Flexible Families?
The experiences of Astronaut and Satellite households among recent Chinese immigrants to Vancouver, British Columbia

Johanna L. Waters
BA (Hons.), University of Oxford, 1998

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
In
The Faculty of Graduate Studies,
Department of Geography

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

JULY 2000

©Johanna L. Waters, 2000
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Geography

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 27/07/00
ABSTRACT
This thesis examines the recent emergence of Astronaut and Satellite family forms in Vancouver, British Columbia. Evident in several cities around the Pacific Rim, these transnational arrangements, among economic-class immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan, involve one or both adult members of the nuclear family returning to the country of origin to pursue a professional career or business. In the Astronaut arrangement, it is usual for the woman to remain in Vancouver – taking charge of all domestic and childcare tasks. In the Satellite situation, children are left without parental guidance for most of the year. Dominant media and academic representations point to two contrasting interpretations of these phenomena. Recently, academics have emphasised the financial vulnerability of these assumed ‘wealthy’ immigrants. Migrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan are understood to be “reluctant exiles,” and the Astronaut situation reflects a failure to find work in the new country. A second, more common portrayal conceives of these migrants as part of a larger, “hypermobile” cosmopolitan elite, who utilise migration as a strategy of economic and cultural accumulation. Particular forms of capital are achievable at particular global sites; the Astronaut and Satellite arrangements epitomise the placement of different family members in different locations to this end.

Through in-depth interviews with members of 42 such fragmented families residing in Vancouver, I established the generally strategic nature of these circumstances. Overwhelmingly, migration had been sought primarily for the education of the children, and the transnational arrangement was planned before migration. I was interested also in how the lone spouse and the Satellite children experienced their situation. A different body of academic literature has emphasised the way in which migration negatively impacts the female of the family, and also how the Chinese family remains significantly patriarchal after migration. For the female participants, practical and emotional difficulties were encountered during the first year of settlement - exacerbated by the loss of both the spouse and old support networks in the new setting of Vancouver. Women undertook all domestic tasks and commonly experienced feelings of boredom, loneliness and fear. After a year, however, many women reported a sense of freedom, clearly linked to the absence of the husband and their own agency in the creation of new support
networks and stable surroundings. The Satellite children presented an ambivalent picture of freedom and aloneness. In the command of their daily lives and in the subversion of parental control and expectations (for example, regarding their strategic acquisition of 'cultural capital') they demonstrated significant independence. Yet they had little control over their placement in Vancouver. The negative implications of this family arrangement for the emotional well-being of the children were clearly apparent, and school staff in particular stressed the need to regard Satellite status as a social problem. The empirical data challenge many assumptions concerning the flexible Chinese family in the contemporary era of transnationalism and globalisation.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS iv

LIST OF FIGURES viii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS x

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction: Astronaut Families and Satellite Children 1
The wider theoretical debates 6

CHAPTER TWO
Globalisation, Chinese Migration and the ‘Flexible Family’ 10
Contemporary international migration 10
Chinese migration and the new rich in east Asia 12
Cultural practices and economic success 14
The Chinese family, guanxi, and the diaspora 16
Theoretical approaches to migration: transnationalism and cosmopolitan cultures 20
The cosmopolitan: culture and migration as strategies of accumulation 25
Aihwa Ong’s Flexible Citizenship 27
The Astronaut and Satellite phenomena: cultural capital, transnationalism and the flexible family 30
A different approach to transnational mobility: the limits to flexibility and the family 32
Perspectives on gender, migration and transnationalism 33
Modern societies and patriarchal structures 36
The social limits to the flexible family: migration, the localisation of women, and the Astronaut circumstance 40
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER THREE</th>
<th>Contemporary Chinese Migration and the Astronaut Phenomenon in Vancouver.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recent Chinese migration to Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available statistics on the Astronaut family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Astronaut Family: a ‘strategy’ or a ‘syndrome’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barriers to employment and success in Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Astronaut family as a migration strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for immigration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER FOUR</th>
<th>The Lone-woman’s Experience of Transnationalism: the Astronaut Family and Localisation in the Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘For the good of the family’: reasons for migration to Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women’s employment status and migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child care and domestic tasks: the loss of support networks through migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolation in the home: boredom, loneliness and fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication and the “language barrier”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transnational marital relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New regimes of sexual exploitation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rod: a child’s perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Claire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER FIVE</th>
<th>Gender and Migration: Independence, “Freedom,” and Patriarchal Relations in the Astronaut Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The critical year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paid employment and domestic work 112
The informality of family life 115
Leisure, lifestyle and self-development 118
Reduced purchasing power and lifestyle 125
Creating a stable lifeworld: friendship networks and ethnic community ties 128
Child care and the parent-child relationship 129
Reinstating patriarchy: the return of the husband 134
Divergent attitudes and the woman’s independence 142
Changing personal relationships 146

CHAPTER SIX
Transnational Family Strategies: Vancouver’s Satellite Children 150
Existing research on the Satellite children 152
Research sample and method 156
The circumstances of the Satellite child 157
Reasons for the phenomenon: ‘cultural capital’ and the transnational strategizing of the Chinese family 160
Limits to the theory of cultural capital: alternative conceptions of ‘education’ 165
The place of Vancouver and cultural acquisition 170
Personal freedom and the challenge to patriarchal control 173
The localisation and disciplining of family members: everyday lives and the negative implications of absent parents 174
Practical responsibilities and domestic life 180
Managing finances 181
A social problem? A school’s perspective on the Satellite children 184
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Immigration to Canada by source area at five-year intervals, 1961-1996
(Source: Ley, 1999).............................................................................................................44

Figure 2: Immigration to Vancouver by Source Area, 1986 – 1998..........................46

Figure 3: Immigration Proportions to Vancouver by Source Area, 1995..............47
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to David Ley for the supervision that he has given me over the past two years. I could not have wished for a more attentive, constructive guide. David has always been available for advice and commentary on my work at any time. His responses have always been extremely prompt and invaluable. In addition, I regard his hard work and scholarship as inspirational. Thank you to Dan Hiebert for reading and commenting on my thesis and also for providing speedy letters of reference when I have needed them. Warm thanks go to Priscilla Wei for the information she has given me, for the translation of newspaper articles, for her comments on my work and for her valued enthusiasm for my project. Thanks also to Elaine Cho for her extreme efficiency and helpfulness.

