

“I LOVE YOU, SO I CHOOSE TO NOT BE WITH YOU”:
THE PRACTICE OF TRANSNATIONAL PARENTING AMONG
CHINESE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

By

Haihong Wang

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Sociology

August, 2009

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Professor Dan B. Cornfield

Professor Laura M. Carpenter

Professor Katharine M. Donato

Professor Holly J. McCammon

Professor Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey

To my beloved parents
and
To my three lovely daughters

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever indebted to the twenty-eight Chinese immigrant families who agreed to talk with me and share their stories of transnational family arrangements. Without the trust they placed in me, I would not have been able to obtain the rich data needed to write this dissertation. I am also grateful to the two research grants received from the Sociology Department and to the Dissertation Writer's Group Fellowship provided by the Center for Ethics.

My dissertation committee has encouraged and challenged me throughout this project. I am indebted to my dissertation chair, Dr. Dan Cornfield, who provided me with encouragement, insight, and professional advice. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to him for his patience and for always being there for me. Also I would like to extend my appreciation to the other members of my dissertation committee, Drs. Laura Carpenter, Katharine Donato, Holly McCammon, and Kathy Hoover-Dempsey, whose suggestions have greatly improved this dissertation.

Special thanks should go to Dr. Karen Campbell, who was the DGS for the most part of my graduate studies, and to Dr. Holly McCammon again, who was the DGS during my most difficult times at Vanderbilt. Thank you so much for your encouraging words and helping hands. You hold a very special place in my heart. The office administrators in the Sociology Department—Linda Willingham, Deanne Cassanova, and Pam Tichenor—helped me with numerous tasks. And their smiling faces always brighten my day. I owe them all a big thank you.

I am also indebted to my friends in Nashville who helped me survive various hardships: my great neighbors in Bellevue—Sharon Conley, Rolland Forand, Jennifer, Kathy, Tony, and friends at Bellevue Church of Christ—Bill Fisher, Steve Blackman, Audrey Williams, my friends in the Chinese community—John Wang, Wu Yonghong, Zhang Ying, Mo Li, Hong Don, Wang Ying, Li Yinmei, Feng Jinchun, Liu Qinfeng, Edward Ho, and the list goes on.

Finally, I could not have completed this dissertation without the love and encouragement of my family. I owe tremendously to my parents for their unconditional support in all of my pursuits. Like all other Chinese parents, they are hardworking and willing to make any sacrifices for their children. My three girls, one of whom was born right before I started my PhD program and two during my fourth year in the program, inspired me and gave me strength to complete my work. Thank you for your patience. I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long, but I finally made it!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	11
Transnationalism and the Transnational Perspective.....	11
Immigration and Family.....	21
Chinese Families.....	31
Current Research and Relevant Suppositions.....	36
III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	39
Qualitative Interviewing.....	39
Sampling Strategy.....	41
Study Sample.....	43
Data Collection Procedures.....	45
Interview Questionnaire.....	48
Data Analysis.....	50
IV. TRANSITION INTO PARENTHOOD.....	52
Introduction.....	52
Immigration and Becoming a parent.....	54
Parenthood as Response to the Age Pressure.....	60
Parenthood as Means of Self Recognition and Measure of Achievement.....	63
Parenthood as Means to Improve Marital Relationship.....	65
Discussion and Conclusion.....	68
V. TRANSNATIONAL PARENTHOOD: MAKING THE DECISION.....	71
Introduction.....	71
Outsourcing Caregiving and the Intensive Mothering Ideal.....	73
Childcare Arrangement—Sending Own Children Away.....	101
The Final Decision.....	116
Discussion and Conclusion.....	123

VI. PARENTING FROM A DISTANCE.....	129
Introduction.....	129
Making the Transition.....	130
Parenthood Reconstructed.....	135
Experiencing Transnational Parenthood.....	145
Time for Family Reunion.....	152
Discussion and Conclusion.....	155
VII. CONCLUSION.....	158
Summary of Major Findings.....	158
Sociological Contributions of This Study.....	161
Policy Implications.....	166
Future Research.....	167
Appendix	
A. Interview Guide.....	169
B. Consent for Research Study.....	173
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	175