top of his breadwinner role: if he was an involved father, that was good; but if he was not, then that was OK too, since it was not all it took to make him a good father, and his fatherhood would not be seriously damaged by failing to assume a caring role for his children.

Here gender differences in how parents view the relationship between work and motherhood/fatherhood were quite obvious. While the relationship between work and fatherhood remains quite constant, that is, work remains an essential element of

fatherhood, the relationship between motherhood and work seems to be complicated and fluid. As Daniels and Weingarten (1982) indicate in their study of parenthood, before they became parents women tended to believe that motherhood would interfere with their work, and it was due to this reason that many women postponed parenthood. However, once the baby was born, these women began to think that “it was their jobs that interfered with their mothering and not the other way around” (p. 128). Daniels and Weingarten’s study was for conventional families where parents and children were in the same household. For non-conventional family arrangements, as in the case of Chinese transnational families, my study indicates that work took on some new meanings: it became a means for Chinese transnational mothers to make up for the insufficient caring role and therefore allowed them to redefine their motherhood through their career achievement. And my finding on the meaning of work to transnational mothers corroborates previous research on Latino transnational motherhood conducted by Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997). In this study, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila found that Latino transnational mothers tended to expand their definitions of motherhood “to encompass breadwinning that may require long-term physical separations” rather than “replacing caregiving with breadwinning definitions of motherhood”, and they believed that “they can best fulfill traditional caregiving responsibilities through income earning in the United States while their children remain ‘back home’” (p. 562). For transnational fathers, however, my study indicates that fatherhood has always been associated with the provider role. Despite women’s labor force participation and their increasing share of the provider role, gender role ideologies and the ideal of mothers as caregivers and fathers as providers seem to still remain deeply embedded in our culture, which has caused parents,

transnational parents included, to have enacted the parenting role and experienced parenthood quite differently.

### Experiencing Transnational Parenthood

Gender role ideologies led transnational mothers and fathers to define good motherhood and fatherhood in a different way. At the same time, the ideal of mothers as caregivers and fathers as providers also provoked different degrees of guilt among these immigrant parents and caused them to experience differently the transnational family arrangement and separation from their children. As discussed previously, transnational parents received a lot of criticisms for their unconventional parenting practice and split household arrangement. According to the parents I interviewed for this study, criticisms came from people around them whom they personally knew as well as from those whom they did not know--those who chose to post their criticisms online. Since motherhood mandates hold mothers responsible for the caring for their children, having them raised by the grandparents in China instead of by their own parents in the U.S was usually considered to be the mothers' problem. As a result, criticisms posted in online forums were more likely to target transnational mothers than fathers. In real life, transnational mothers reported being confronted with the issue of transnational parenthood at work, at church or at other social gatherings, and the confrontation took the form of inquiries about reason behind transnational parenting, timing of family reunion or even harsh criticisms against their transnational practice. But the harshest criticisms came from online forums, as anonymity made it possible for other parents to freely express what they thought about the transnational family arrangement without any concerns.

According to Jiang Xue, while most Chinese immigrant parents she knew chose not to say anything, some would come up to her and directly told her that she was not doing the right thing by letting her parents raise her own daughter. As for her American colleagues and friends, she said she was very sure that they also found her transnational parenting practice difficult to understand. However, they chose to not openly confront her with their criticisms “just for the sake of politeness”. She said:

When my American colleagues asked me about my daughter, I had to tell them the truth. Some of them responded with an “oh” and then stopped asking for further details. Others would ask why but still would not make any comments. I knew what was in their mind. They must have thought that I was so weird because in their culture this was really something bad. Even if they are familiar with our culture, it is still very hard for them to understand us as immigrants struggling to get settled in the U.S.

She said she chose not to explain to her American colleagues because they would not understand even though she did. As for those harsh criticisms from other Chinese parents, she said she chose not to explain either, because those parents were all too familiar with Chinese immigrants’ struggles in the U.S but in many cases it was just the different family circumstances that made all the differences in their family arrangement and parenting practice.

Most fathers, however, did not report being frequently confronted with the issue of transnational parenting, either by their American colleagues, friends or by their fellow Chinese immigrants. As some of the fathers pointed out, this was probably because men were less accustomed than women to talking about their family and kids or asking about other people’s family situations. Only a few fathers said they were actually questioned about their family arrangement by their American colleagues. According to Zhou Jie, after learning the truth, some of his colleagues worried that he would regret what he did

to his daughter later on, while others wondered why his wife would not want to become a full-time mom for the sake of their child. He said:

I never expected my American colleagues and friends to understand what my wife and I did to our daughter because we are from two different cultures and we are first-generation immigrants while they are not. What's the point of taking the effort to explain? I don't actually need people to understand me and to sympathize with my situation. As long as I think this arrangement is for the benefit of my daughter, then that's enough.

Like transnational mothers, fathers also felt that it was unnecessary to explain to other people their transnational family arrangement and to seek their understanding of their family decision, although fathers were much less likely than mothers to be confronted with the issue of transnational parenting.