Thank you to all the participants in the interviews for this thesis, without whom, of course, I would know nothing. Thank you to my E.S.L. class at St Chad's church for showing me how hard new immigrants work at learning a language and how successful they can be. I am very grateful to Esme Lee – for talking to me about important issues relevant to my work, for translating for me during interviews, and for being a good friend. Thank you to May Hsu, Tina and Wayne, and to May's friend Amy (who also gave freely of her time to translate for me on several occasions). I want to express my gratitude to the staff at several schools who were generous with information, yet also showed significant sensitivity towards those children in their charge. Thank you to Lena Hsu, Liane Gebauer, Pauline Hedberg, Jane McFadyen, Lawrence Fast, and Diane (at the LEAD programme).

To my closest friends here, especially Graham, Simon (and Emma), Jamie, Kathrine and Amy. Good luck next year to you all. Lots and lots of love to Mammy, Daddy, Craig, Gavin, Grandpa Archie, Nana and Grandma. This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my wonderful Grandpa Ray, who I think about a lot. Finally, my love and thanks go to Richard. Thanks Rich for your unfailing support.
CHAPTER ONE

ASTRONAUT FAMILIES AND SATELLITE CHILDREN

There is...a curious new form of spatially extended family that is evolving which is a product of the Asian migration in the context of modern communications (Skeldon, 1995, p. 533).

At Douglas Park community centre on the west side of Vancouver, British Columbia, a group of women meet twice-weekly to discuss common problems faced by the newly immigrated family. Providing each other with both practical and emotional support, these women are themselves new immigrants, and are participating in what is known as the LEAD programme.1 This programme aims, among other things, to improve English speaking, to facilitate the making of friends, to boost self-confidence and to encourage involvement in the local community. Most of the women at this meeting came with their families from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and are classified as 'economic' immigrants under the terms of the Canadian immigration system. Their entry to Canada would have been dependent on their husbands' demonstration of sufficient financial capital and/or particular skills and qualifications. Most do not have paid jobs now they are in Vancouver, and instead they devote their time to learning English, while adjusting to the new environment and aiding their children in this adjustment. They face all the usual difficulties of immigrant settlement, and the demands of parenthood, but with an

1 The LEAD program is provided by the Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS) which is a community-based agency of and for women. It receives funding from federal, provincial and municipal levels of government, and from the United Way.
important additional challenge. They have to adjust, also, to the abrupt absence of their husband from their daily lives.

Substantial anecdotal evidence would suggest this picture to be repeated throughout Vancouver; at community centres and in church halls, women with absent husbands are drawn together by a similar migration experience. These women are part of the Astronaut family phenomenon - or “syndrome,” as Ronald Skeldon (1995) has suggestively called it - which has appeared in Vancouver, and certain other cities around the Pacific Rim, in recent years. In this situation, after the immigration of the family, the husband soon returns to Hong Kong or Taiwan where he will cultivate his business or continue with his professional career. He will then send money to support his family in their new country of residence, and usually visit them two or three times a year.

In the Canadian press, this phenomenon has been subject to sparse, although notably contradictory analysis. In October 1992 the Vancouver Sun printed a small piece on Astronaut families in Vancouver. This article suggested that most families in this situation are from Hong Kong, and migrate to Canada to obtain a “more secure future” in anticipation of the 1997 hand-over of Hong Kong to China:

But faced with an economic recession in their newly adopted countries, many former Hong Kong citizens cannot resist the lure of the Asian finance capital’s vibrant economy and low income-tax rate. So a family member – usually the father – returns, to earn as much money as possible before 1997.2

2 Dawn Hanna (1992): “‘Astronaut’ families facing stress of lengthy separations.”
The assumption was that, following 1997, the Hong Kong families would settle more or less permanently in Canada. The portrayal was sympathetic; members of the immigrant families were presented as the hapless victims of unforeseen financial (and political) circumstances, and thereby forced to adopt the Astronaut arrangement. The article also highlighted the social problems associated with lone parents attempting to cope in an unfamiliar environment. There was a call, for example, for more “social services geared to the particular problems of alienation.” The significance of Astronaut families from Taiwan was not recognised until later on in the 1990s (published academic studies of the Astronaut family to-date have generally focused only on Hong Kong immigrants), undoubtedly coinciding with the beginning of the sizeable increase of migration from Taiwan to Canada.\(^3\) In September 1994 the *Vancouver Sun* printed another two articles, but this time with a very different point to make: “Do the ‘astronaut’ families pay their fair share of taxes?” asked the first article, followed by the second, fourteen days later, which claimed in response that “Most ‘astronaut’ families cheat on their taxes....”\(^4\) Immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan, the author asserted, do not declare world-wide earnings to Revenue Canada, and are consequently paying less tax than is required of them. At the same time, they are benefiting from Canadian English language training, medical care, and public schooling for their children. The implication of these later reports is that the Astronaut family represents a calculated strategy, by which the migrant family is able to take advantage of the Canadian state. These contrasting representations of the Astronaut family – of victim on the one hand, and strategiser on the other – were

---

\(^3\) The number of Taiwanese immigrants to Canada rose from 7,694 in 1995 to 13,319 in 1997. In 1998 numbers of principal applicants from Taiwan fell again to 7,164.

\(^4\) Barbara Yaffe (1994): “Do the ‘astronaut’ families pay their fair share of taxes?” and “Most ‘astronaut’ families cheat on their taxes, accountant says.”
only implied in these reports. Yet they are, I suggest, indicative of important, wider theoretical debates.