However, since the motherhood mandates hold mothers responsible for the caregiving of their children, the issue of transnational parenthood weighed more heavily on mothers and provoked a great deal of distress in them. Emotionally, mothers and fathers had quite different experiences with transnational parenthood. Compared with fathers, mothers seemed to psychologically suffer more from their transnational family arrangement. As discussed previously, it usually took a longer time for mothers to "recover" from the pain of separation than for fathers, and even if mothers did "recover" from their initial emotional breakdowns, they still did not believe that their life would "return to normal" with their children living far away in China. Even though they believed that their accomplishment at work could make up a little for the caring role they were supposed to but could not perform due to various reasons, and that their children could receive much better care living with the grandparents than with them in the U.S, mothers still tended to have a very strong sense of guilt for not being able to care for their

own children. Many mothers indicated that they were caught in an awkward dilemma of guiltiness, which was best illustrated in what Zhang Fan said about her feelings of guilt:

I sometimes feel very guilty of letting my son live with his grandparents in China, because I say to myself, “Shouldn’t I be caring for him instead?” But at the same time I also know that if I managed to keep him with me in the U.S, I would still feel the guilt because I wouldn’t be able to give the kind of attention he needs. That would also disqualify me as a good mother. So when there is no solution to this dilemma, I’d rather suffer the pain of separation than let my son receive undesirable care.

Transnational mothers often felt torn between their responsibility to care for their children and their wish for personal development or simply their wish to settle in the U.S as first-generation immigrants. These mothers tended to view their transnational family arrangement as violating “good mother” norms, which, despite legitimate reasons behind this arrangement, has actually deprived their innocent children of the motherly care, something that they so much deserve to receive. Therefore, transnational mothers often suffer two layers of pain: the pain provoked by separation from their children as well as pain caused by their failure to conform to the good mothering mandates, and the latter was often in a position to exacerbate the experience of mother-child separation that was already hard enough for mothers to endure.

Whether or not the father was supportive also seemed to make a big difference in the mother’s emotional response to separation. For those mothers who were having marital problems, transnational mothering was a particularly painful experience. They were also more likely to get very emotional during the interview than other mothers. To them, the family problems were two-folded. On the one side, they were not able to maintain a happy marriage, and they were not considered a “good wife” by themselves or by their spouses; on the other side, they were also not considered a “good mother” as they chose

to separate from their children. This double accusation haunted these transnational mothers and made their transnational parenting experience especially difficult. In contrast, it was relatively easier for those women who had a very supportive husband to cope with transnational parenthood as they only had to work on the parenting issue, on which they also had support from their husband.

However, despite the fact that they were collectively labeled “selfish” or “bad” parents, with mothers more likely to be targeted by harsh criticisms than fathers, none of these transnational parents reported seeking help and comfort from a support group, in real life or online, formed by parents in the same family situation. As a matter of fact, according to the parents I interviewed for this study, none of them ever heard about the existence of such a support group. These transnational parents, mothers and fathers alike, tended to view transnational family arrangement as a very private matter resulted from each family’s unique circumstances. For this reason, other families’ experiences might not be that helpful to one’s own problems. However, mothers were more likely to seek some kind of comfort from other people when they felt overwhelmed by their feelings of guilt. About half of the mothers reported ever doing so while only two fathers said they needed some sort of comfort from other people to deal with their sense of guilt. Church was the place which most of these mothers said they could get comfort from. In Yu Min’s case, she started to attend church regularly after her daughter was sent to China and later she became a Christian. She said she was feeling so depressed at that time as a result of the separation, then one of her friends brought her to the church she and her family attended, hoping that Yu Min would meet more people there and therefore feel a little better. Yu Min said she was grateful to her friend as it really helped her a great deal.

Another mother, Xiong Jing, also reported that she found great comfort at church, but she was a little different in that she was already a Christian before her son left the U.S. She said:

After my son left, I started to attend all kinds of church activities, much more than before. I do so because I really need all of this. When I'm at church with other people, I feel much better because I know I'm so close to God. But I'm not saying that this could free me from the sense of guilt that I have for not being able to care for my son. The guilt is always there. It is just that by attending church activities I'm not allowing this guilt to kill myself.

There was also another mother who reported going to see a counselor when she felt extremely bad about her family situation. Lu Qing was also one of the mothers who were having some problem in her marriage. But according to her, it was not helpful at all: "The counselor did give me a lot of advice and suggestions, but she could never understand my situation as a struggling immigrant and mother. Her suggestions may work for American families, but unfortunately they did not work for me." She said she never went back to the counselor again.

Compared with mothers, fathers' response to transnational parenting seemed to be more rational than emotional, and they were more likely than mothers to justify their transnational family arrangement. Although some of them admitted that they did experience a sense of guilt sometimes, they tended to look at the whole issue from a positive perspective instead of indulging themselves in the guilt. Some fathers emphasized the special importance of the extended family and considered it part of their own family. They believed that their children were still *in* the family even if as a matter of fact they were living with the grandparents in China. Sun Yu was one of these fathers. He said:

Sometimes I do feel a little pain for not being able to be with my daughter. But this is not my whole experience. If I had left my child with someone else, then I should have every reason to feel very guilty of doing that. But the thing is: she is now living with my parents. This should be no problem at all. We are still one family, so I never thought that she was sent away. Instead, she is still *with* us and is still *in* the family.

Another father, Feng Jun, expressed a similar opinion. He said, “Why should parents feel guilty about letting their own family take care of the child? Shouldn’t those who let other people do the job feel guiltier?” By “other people”, he meant babysitters, live-in nannies, or caregivers at daycare centers. Here both Sun Yu and Feng Jun defined “family” as their big extended family where it was quite natural for family members like the grandparents to care for the young children. Other fathers tended to emphasize their children’s well-being as the most important thing to consider in case of family arrangement. Li Dong said he never cared about what other people might think of him as a parent:

Call me a selfish or irresponsible father. I don’t care. The most important thing to me at this moment is that my child is being well cared for in China. I don’t have to show to other people how responsible or how devoted a father I am, or how much I love my child, because I believe parenting is not a show. As long as I have done nothing to be ashamed of, I should have nothing to worry about.

Li Dong held the belief that children at his daughter’s age needed a great deal of attention from their adult caregivers and that as long as she was receiving what she needed, it did not matter whether the caregivers were her parents or her grandparents. He also said if the parents were not able to attend to their children’s needs, then they were not doing their children any favor by keeping them in the U.S.

## Time for Family Reunion

Despite the different reasons behind transnational family arrangement among the Chinese immigrant parents I interviewed for this study, when it came to timing for family reunion, all parents surprisingly agreed that ideally their children should be brought back to the U.S no later than three years of age. According to the parents I interviewed, this was so critical that even if by that time the problems that had originally prompted the transnational family arrangement were not yet resolved, they still insisted that their children be brought back to the U.S and that the family be reunited. There are two major reasons why this age issue is considered so important. First, transnational parents believed that they would have problems re-bonding with their children if they were brought back to them too late. In other words, if their children became so attached to the grandparents, then it would be very hard for the parents to “reclaim” their parenthood. Some parents reported that they read this in parenting books where it said that three years of age was a landmark and before that it was generally very easy for them to adapt to abrupt life changes. After they reached three years of age, however, it would be a little harder for them to make adjustment. Other parents did not report doing any research on the best timing for family reunion. They said it was all from their personal experiences since they themselves did not remember what happened to them before three years of age but memory seemed to start sometime after that age. Another reason why family reunion had to take place before the child reaches three is that although parents hoped that their American-born children would inherit some Chinese heritage and be immersed to some degree in the Chinese culture, they believed that they should be American-educated, which would allow them to be better integrated in the U.S than the parent generation. For

this reason, transnational parents wanted to bring their children back to the U.S early enough for them to learn the English language so that when they started elementary school their English would be good enough.

Among the twenty-eight families interviewed, eleven families had brought their children back to the U.S at the time of the interview. All but two families had their children back before age three. For these two families, one had the child return to the U.S when he was aged three years and four months old; the other returned at about three years and 7 months. These two families reported that the delay was caused by the fact that the grandparents did not obtain their visitor visas in time (due to visa refusals, etc.) and at the same time the parents were not able to travel back to China to bring the child back themselves. Usually it was the grandparents caring for the child who brought the child back to the U.S. In only two cases it was the mother of the child who flew to China to bring the child back. After a period of adjustment in the U.S, the child would usually start to go to a daycare center or attend preschool. As discussed in the previous chapter, sending a child to a daycare center was not considered by transnational parents as an effective childcare arrangement. However, these parents also believed that it was the case only when the child was at a very young age when he or she needed a great deal of attention and intensive care from adult caregivers. In this sense, daycare centers never met their expectation. But after the child reached a certain age, usually after he/she turned three years old, sending the child to a daycare center oftentimes became an appealing arrangement, as the child needed to not only learn the English language but to also socialize with other children of the same age.

None of the eleven families reported having any problems bonding with their children after a long time of separation. Instead, some parents said that their children benefited a great deal from the few years they lived in China with the grandparents. For one thing, their children had a very close relationship with the grandparents, which was what these parents had wanted to see, especially for those parents who had hoped that their children could somewhat help them compensate the grandparents for leaving them far behind. Another benefit, according to these parents, was that after living in China for a few years their children were more likely to think that they were Chinese (though they held American passports and were considered American citizens) and therefore were more willing to learn and speak Chinese. To many Chinese immigrant parents this was very important, as they did not want their children to forsake their Chinese heritage and become fully Americanized.

None of the transnational parents I interviewed, whether they had brought their children back to the U.S or not, said that they ever regretted their transnational parenting arrangement. When asked whether they would choose transnational family arrangement if they had to choose all over again, all families indicated that they would do the same if situations that had prompted their decision on transnational parenting still remained the same. However, these parents (fathers and mothers alike) were very cautious in giving advice and suggestions to those parents who came to seek their opinions on whether they should also adopt the transnational family arrangement. They believed that every family had its unique situation and every child was different, so what had worked for them might not also work for other families. As Yu Min, the mother who was offered suggestions

that she should send her daughter to the grandparents' home when she was still expecting, pointed out during the interview:

Although at that time people around me automatically offered me suggestions on what I should do with my new-born baby, I wouldn't do the same to other parents. When they came to me to ask for my advice, I usually told them what happened to me and what my situation was like at that time. Then I would tell them that they had to make their own decision. I wouldn't make any suggestions as to whether they should or should not let their children live with the grandparents for a few years. This is not a normal way of parenting after all, but something that we had to do when we were overwhelmed with life in the U.S. For this reason I shouldn't advocate it.