It is not just immigrant wives who can find themselves alone. Mrs. Jones,⁵ the vice-principal of a high school in the city of Richmond (a Vancouver suburb) frequently has difficulty contacting the parents of some of the students at her school. She told me:

Sometimes, when we have a look at the student’s marks and see that they are doing poorly...we request a parent conference, and there is no parent...It has come to our attention that some parents are gone for the whole year. They are gone. In order for students to register at our school they need a parent physically present with them. But after the student is registered, sometimes the parents just disappear, and it’s really tough. I’ve had, in the last two years, two cases of fake parents, because I have been insistent upon making contact with a parent.

Mr. Peters, the Principal of a different Vancouver high school, has “very limited contact” with the parents of many of his students. In some cases, “virtually zero.” In several schools throughout the Vancouver region, teaching staff members have echoed the concerns of both Mr. Peters and Mrs. Jones. Immigrant children as young as thirteen, I have found, live alone, with siblings, or with relatives, whilst their parents spend the majority of their time taking care of business in Hong Kong or Taiwan. “We find that most of the students that are left without parents are left with quite extensive resources,” Mrs. Jones adds. “A bit of money, usually a nice car, cell phone, usually a nice house, so we are not worried about shelter or food.” The school staff members are very worried, however, about what they perceive to be the effects on the children of an absence of parental guidance: discipline problems, poor school attendance, loneliness, gang

⁵ Pseudonyms are used in this chapter.
membership and vulnerability to extortion. These children, of recent immigrant families with absent parents, are Vancouver’s so-called Satellite children.\textsuperscript{6}

These initial indications suggest these students to be a particularly vulnerable group of people, and media representations certainly support this perception. In the local Chinese-language media, coverage of the Satellite phenomenon has been more substantial. Several reports represent the concerns of school staff, regarding the diversion of limited resources to providing extra care for children whose parents work overseas. The notion that schools are in many cases playing a ‘baby-sitting’ role has been a recurrent theme (e.g. Yeung, 1997; Kwong, 1998). A second issue has dominated coverage, addressing the perceived vulnerability of lone-children vis-à-vis teenage gangs (Tsang, 1994, Tang, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c).\textsuperscript{7} As this recent article published in the \textit{Vancouver Sun} demonstrates, concerns over gang membership and practices of extortion are of current importance:

Ever since a huge influx of Chinese students immigrated to Richmond in the 1990s, and now make up at least 40 percent of the school’s student population, the “home alone” problem has been one recognized and criticized by police and school officials. As discovered in the Toi Ching and other investigations, a young student living alone is a prime target for criminals for either extortion or gang recruitment.\textsuperscript{8}

The article reports a special joint task force, which has been launched by Richmond school board and the R.C.M.P. against a particular gang (the “Toi Ching”) comprising

\textsuperscript{6} These are sometimes referred to as ‘parachute’ children in the existing academic literature.
\textsuperscript{7} Tang (1999a) reports the following: “It has come to the attention of the police that school violence has been increasingly frequent and the participants are from wealthy Chinese families preying on their fellow countryman....Chi-kwong Lung, youth counsellor from north Burnaby [Vancouver municipality], said young people join gangs because they are satellite kids or lonely kids of the astronaut families...they fall prey to the youth gangs and are afraid to report to the police in fear of repercussion.” (A1, \textit{translated from the Chinese by Priscilla Wei}).
\textsuperscript{8} Mike Howell (3\textsuperscript{rd} July, 2000) “Task force dents gang crime in schools.”
immigrant youth from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Significantly, specific links have been
drawn between gang recruitment and the Satellite phenomenon:

95 percent of these kids are just scared kids with nowhere else to turn. They don’t
really want to become criminals. What they want is their parents to get back over
here so they can have a normal life. (ibid.)

Astronaut Wives and Satellite Children:
The Wider Theoretical Debates

Chinese legal migrants...are a highly educated and dynamic group of people who are
laying demographic foundations which will play an important role in any new world
order in the twenty-first century (Skeldon, 1997; p. 232).

Setting these examples within a broader societal context, this thesis is primarily
concerned with the migration of middle-class skilled and/or relatively wealthy Chinese
families to Vancouver, British Columbia. This immigration flow is a notable feature of
recent migration trends, and is principally related to emigration from Hong Kong and
Taiwan. Within contemporary theoretical debates, common interpretations suggest that
the social unit of the Chinese family is particularly adept at responding strategically,
through migration, to meet their financial (and now also cultural) needs. Historically, the
Chinese diaspora was the quintessential “trade” diaspora, buying and selling goods over
an extended area of the globe - the ‘prototype’ of ethnic entrepreneurship (Cohen, 1997).
Migration followed a circular pattern of sojourning that traversed nation-states, and the
particular way in which the Chinese utilised guanxi (interpersonal relationships) and
familism as a basis for economic advantage has been frequently noted (Hsing, 1997;

---

9 Hereafter British Columbia will be referred to with the abbreviation B.C.
10 Illegal Chinese migration to Canada is an important issue, but will not be dealt with in this thesis.
Cohen, 1997; Ong, 1999). More recently, the Chinese family firm has emerged as a superior form of economic organisation, strategically drawing on various aspects of "Chinese culture" - Confucianism and familism in particular (Berger, 1988; Wong, 1989; Tai, 1989; Hsing, 1997). Mitchell (1995), for example, describes the capitalist practices of Chinese business elite as "embedded in sociocultural relations" and "extremely successful in the contemporary global economy" (p. 366). This claim has been substantiated empirically by Olds (1998), who has examined the intersection of "familial and corporate goals" operating within the Li group in the development of Vancouver's Pacific Place.