Like Yu Min, many Chinese transnational parents regarded transnational parenting as a family survival strategy adopted by immigrant families to offset the difficulties and hardships that came along with immigration. And it was a family strategy that happened to have good outcomes. These parents believed that transnational parenting was not what parenting was supposed to be, although at the same time they did not want to be labeled "bad parents" either.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter I discuss how Chinese immigrant parents managed to parent in the transnational context. Specifically I address issues such as how parents adjusted themselves to the separation from their children, how they reconstructed parenthood after the separation, and how the meanings of motherhood had changed as a result of the transnational family arrangement. Toward the end of this chapter, I also discuss the timing of family reunion and transnational parents' general view of their transnational parenting experience.

Gender differences existed in Chinese immigrant parents' transnational parenting experiences. Since parenting mandates held mothers and fathers responsible for different parenting tasks, i.e., mothers as caregivers and fathers as providers, the transnational family arrangement was more likely to provoke intense feelings of guilt and pain among mothers. Mothers were also found to be more likely than fathers to rationalize their decision on transnational parenting, and their efforts to rationalize were seen in their tendency to incorporate work into the definition of good mothering and consider their career progress during their children's absence as a means to make up for their inefficient caregiver role. Fathers' definition of good fathering, however, remained relatively stable despite the transnational family arrangements.

The gendered experiences with transnational parenting imply that Chinese transnational mothers and fathers tended to identify with different sets of mothering and fathering mandates which served as standards against which they, consciously or unconsciously, evaluated their own parenting behaviors. However, given the hardship and challenges that accompany their life in a foreign land, immigrant parents may be more susceptible to violating these parenting norms or more likely to be stuck in a situation where they find themselves sometimes forced to "ignore" these parenting expectations in order to become better parents. This may sound a little hard to understand at first, but it seems to be what a Chinese transnational mother meant when she post "I love you, so I choose to not be with you" in a Chinese online forum. Given different cultural expectations about mothers' and fathers' parenting roles, international migration and the subsequent transnational family arrangements have caused divergent effects on mothers and fathers: it intensified mothers' inner struggles with themselves on

what constitutes a good mother and where work stands in their definition of good mothering. The definition was found to be fluid, as work could either mean something contradicting the notion of good mothering before transnational family arrangements or an indispensable element of it when they had to parent from a long distance. However, the fact that transnational fathers seldom found it necessary to redefine good fathering as a result of their transnational family arrangements is simply an indication that for these Chinese immigrant fathers a good father does not really go far beyond a good provider or breadwinner.

The findings on transnational mothers' tendency to redefine good mothering to justify their unconventional mothering arrangements corroborate previous studies on Latino transnational families (Dreby 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). These not only demonstrate that the mothering mandates are widely shared among mothers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, but also indicate that the impact of transnational family arrangements is gendered and not equally felt by transnational mothers and fathers.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **CONCLUSION**

In my dissertation I examine the impact that international migration has on immigrant parents and their family arrangements. At the beginning of this dissertation I raised a series of questions that I hoped to answer through my study of professional Chinese immigrants residing in Nashville, Tennessee. I wanted to investigate the phenomenon of transnational parenting among Chinese immigrant families in the U.S and find out why many professional Chinese immigrants chose to send their young children to live with the grandparents in China while they remained in the U.S, how the decision on transnational parenting was made, how parents interpreted their experiences with transnational family arrangements and whether there were any gender differences in the way they looked at their unconventional parenting practice. Three empirical chapters are devoted to the discussion of these major research questions.

In this final chapter, I first provide an overview of major findings presented in previous chapters of this dissertation, which is to be followed by a discussion of the theoretical contributions and policy implications of my work on Chinese transnational families. Toward the end of this chapter I propose a brief research agenda to expand my current research.

#### Summary of Major Findings

Major findings of my research are summarized as follows:

First, transnational parenting arrangement is a family strategy adopted by professional Chinese immigrants to manage difficulties that they encounter as first-generation immigrants in the United States. It is first and foremost a response to structural constraints that limit these professional Chinese immigrants' opportunities in the host country. These constraints include such issues as barriers to permanent residency and decent employment, lack of recognition of professional immigrants' foreign-earned qualifications, and Nashville offering a less favorable context of reception due to its status as one of the new immigrant gateway cities, etc. Parenting in the context of immigrant adaptation and settlement poses extra challenges to immigrant parents who are already struggling with their social isolation, lack of support networks and more often than not, their limited English language skills. For these reasons, transnational parenting is in and of itself an immigrant family strategy to relieve the pressure associated with immigrant adaptation and settlement -- the structure of family is made flexible in order for Chinese immigrant families to resolve or better handle the above issues.