These characteristics of familism, spatial mobility, and economic flexibility are said to be reflected today in the 'hypermobility' of wealthy and skilled Chinese migrant families from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Skeldon, 1995; Cohen, 1997; Ong and Nonini, 1997; Ong, 1999). In her analysis of what she calls a "transnational Chinese public," Aihwa Ong gives a wide-ranging consideration to their contemporary migration and business practices. Here she describes the various ways in which migration is utilised as a deliberate strategy of capital accumulation:

Among transnational Chinese subjects, those most able to benefit from their participation in global capitalism celebrate flexibility and mobility, which give rise to such figures as the multiple-passport holder; the multicultural manager with "flexible capital"; the "astronaut," shuttling across borders on business; "parachute kids," who can be dropped off in another country by parents on the trans-Pacific business commute; and so on. Thus, while mobility and flexibility have long been part of the repertoire of human behaviour, under transnationality the new links between flexibility and the logics of displacement, on the one hand, and capital accumulation, on the other, have given new valence to such strategies of manoeuvring and positioning. Flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability (p. 19).
Ong is also mindful of the so-called *cultural logics* of globalisation. Migration does not always prioritise the accumulation of financial capital; a major objective of her work is to explicate the strategies of *cultural* or *symbolic* accumulation, which coincide with, and directly facilitate economic strategies in the practices of this Chinese transnational population. Thus, the ‘parachute children’ are “dropped off in another country” not because it is immediately economically advantageous to do so, but because of the potential for the acquisition of cultural capital, through locating children in a North American school. Discussing the recent trend in students from overseas, Mr. Peters gave three reasons in explanation of why children from Asia attend his high school in Vancouver:

To learn the world language of the future, which is English. It is clear that that is going to be the language of commerce for the future. It’s going to be the language for the European Union and certainly for trade with Asia in Canada. Secondly, many of them come from families who have a business and they want their children to have at least reasonable English so they can come back and help with the export-import part of the business, and so they will do the language. And then thirdly, prestige. If they can get a degree from a Canadian university then that will go a long way. To say, “my son has a degree from the University of Toronto or UBC”...A foreign university, right? North America.

He is clearly describing the accumulation practices of a privileged migrant group, with the financial capability to undertake this migration.

Together, however, these images paint an ambiguous picture. On the one hand, representations of *powerful* Chinese migrant families dominate contemporary media and academic accounts (cf. Ley, 1999, 2000). On the other hand, much anecdotal evidence, along with a small body of empirical work (Man, 1995; Pe-Pua et al. 1998) and some
media reports (overwhelmingly in the Chinese press) highlight various negative implications of such a 'flexible' family arrangement for the family members involved. Which of the two is the more accurate?

In chapter two of this thesis I shall review in more detail this broader theoretical and empirical literature surrounding the Astronaut and Satellite phenomena. Chapter three considers recent migration to Vancouver from Hong Kong and Taiwan and the reasons for the emergence of the Astronaut family in this particular context. Drawing on in-depth interviews with family members, chapters four and five consider the experiences of the lone spouses who reside in Vancouver, whilst chapter six focuses on the Satellite children. In chapter seven, my aim is to draw some conclusions from the empirical work, in relation to existing studies and theoretical ideas.

\[11\] Although middle-class status indicates their relative material privilege.
CHAPTER TWO

GLOBALISATION, CHINESE MIGRATION AND THE ‘FLEXIBLE FAMILY’

The main purpose of this chapter is to suggest the wider empirical and theoretical contexts of the Astronaut family and Satellite children, proceeding from a consideration of the broadest structural conditions that factor in recent migration trends, to a much more focused examination of the specific Chinese migrant population from which the Astronaut and Satellite phenomena emerge. I begin with a consideration of recent trends in patterns of international migration.

Contemporary International Migration

Astronaut and Satellite families are inextricably linked, at the broadest scale of analysis, to several recent and significant global trends in patterns of international migration. Since 1945, and particularly since the middle of the 1980s, the volume of migration in every major region of the world has grown dramatically, and the pace of growth is accelerating. Castles and Miller (1993) suggest that the 1990s, along with the first decade of this new century, will be remembered as “the age of migration” (p.3). Migration is now ‘globalised,’ they argue, as an increasing number of countries world-wide are profoundly affected by the mobility of people across national borders in multiple ways (culturally, socially, economically and politically). Several related large-scale tendencies have been identified, which, as will become clear later on, bear important relation to the Astronaut and Satellite strategies. Firstly, and in spite of a widely articulated concern over the erosion of nation-state boundaries (e.g. Sassen, 1996), in the last twenty years migration
has been increasingly brought under state regulation. This can be clearly observed in the changes that have occurred in national immigration policies, not least in the encouragement of economic-class migrants with significant human capital. The implementation of so-called 'Business Migration Programmes,' for example, is a principal factor accounting for the substantial increase of wealthier legal migrants from areas in Pacific Asia to North America, Australia and New Zealand (Smart, 1994; Boyer, 1996; Frideres, 1996; Ley, 1999, 2000). Through this programme, and the wider application of a 'points system', certain states have exercised considerable control over the 'class' of immigrant accepted for residency status. A second observation concerns the close relationship between new patterns of international migration, major structural changes in the global economy (economic globalisation), and more regionalised examples of economic transformation. A 'hyper-mobile' entrepreneurial and professional class of migrant has emerged conspicuously on the world stage (Skeldon, 1997), taking advantage of the new mobility of capital with their own flexible locational strategies. These are the 'best and the brightest,' often governing substantial financial assets (ibid.), and it is these migrants in particular who have benefited from the migration policy changes in several Western states. A third notable trend entails the relationship between international migration and technological change. The increased availability of air transportation, access to telecommunications, and the expansion of the media all imply the intrusion of migration into daily life, where it is not just a more frequently imagined possibility (Appadurai, 1996; see also Yeung, 1998) but also an increasingly real one. Within these wider processes, a cohort of middle-class Chinese migrants has had a particularly significant impact (Skeldon, 1997; Ong, 1999). As I will show, the 'new
rich’ of East Asia (Robison and Goodman, 1996) constitute a large component of the migration of skilled and relatively wealthy people to major cities in North America, Australia and New Zealand (Skeldon, 1994, 1997). It is from this population of migrants, from Hong Kong and Taiwan in particular, that the Astronaut and Satellite phenomena have emerged (Skeldon, 1995).

Chinese Migration and the New Rich in East Asia

The gleaming new skyscrapers of Asia’s cities, the traffic jams, the busy airports...all these things should remind us that the surging growth has created a large and growing Asian middle class. Economists predicted in mid-decade that by the end of the nineties there would be 400 million Asians with incomes equivalent to the average in today’s rich countries; a three-fold increase in the size of Asia’s middle class in ten years. It is a huge market for every item of prosperous lifestyles.... (Patten, 1998; p. 122)

Thirty years of rapid social and economic development has bred a sizeable aggregate of wealthy individuals. (Chu, 1996; p. 208)

Around the Pacific Rim, Hong Kong and Taiwan have been major areas of recent emigration. As expected, the majority of people in this category have a high educational attainment and highly valued skills, are of working age and with a moderate to high degree of personal wealth. Examining emigrant profiles for Hong Kong, Skeldon (1994a) found that from 1987 to 1991, fifteen to nineteen percent of all emigrants had achieved at least a degree-level education, compared to a figure of four percent for the population as a whole. In 1991, seventy-two percent of emigrants of working age were classed as “managers and administrators, professionals and associate professional” workers (ibid. p. 32). A different survey conducted in 1987 observed that the most likely emigrants from
Hong Kong were aged between twenty-five and thirty-nine and earning more than US$1000 a month (Smart, 1994).

This contemporary story of middle-class Chinese migration must begin, however, with the rise in the global economic power of the Pacific Rim, and the emergence of the so-called “new rich” of East Asia – described by Robison and Goodman as the “economic dynamisers of the twenty-first century,” (1996, p. 1). Writes Manuel Castells (1996):

I think it is fair to say that the Asian Pacific has become the main center of capital accumulation on the planet, the largest manufacturing producer, the most competitive trading region, one of the two leading centers of information technology innovation and production (the other is the US), and the fastest growing market. The rise of the Pacific has undoubtedly changed the geoeconomics and geopolitics of this millennium. (p. 207-208)

The most surprising feature of this success has been the eminence of the so-called East Asian “tigers”: Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea. In the space of only thirty years, from the mid-1960s onwards, these territories became the most competitive producers and exporters, and sustained the highest rate of GNP growth in the world (Castells, 1998). The emergence of a middle-class population has consequently resulted, whose power resides in the possession of significant financial capital and technical or scientific expertise (Robison and Goodman, 1996; Shiu-hing, 1996). There are of course differences within this broad classification; examining the new rich in Taiwan, for example, Chu (1996) makes a distinction between a “new middle-class” and a class of “lower-white-collar” employees (see Shiu-hing, 1996 for Hong Kong).\footnote{The former group includes the owners of small and medium businesses, intellectuals and professionals. She describes them as “loyal adherents of traditional Chinese familism,” and extolling a ‘savings ethic’ (p. 213). The family, she argues, has served as a crucial social institution in providing financial assistance and relatively cheap labour, facilitating successful business ventures. As for the latter group of lower white-}
of explaining the migration patterns of the last two decades, however, the ability to migrate granted through the wealth and expertise of these populations is a crucial unifying quality. As I will show, the selection criteria for migrants in Canada and several other Western states are highly biased towards skilled and wealthy migrants (see chapter three).

Cultural Practices and Economic Success

Global capitalism in Asia is linked to new cultural representations of “Chineseness” in relation to transnational Asian capitalism (Ong, 1999; p. 7).

The transnational elite, professionals and business people living and working in several global sites and involved in the control of capital and information flows between these sites, negotiate the new spaces of late capitalism to their supreme advantage (Mitchell, 1993; p. 268).

I want to examine some theoretical explanations for the recent and conspicuous emergence of a successful and particularly mobile Chinese population, with a specific focus on the business migrant. The rise of Pacific Rim capitalism, and the overall high achievement of Chinese business in the 1980s and 1990s, sparked an intense interest in the underlying causes of economic success. In Hong Kong, the flexibility of manufacturers to adapt to the demands of world markets was deemed a crucial factor, and one dependent upon an industrial structure comprised primarily of small businesses (over 90 percent of manufacturing firms in 1981 had less than fifty employees) (Castells, 1996).

collar workers, “consumption power” and “self-development” are said to be their defining characteristics. Embracing a ‘get rich quick’ mentality, and rejecting certain (more traditional) family responsibilities, this group seeks status in the purchase of certain desirable consumer items, in self-improvement, and in overseas travel (on which there was a significant increased expenditure in the 1990s) (Chu, 1996). Shiu-hing (1996) acknowledges diversity within the middle-class of Hong Kong, but stresses a unity of values, particularly in support of private property rights, capitalism, and a “bourgeois lifestyle”. Siu (1999) has emphasised the “brash consumerism of the 1980s and 1990s” as a marking feature of the new middle class of Hong Kong (p. 110).
These small firms were able to link up effectively to the world market through networking and subcontracting. Similar observations have been made for Taiwan. Writes Castells:

the nucleus of Taiwanese industrial structure was home grown. It was made of a large number of small and medium firms, set up with family savings and cooperative savings networks, and supported when necessary with government bank credits...most of Taiwan's development was enacted by a flexible combination of decentralized networks of family-based Taiwanese firms, acting as subcontractors for foreign manufacturers located in Taiwan, and as suppliers of international commercial networks. (pp. 255-256)

Many geographers have recently stressed the importance of 'social embeddedness' in the explication of certain economic processes (Mitchell, 1995; Peck, 1996; Olds, 1998). Financial markets and business activities, it is argued, involve social and cultural practices that draw upon peculiar socio-cultural resources (Smart, 1993; Peck, 1996). Exemplifying this approach, scholars turned to the social and cultural foundations of Chinese society in explanation of the recent economic success in East Asia, when Western models of industrial development were clearly inadequate. In direct opposition to the thesis of Max Weber\(^3\) so-called 'Chinese cultural values' (Confucianism and familism in particular) became valorised as the key to understanding the distinctive nature of capitalist transformation within the societies of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea (Wong, 1985; Tai, 1989; Mitchell, 1995; Hsing, 1997).\(^4\) These ideas

\(^2\) These firms, Castells (1996) argues, used a model adapted from an original core of only twenty one family firms from China who migrated after the Revolution.