Second, the practice of transnational parenting adopted by professional Chinese immigrants also comprises some cultural elements. In Chinese culture, the grandparents' involvement in caring for the grandchildren is very common. However, international migration oftentimes limits or even completely forbids the grandparents' involvement in the lives of the younger generation and thus makes it difficult for Chinese immigrants to maintain some kind of cultural continuity or ties. Therefore, in addition to being a family strategy to handle adverse situations in the United States, transnational parenting is also an effective way to re-involve and re-connect with the grandparents still in China.

Third, family decision making in the context of immigration is a difficult and complicated process. For Chinese professional immigrants interviewed for this study, they not only had to consider the same types of work and family issues that any family is likely to encounter (e.g., child rearing, domestic work, marital relationship, etc.) but also had to face the fact that family situation was oftentimes exacerbated in the process of immigration and therefore became tricky to handle. For example, marital tensions as a result of immigration added to the pain of parents involved (especially mothers) and the complexity of the decision making process when they had to make decisions on who to take care of their children and whether or not to work outside the home. Also, seeking employment outside the home or preparing for future employment outside the home (e.g., obtaining a degree or necessary trainings) were considered by many professional Chinese immigrants to be a means to better and effectively fight the downward mobility that many professional immigrants experienced after immigration. Therefore, issues such as whether or not to work outside the home or to obtain an academic degree, when this had to be done and even when to become parents had become so important -- they could largely determine how soon these immigrant families could settle and integrate into the host society or, for many professional immigrants, to achieve the kind of socioeconomic status that at least matches their pre-immigration status. So in the context of immigration, family prioritization and negotiations were of special significance to immigrant families.

Fourth, the experience of transnational parenting was gendered. Given different cultural expectations about mothers' and fathers' parenting roles, Chinese transnational mothers and fathers tended to interpret their unconventional parenting practice in a different way, and notions of parenthood also went through redefinition and

reconstruction during this process. While work was always an element in the definition of good fathering by transnational fathers, it could assume different roles in what it took to make a good mother: it generally contradicted the notion of good mothering; however, when transnational mothering had to be adopted it helped to re-establish transnational mothers' identity as good mothers.

### Sociological Contributions of This Study

By investigating the phenomenon of transnational parenting among professional Chinese immigrants in Nashville, Tennessee, my work contributes to the literature of transnationalism and immigrant adaptation in the following ways:

First of all, by focusing on transnational families this current study bridges two important literatures, transnationalism and family, which do not come together as often as they should. Transnationalism has been mostly studied in the public sphere. In contrast, the type of transnationalism that is going on in the private sphere, for instance, in a family, has not been well studied. The family has been identified as one of the most important focal points for immigrant adaptation research. As noted by Rumbaut (1997), "the family is perhaps *the* strategic research site... for understanding the dynamics of immigration flows (legal and illegal) and of immigrant adaptation processes" (p. 4; emphasis in original). Foner (2005) also indicates that "we are only just beginning to understand the complex ways that the new arrivals construct--and reconstruct--their family lives here" and "a lot more work needs to be done in this field. We need additional, careful cultural--as well as structural--analyses of immigrants' family lives to appreciate the new forms and patterns that develop among them here" (p. 164). Split households as a result of

international migration are not a new phenomenon. Over a century ago split families were usually formed when men migrated first to another country. Then after they settled in the host country, which could take many years, they brought over the rest of their family and ended the separation. Nowadays with massive increase in international migration, transnational families are becoming more common, and this calls for more research on immigrant families from a transnational perspective. In my dissertation research, I attempt to fill the gap in the existing research literature on immigration and immigrant adaptation and also to direct some more scholarly attention to the study of transnational families.

By focusing on Chinese transnational families I also contribute to the limited research on transnational families that has heavily concentrated on immigrant groups of Latin American background. One reason for this situation is probably due to the geographic locations of Latin American countries which made it easier for people in these countries to migrate to the U.S. The large number of immigrants from these countries also makes them subjects of scholarly attention. Despite ethnic and socio-demographic differences among Latino immigrants, the striking similarities, such as language and many cultural and family values and configurations, facilitate the study of Latinos as a whole group (Cabrera and Coll 2004). Another reason is that the increasing demand for domestic workers in the U.S. has led many Latin American women to migrate to the U.S. and leave behind their children and also sometimes their husbands (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). As a result, transnational families are very common among these Latin American immigrant groups and a great deal of scholarly attention is also directed toward them. In contrast, Chinese transnational

families are largely ignored though they are also very common. Unlike Latin American immigrant mothers who left their children behind them *when* they migrated, these Chinese transnational families sent their children back to China *after* they migrated. There are reasons why Latin American immigrant mothers have to leave their children behind: first, the types of work they do, which is primarily in female-dominated parts of the economy such as paid domestic work, do not allow them to take care of their own children at the same time; second, the lack of legal documents is what has prevented many immigrant mothers from bringing their children along (Thorne, Orellana, Lam and Chee 2003). However, the Chinese immigrant families that I have studied are quite different in terms of their economic well-being and their legal status. As discussed in Chapter II, the majority of Latino immigrants entered the United States as labor immigrants while the majority of Chinese immigrants came as professional immigrants. The socioeconomic standings of these two immigrant groups are very different, with the former on the lower end and the latter on the higher end. The above differences in legal status and socioeconomic standing have led to different immigration experiences in terms of the “context of reception” and labor market incorporation. For all these differences discussed above, the transnational family experiences of Chinese immigrant families may not be understood by simply looking at the experiences of Latino immigrants. In this dissertation I examine factors that lead Chinese immigrant families to adopt the same family strategy, i.e., transnational parenting, as their Latino counterparts despite the differences in their context of reception and labor market incorporation. The struggles of Chinese professional immigrants in the process of integration are uncovered.