\(^3\) Max Weber (1966) argued that the cultural philosophy of Confucianism retarded capitalist development in Asia.

\(^4\) Focussing specifically on Hong Kong, Wong (1989) has identified what he designates as four "major Chinese cultural elements" facilitating capitalism in this territory through the promotion of an ethos of hard work 'for the good of the family'. These are namely, 'incorporative cosmology', 'high achievement motivation', 'pervasive familism' and 'utilitarian discipline'. These encourage members to work hard for the good of the family.
have been extended also to the successes of overseas Chinese entrepreneurs, both historically and contemporaneously (Mitchell, 1997a; Hsing, 1997; Olds, 1998). It is to these cultural and historical attributes that I now turn.

The Chinese Family, Guanxi, and the Diaspora

The new middle class are loyal adherents to Chinese familism (Chu, 1996; p. 213).

Firstly, as was indicated above, Confucianism - a Chinese cultural system - is understood to endorse certain values particularly conducive to financial success. Prioritising the good of the family (and family business) above any individualistic concerns, for example, is a central tenet of Confucianist discourse. Paternalistic relationships are an accepted mode of social stratification, thereby reducing conflict between individuals within the family and firm. Significant emphasis is placed on the importance of education and intellectual growth, reflecting a belief that human beings can be perfected through scholarship. And in addition, Confucianism is understood to promote diligent work and frugality in life, thereby encouraging the accumulation of financial savings (Tai, 1989).

Indicating a second important tenet of Chinese cultural tradition, Hamilton (1999) describes “the family” as “the critical unit in both community and kinship organization” (p.21; see also Baker, 1979). The notion of ‘familism’ appears prolifically in recent analyses of the success of Chinese capitalism, and underpins the “affective model” of

---

5 Cohen (1997) notes that “a passion for certification” is a distinctive feature of overseas Chinese (p. 172).
Chinese economic development, as defined by Tai (1989). Distinguished from a Western model of capitalism that emphasises individualism, the affective model in contrast extols group orientation and familial “emotional bonds.” These bonds are conceived to exercise significant authority over individual behaviour. According to Wong:

the family is the basic social grouping uniting individuals. Family ties are permanent, and individuals owe their loyalty to the family throughout their lives...The Chinese consider the family as the primary focus of their loyalty (Wong, 1985; p. 16).

Making a similar point, Susan Greenhalgh (1994) remarks that within analyses of Chinese business success: “family firms are depicted as single actors whose members work in concert for the benefit of all” (p. 749).

In an examination of the way in which the family, in particular, can be used to facilitate the achievement of particular financial objectives, Mitchell (1995) compares the credit systems of Western and Chinese societies. In contrast to the Western system, which is based on (among other things) the constancy of money and the social distance between creditor and debtor, she observes that “many major Chinese banks rely on personal relations and trust to obtain securities and make loans” (p. 368). Personal, and especially extended familial, connections are fundamental to the operation of this latter model:

even in the case of international transactions, where geographic distance might operate to sever particularist ties of this nature, the ‘personal’ character of credit transactions has been carefully maintained...the painstaking establishment and maintenance of long-term, extended family ties remains a critical ingredient in the contemporary circulation of finance capital overseas (ibid. p. 369).

---

6 Familism is used within the literature to mean several different but related ideas. Wong (1989) suggests that ‘familism’ can represent three key business strategies: a paternalistic management ideology, nepotistic treatment, and the family ownership and management of business.
Mitchell argues that the availability of this type of credit is especially advantageous for entrepreneurs operating in the contemporary context of international financial liberalisation. Business in Hong Kong is frequently owned and managed by the same family, avoiding the types of internal conflict characteristic of Western models. Family networks can produce relatively cheap credit for borrowers, in addition to the advantages posed by a reliance on informal credit channels. The notion of the family is paramount in Mitchell's analysis, although there are two more specific points I wish to elicit from this. Firstly, Mitchell's representation is of an overwhelmingly powerful entrepreneurial class of people, and this is apparent in several examples of her work (see also Mitchell, 1993, 1997a, 1997b). Secondly, I want to stress the way in which the relationships presented here, built on the notion of "extended family ties," are conceived to operate effectively "in the case of international transactions" (1995, p. 369; emphasis added). The negative effects of "geographic distance" on particular social relationships are seemingly overcome in the experience of the Chinese family.

Two additional and related cultural attributes are salient to this general discussion. Firstly, the business activities of Chinese firms are frequently considered in terms of business networks or affective social ties known as guanxi. Like Mitchell's "international transactions," guanxi relations often span regional and national borders, and have been demonstrated to provide Chinese business with a clear competitive advantage over a

---

7 Mitchell focuses on Li Ka-shing's Concord Pacific project in Vancouver as an example of an extremely successful family-run Chinese business operating in the global context. Olds (1998) similarly considers the Li group in Vancouver, demonstrating "the critical role of extended social relations in guiding large-scale property capital flows from Hong Kong" (p. 373).
Western model of business organisation (Cohen, 1997; Hsing, 1997; Olds and Yeung, 1999). Researching Taiwanese investment in south China, You-tien Hsing notes:

Taking advantage of the linguistic and cultural affinity, Taiwanese investors in south China successfully cultivated interpersonal relationships (guanxi) with local Chinese officials in the region. Using such interpersonal networks, Taiwanese investors have managed to bypass bureaucratic demands on foreign-investment projects and maintain and enhance flexibility in production and marketing. (1997; p. 143).

In at least one important respect, the concept of diaspora has similar connotations. Used in an historical sense to explain the traumatic removal of a people from their homeland, the revisited term now suggests the *empowerment* of an ethnic group (Safran, 1991; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1995). The particular pattern of circular migration or “sojourning” which characterised 19th century Chinese traders, for example, and involved the establishment of guanxi, was characteristic of the Chinese ‘trading’ diaspora (Cohen, 1997; Hamilton, 1999). The geographical mobility practised by this group undoubtedly facilitated economic accumulation. Today, the diaspora, along with guanxi and an instrumental notion of ‘the family’, provide “a means to adapt to rapid capital flows, the international market for skills and to the demands of the powerful multi-national corporations,” thereby facilitating competitive advantage in the new, liberalised global economy (Cohen, 1995; p.13). As Robin Cohen observes:

Globalisation has enhanced the practical, economic and affective roles of diasporas, showing them to be particularly adaptive forms of social organisation... (1995, p.16).

Nonini and Ong (1997) make similar observations, incorporating the particular traditional social formations of guanxi and ‘the family’ and emphasising their exceptional flexibility in the current economic setting:
the contemporary regime of flexible accumulation has called forth new deployments of “family” and of guanxi particularist relations from within the accumulation strategies of transnational Chinese...Family and guanxi relations among diaspora Chinese represent a long-standing habitus whose very flexibilities have now been placed in the service of accumulation strategies under the novel conditions of late capitalism, and in the process are thereby being reworked themselves (p. 21).

For the Chinese entrepreneur in the contemporary setting, these aspects of tradition connote the possibility of flexible and successful business relationships with other ethnic Chinese on a global terrain. Based on a mutual understanding of the existence of affective ties, historical and cultural legitimisation is thereby given to business relationships (Mitchell, 1997; Hsing, 1997). Through invoking a cultural and ethnic affinity amongst spatially dispersed group members, these examples emphasise once again the way in which the generally erosive effects of geographic distances on social relationships can be apparently overcome in these particular circumstances.

Theoretical Approaches to Migration:
Transnationalism and Cosmopolitan Cultures

At this point in the discussion, it is necessary to identify two important and related theoretical perspectives that have come to prominence relatively recently within the social sciences, and are implicit in many of the observations and analyses of Chinese capitalist success outlined above. These perspectives facilitate an understanding of the contemporary migration of middle-class Chinese families and are especially useful in explicating the Astronaut and Satellite family forms. The first perspective is implied in the invocations of diaspora, guanxi, and “extended family ties,” and indicates a reinterpretation of the way in which social relationships are conceived to operate over
space. In the second theoretical position, notions of ‘culture’ have been transformed away from a principally place-bound conception and towards ideas of ‘deterritorialisation,’ the possibility of the strategic acquisition of culture, and the related ‘self-fashioning’ of cultural subjects. I will briefly consider these theoretical shifts in turn.

**Transnationalism**

The widely observed consequences of the general process of globalisation - displayed particularly in contemporary trends in the international mobility of people (described above) - are inadequately explained by more traditional approaches to migration within the social sciences.\(^8\) Developed in response to this particular theoretical deficiency therefore, the term ‘transnationalism’ has found relatively recent ascendancy (the last five years have been notable), while its impact has been substantial.\(^9\) Whilst denoting a wide range of scholarship, attempts have been made to delimit the scope in which the concept

---

\(^8\) Traditionally, research on international migration has taken two distinct forms within geography. The first focuses on the movement itself and is concerned with the numbers of people who migrate, where they migrate from, where they migrate to, and with identifying the push and pull factors that dictate the movement. The second approach is concerned with the host country’s response to migration, and the social consequences of immigration for the host society. Whilst the first privileges economic and political factors in explanation, the second approach is sensitive to culture, specifically the ethnic culture of the immigrant group in relation to the dominant culture of the wider society. In this latter approach, assimilation along various dimensions (Gordon, 1964; see also the work of the Chicago School of sociology) is perceived as the normative ideal of a society where a majority cultural group is also the hegemonic norm. Both approaches to migration, however, have tended to conceive the country of origin and the country of destination as discrete entities; migration is the act of moving from one country to another, from one cultural context to another, and from an ethnic majority to an ethnic minority scenario. Culture and territory are closely aligned and usually defined in terms of a national identity. New patterns of migration, however, appear to indicate significant movement of people and of cultural ideas back and forth across borders in a relatively unimpeded way.

\(^9\) A special issue of the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (1999: 22) was recently published, concerned solely with research on transnationalism. In January 2001 a new journal will be launched entitled “Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs.” Described as a journal “devoted to the social scientific understanding of globalization and transnationalism” (http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/wwwroot/gnjournal.htm), its editors span the social science disciplines and indicate the extent to which transnationalism is a concept at the forefront of interdisciplinary approaches to social research. Interest in transnationalism is reflected also in government-funded projects in its name, such as the UK-based ESRC “Transnational Communities” programme, with a £3.8 million in
can be usefully applied.\textsuperscript{10} A helpful and widely endorsed definition is provided by Basch et al. (1994), who suggest that transnationalism represents:

the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement...many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders. Immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political – that span borders we call “transmigrants”...Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states (p. 7).

Their definition is akin to Vertovec’s (1999) description of transnationalism as a “social morphology” which describes the way in which social relationships can operate over significant distance, spanning national borders, and reducing the importance of a face-to-face context and/or general proximity between persons. The concept of the social “network” is central to this understanding (Rogers and Vertovec, 1995; Castells, 1996). It is apparent from these definitions that the business practices of the Chinese family, captured by notions of guanxi, diaspora, and extended familial relations, bear some relation to the process of transnationalism. As may be already evident, and will become clear later in this chapter, the recent patterns of middle-class Chinese migration, which are epitomised in the Astronaut and Satellite arrangements, display many of the key features of a transnational social morphology.

Reinterpreting Culture

“Cultural transactions in between social groups in the past have generally been restricted...” (Appadurai, 1996; p. 27).  

\textsuperscript{10} In an example of an attempt to delimit this range of work, Vertovec (1999) has identified five conceptual premises that underlie the most common uses in current research. He defines these as: a social morphology,
A second theoretical shift has occurred in the conceptualisation of culture. Transnational mobility, migration and technology have challenged explanations of culture connoting a straight-forward relationship between a group of people, a particular territory (e.g. the nation), and a cultural identity (see Hannerz, 1996, Appadurai, 1996).\(^{11}\) Appadurai (1996), for example, claims that the powerful, contemporary and combining influences of "media" and "migration" have profoundly altered the relationship between culture and place to the extent that the "deterritorialization" of culture has consequently occurred.