Third, in this study of Chinese immigrant families I also bring immigrant fathers into the picture. Gender shift in the demand for immigrant labor has led many Latin American mothers to leave their children behind to seek employment outside their own country. One of the effects that this feminization of migration has had on immigrant family studies is that scholarly attention tends to concentrate on immigrant mothers. Fathers, on the other hand, are generally left out. Also, there is very little research that compares parents' roles in transnational families (Dreby 2006). And in a few cases where transnational fatherhood is studied, there is no corresponding transnational motherhood to compare it with, as in these cases when it is the father who left the rest of his family (wife and children) behind (Pribilsky 2004). In this study, I bring mothers and fathers together in order to find out how parents reached the decision to send their children to China to live with their grandparents, how they understand their roles as parents, how they reconstruct motherhood and fatherhood and redefine their roles after they are separated from their child(ren), and whether there is any gender difference in the practice and understanding of transnational parenting. In doing so, I bring gender into the study of transnational practice, which is often neglected in the existing research literature on transnationalism (Alicea 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997), and therefore manage to "factor in gender differences in the understanding of transnationalism" (Rio 1992: 228).

Last but not the least, this current study also contributes to the ongoing study of immigrant communities in newly emerging gateway cities. Historically immigrants tend to accumulate in big coastal cities in the U.S. such as Los Angeles, New York. As a result, immigrant studies overwhelmingly concentrate on immigrant communities in these

big cities (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000; Foner 1998; Lee and Karageogis 1997; Light and Bonacich 1988; Min 1998; Sanders and Nee 1996; Zhou and Logan 1989; Zhou and Logan 1991). However, starting in the 1990s new patterns of immigrant settlement have emerged: although large numbers of immigrants continue to settle in traditional gateway cities, states in the U.S interior have witnessed extraordinary increases in their immigrant population (Cornfield 2004; Cornfield and Arzubiaga 2004). However, there has not been so much scholarly attention devoted to these new and fast-growing immigrant communities in the U.S. interiors as the rapid rise of immigration to these areas warrants. Compared with traditional gateway cities where there are highly developed ethnic enclaves and socially-supportive immigrant communities, cities in the U.S interior may not have as much to offer to their new immigrant population. In addition, the context of reception in these interior cities might be quite different as well. As a result, immigrant settlement and integration, which never comes easy for any immigrant group, may be even more difficult than in those traditional gateway cities. In the case of the Chinese immigrants interviewed for this study, despite their high socioeconomic status and legal immigration status in the U.S, they seem to be a relatively isolated group. Their social isolation may be attributed to two major factors: one is their first-generation immigrant status. As these first-generation immigrants leave behind the culture that they are so familiar with and the support networks that they are so used to resorting to when they were in need of help, the unfamiliar social and cultural environment together with their lack of social capital in the host society can very easily overwhelm them and catch them unprepared. This may be the situation for not only those Chinese immigrants interviewed for this study, but also for immigrants elsewhere and from countries other than China.

The other important factor that contributes to the social isolation of these Chinese immigrants may have a great deal to do with Nashville the new immigrant receiving city. Although in recent years Nashville has witnessed a significant increase in its immigrant population (Cornfield 2004), there still lack highly developed ethnic enclave and socially-supportive immigrant communities which may facilitate new immigrants' settlement. By examining the effects that immigration has on Chinese immigrant families residing in Nashville, my dissertation research contributes to the understanding of challenges that immigrant families are constantly faced with in the process of settlement and integration in new destination cities. My work, therefore, also carries some policy implications, which are to be discussed in the following section.

### Policy Implications

Although it might not be feasible to prevent transnational family arrangement from emerging at all, as it is a significant family strategy adopted by immigrant families to ensure their economic survival or maximize social mobility, there are certain things that the immigrant communities as well as mainstream society could do to help families going through transnational parenting to deal with family separation and the pain that it incurs. In the case of Chinese immigrant families interviewed for this study, although a few transnational families mentioned that they sought help with their family situations from the Chinese community by attending local Chinese churches, most of these families never went to church or sought help from alternative sources. Instead, they tended to keep their family issues to themselves. Although many families believed that transnational parenting was a private issue, the fact that they did not seek help with their family

situation (marital problems, pain of separation, feelings of guilt, etc.) could also imply that there is not much help available either in the Chinese community or in the much larger Nashville community. So it is very important that some services, such as family counseling, be offered to the immigrant communities in Nashville. And if this is to be done, service delivery will need to be very sensitive to cultural issues in order for it to be effective. For example, among the very few Chinese immigrant parents who sought outside help to deal with separation from their young children, one mother went to talk with a white counselor with the hope that the counseling she received would be of some help, only to find that the advice and suggestions offered to her would never work because the counselor herself was white and could not understand the situation that a first-generation immigrant is faced with. Therefore, it is very important that there are services available that are tailored to the needs of new immigrants from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. In addition, these counseling services offered should also consider gender differences, given the gendered experiences with migration and the transnational family arrangements as a result of gender role ideologies and different mothering and fathering mandates.

#### Future Research

Given the relatively small sample size used in this study and the limited generalizability as a result of it, future research on the practice of transnational parenting among Chinese immigrants in the U.S will aim at increasing the sample size and expanding the study to include grandparents involved in the transnational family arrangements, other Chinese immigrant parents in Nashville who never had the

experience of transnational parenting, and transnational parents from other cities in the U.S, especially those residing in major receiving cities where there exist highly developed ethnic enclaves and socially-supportive immigrant communities. Studying families who never had the experience of transnational parenting will allow me to examine the practice from a different perspective and have a better understanding of splitting the family as an acceptable (or unacceptable) strategy to deal with difficulties that immigrant families are confronted with in the process of settlement and integration. Expanding my sample to include transnational parents in other cities, especially those in traditional gateway cities such as New York and Los Angeles, however, will make it possible for me to study whether my findings based on my Nashville sample can generalize to Chinese immigrant communities in these other cities and in the case of immigrant families residing in major receiving cities, how highly-developed ethnic enclaves and socially-supportive immigrant communities can facilitate immigrant family adaptation and therefore may reduce the likelihood of immigrant families relying on their kinship network back in their home country for caring for the young children.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Background Information

1. When did you come to the United States?
2. Did your spouse come with you? If not, then when did he/she come?
3. How many children do you have?
4. Did you have any children before you migrated to the U.S?
5. Why did you decide to migrate to the U.S?
6. Did you migrate to the U.S directly from China or from somewhere else?
7. What is your educational background?
8. What kind of job did you have before you migrated? If you don't mind, may I ask how much you earned annually before you migrated?
9. Where do you work now? And what kind of job do you do? How long have you had this job?
10. When you were a child, did you experience any separation from your parents? If so, what was the situation like? How old were you? If you have siblings, were they also separated from your parents? Do you still recall what your feelings were like at that time?

[General questions about parenthood]

11. Did you always want to be a parent? When/How did you decide to have children?
12. What do you think are the most important qualities of a mom? A dad? How do you define good mothering/fathering?
13. What do you think is your most important role? Being a mother/father or something else?
14. Do you regard yourself as a career-oriented or a family-oriented person?

#### Making the Decision

1. When was your child sent back to China?
2. What was the gender of the child sent back?
3. How old was the child when he/she was sent back?
4. When did you start discussing sending your child back?
5. Who first suggested the idea of sending your child back? You the parents or someone else?
6. How long had you been in this country at that time?

7. What was your situation like at that time? Such as your job/financial situation? Your immigration status (permanent residency application pending/permanent resident /U.S citizen/other)?
8. Did anything significant happen at this time that prompted you to consider sending your child back?
9. Were you employed at that time? Was being a stay-at-home mom possible at that time? Did you ever consider being one? How about stay-at-home dad? If it were an option, would you have wanted to?
10. Was sending your child to daycare an option at that time?
11. Were the child's grandparents or other family members/relatives here to help with child care at that time? If not, did you have any help with childcare from people such as a babysitter?
12. [If multiple children]: How did you decide which child to send back?
13. Were your child's grandparents/relatives involved in the decision making?
14. Was there anybody else involved in the decision making?
15. Was there anybody among your friends or people you knew who already sent their children back?
16. Did you seek advice from other people when you were making the decision? If so, from whom did you seek advice?
17. Which side of the grandparents/relatives is the child currently living with? (Or, for those parents who already have their children back in the U.S: Which side of the grandparents/relatives did your child live with when he/she was in China?)
18. How did you decide which grandparents/relatives your child should live with?
19. When did you finally decide that you would have to send the kid back?
20. Did you at first decide not to send back but later changed your mind? What prompted this decision change?
21. How long was it between the time someone first suggested the idea of sending back and the time when you finally made the decision?
22. Now think of the whole decision making process, would you say it was an easy decision or a hard one? Did you eventually reach a consensus? If so, how did you reach a consensus among parties involved in the decision making? Was there a great deal of negotiation?

### **Making the Transition**

1. How did you feel after you made your decision? Sad? Relaxed? Other feelings?
2. How long after you made the decision was your child sent back?
3. Was there a time when you wanted to change your decision? Were there any changes in your decision before your child was eventually sent back? If so, what was the situation like? What made you eventually keep your original plan?
4. How much were you involved in child care before you decided to send your child back? What did you usually do? Did you ever have any problem negotiating the amount of caretaking you and your spouse should do?
5. Was there any change in your involvement after the decision was made?
6. Did you start to spend more time with your child?

7. Was there anything you did to prepare yourself emotionally for the impending separation?
8. Did you talk with other people about the decision you made?
9. Who prepared the child's documents for travel back to China?
10. Who traveled back to China with your child? If it was you, how long did you stay in China with your child? If it were not you, why did you choose not to travel back to China with your child?

### **Motherhood and Fatherhood Reconstructed**

15. How did you feel immediately after the child was sent back? Sad? Relaxed? Or other feelings?
16. By the time of the interview, how long has your child been in China?
17. As there was not as much caretaking work involved after your child was sent back, how did that affect your study or work?
18. Do you think your relationship is in any way affected by the absence of your child?
19. Have you ever visited your child in China? If so, how often? Did mother and father travel together to visit the child?
20. How often do you talk to your child? Do mother and father spend the same amount of time talking with the child?
21. What other means of communication do you use?
22. Do you visit such popular online forums as mitbbs.com or wenxuecity.com where there are often discussions about sending kids back?
23. Are you ever involved in online discussions like that?
24. What do you think the benefits, if any, of having your child living with their grandparents/relatives in China?
25. How about the negative effects (if any) on you and your child? Are there any?
26. Have you ever received any criticisms for sending your child back? What do you say to people who criticize your choice?
27. [Read some other criticisms collected from the BBS and ask what they think of these accusations].
28. When do you plan to bring your child back? [When do you think is the best time for the family to get reunited?]
29. Have you ever felt regret for sending your child back?
30. When you feel bad about sending your child back, what do you usually do?
31. Are there support groups or something like that where you can go seek understanding or help from people like you?
32. Did you ever give advice to other people who were also considering sending their children back? What was your advice?
33. What do you want to say to those parents who are right now considering sending their kids back?
34. If you had to make a decision all over again, would you still choose to send your child back?

## **The Return of the Child(ren) and Reunion of the Family**

1. When did your child return to the U.S?
2. How old was he/she when she came back?
3. Did you know when you were going to bring your child back before he/she was even sent back?
4. How did you decide when it was time to bring your child back? Was it an easy decision? Was there any negotiation among the parties involved (child's parents, child's caretaker in China)?
5. Who brought the child back to the U.S?
6. Did you see any change in your involvement in child care after your child came back to the U.S as compared to before he/she was sent back to China?
7. Did you ever try to make up for the time you and your child were not together? If so, what did you do?
8. If you were to have another child in the near future, would you send him/her back too?
9. Now what do you think of sending your child back to China? Do you now think differently than before?
10. What do you think of sending kids back to China in general? Has there been any change in how you think of this?

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FOR RESEARCH STUDY

**Principal Investigator:** Haihong Wang  
**Title of Study:** “I Love You, so I Choose to Not be with You”:  
The Practice of Transnational Parenting among  
Chinese Immigrants  
**Institution:** Department of Sociology  
Vanderbilt University

Name of Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

*The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read the form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about the study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. A copy of this consent form will be made available to you upon request.*

#### Purpose of This Study

In this study I hope to find out why many Chinese immigrant parents chose to send their children back to China to be taken care of by the grandparents, how they feel about being an immigrant parent and a transnational parent in particular, and whether or not there is any gender difference in the practice and understanding of transnational parenting.

#### Description of Interview Process/Expected Risks and Benefits

During this interview, I will ask you a series of questions about how the decision of sending your child back was made, how you made the transition from being a parent to being a transnational parent, and how you practiced and understood transnational parenting after your child was sent back. You will also be asked about your values, expectations, role definitions, and beliefs related to being a father/mother.

With your permission, I will tape our interview. I will also transcribe this interview myself so that I can use your own wording, and not risk misrepresenting you by attempting to summarize or paraphrase you. Your identity will also not be revealed in any articles, reports or books that will be published based on this data. Instead, I will assign you pseudonym and if need be, I will further disguise unique details about you and your family so that you will remain completely anonymous. Any transcripts or excerpts from

interviews cited in articles and reports will not have your real name attached to it. The data I collect from these interviews will be used solely for research purposes.

I anticipate that you will not be made uncomfortable or put at risk during this interview. If you are uncomfortable about answering a specific question, you have the right to skip that question and move on to the next question. At any point the interview, you also have the right to withdraw from the study.

Based on the data that you and other respondents provide in these interviews, I hope to achieve a better understanding of the practice of transnational parenthood. I believe that not only will this data fill a gap in the current literature, but that it will also help develop sociologists' theoretical understandings of transnational families. You will receive a small compensation for your time and participation in my study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at any time. I can be reached via email at [haihong.wang@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:haihong.wang@vanderbilt.edu) and by telephone at (615) 322-7626 (Department of Sociology, Vanderbilt University). My mailing address is as follows:

Department of Sociology  
Vanderbilt University  
BOX 1811 Station B  
Nashville, TN 37235

You may also contact the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at Vanderbilt University at (615) 322-2918.

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I have read this consent form and understand the procedures to be used in this study. I also understand the possible risks, inconveniences, and/or discomforts that may be involved. I understand that I may ask questions at any time and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer specific questions, as well as the right to withdraw from this study at any time. In addition, I also give permission for this interview to be taped.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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