Examining the cultural dimensions of globalisation, he argues:

> electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination....few persons in the world today do not have a friend, relative, or co-worker who is not on the road to somewhere else or already coming back home, bearing stories and possibilities. (p. 4).

As media and personal mobility therefore expose an increasing number of people to an increasingly diverse number of cultural ideas and experiences, possibilities exist for life and lifestyle to become disconnected from the place of birth and residence. Thus, he continues:

> More people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born: this is the well spring of increased rates of migration at every level of social, national, and global life (p. 6).

\(^{11}\) Writes Hannerz (1996), "the culture concept seems perhaps more contested, or contestable, than ever," p. 30. Until relatively recently, culture has generally been conceived as the essence of a definable group, rooted in a specific place or territory. The most explicit links between a cultural group and a territory have been drawn in relation to projects of nation-state building (Anderson, 1983; cf. Gupta, 1992), when it was politically and ideologically expedient to define culture, people and national territory as an organic unity. Indeed, a notion of a distinctive 'Chinese culture' has been central to the above explanations of recent
Patterns of contemporary international migration (outlined above), he thereby implies, are driven - at least in part - by the social imagining of different cultural experiences and the subsequent movement of people to actualise them. This idea of culture as something imagined, and containing elements acquired from a variety of diverse places around the globe is akin to Vertovec’s (1999) definition of a ‘transnational consciousness,’ whereby individuals possess so-called “decentred attachments” and “multiple identifications”.

Asserting the work of the imagination in the constitution of cultural identity introduces an additional possibility - that of the “self-fashioning” of cultural subjects (Mitchell, 1997). As Ien Ang realised of her own Chinese identity, rather than representing the essence of her being,

‘Chineseness’ becomes an open signifier which acquires its peculiar form and content in dialectical junction with the diverse local conditions in which ethnic Chinese people have constructed new lives and syncretic social and cultural practices, (1994; p. 16).

The notion that cultural identity can in some way be “constructed” is crucial to an understanding of the contemporary migration practices of the Chinese middle-class. However, this claim requires an important qualification, of which Ang is mindful. The ‘deterritorialization’ of culture, and the importance of the imagination in the construction of cultural identities, should not imply that distinctive cultures are no longer to be found
in particular places, nor that people are free to adopt any cultural identity that they so choose. As Hannerz points out:

There is now a world culture, but we had better make sure we understand what this means: not a replication of uniformity but an organization of diversity, (1996, p. 102).

There remains an important geography to culture.

The Cosmopolitan:

Culture and Migration as Strategies of Accumulation

The process of shaping cultural citizens is multilayered. It involves the self-fashioning of Chinese subjects...Overtly, the education of future Hong Kong emigrants entails acculturation to a general British-Canadian subjectivity; more subtly, however, it can also be seen as an effort to indoctrinate the Hong Kong middle-class into a kind of transnational cosmopolitanism (Mitchell, 1997a, p. 230).

The ease with which Hong Kong Chinese move in and out of different cultural traditions is due to pragmatic-empirical considerations and, more often than not, is based on cost-benefit calculations (King, 1996; p. 274).

Achieving an understanding of the global “organization of diversity” is the goal of the cosmopolitan. Described by Hannerz, the cosmopolitan possesses a certain state of mind: “an intellectual and esthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences...the concern with achieving competence in cultures which are initially alien...” (1996, p. 103). I want to consider the way in which the motivation behind recent Chinese migration to North America, Australia and New Zealand can be tied to such a cosmopolitan desire, for the acquisition of particular cultural symbols.

12 Consonant with the strongly argued critique of transnational discourse by Mitchell (1997c), Ang is critical of what she perceives as “the formalist, postmodernist tendency to overgeneralize the global currency of so-called nomadic, fragmented and deterritorialized subjectivity” (p. 4).
The term ‘cosmopolitan’ has been frequently used to describe the particular cultural outlook of the Chinese middle-class, especially in reference to businessmen and professionals from Hong Kong (Li et al., 1995; Mitchell, 1997a; Cohen, 1997; Olds, 1998; Hamilton, 1999; Friedman, 1999). According to Jonathan Friedman (1999), the cosmopolitan represents an “elite” identity, and is inextricably linked to the consolidation of global power amongst this group. He writes:

The new encompassing cosmopolitan elite is thus one that incorporates all the differences in the world, transforming them into the identity of the new authorities of the world (p. 192).

The new elites are linked by the emergence of a matrix of global discourses of which hybridity has gained in dominance (p.183).

In a similar argument, Katharyne Mitchell has demonstrated how certain Chinese migrants exercise the power to manipulate various discourses of transnationalism, hybridity, and traditional Chinese cultural values (“strategic orientalizing”), for their own economic advantage (Mitchell, 1997b; p. 551). In the following quotation, we can see how the two key theoretical perspectives of transnationalism and a deterritorialised notion of culture work along side socio-cultural arguments that ground Chinese capitalist success in notions of Chinese tradition:

As capitalist networks articulate, Chinese businessmen who speak the language of the global economic subject, but are also imbricated in a Hong Kong Chinese discourse, are able to operate as the quintessential hybridized middlemen...With flexible citizenship and deterritorialized systems of credit, but with a durable and elastic business network established on the basis of the extended family, overseas Hong Kong Chinese capitalists can manipulate images of both the transnational, transcultural cosmopolitan and the ‘ethnic Chinese’, enabling them to position themselves on the margins of the nation, but at the lucrative center of Pacific Rim business. (1997b, p. 551)
Once again, the "extended family" is the basis of the flexible business networks on which financial success is predicated. In particular, however, I want to draw attention to the way in which culture is depicted in this passage - as a resource to be manipulated by active human agents. Those who enjoy economic mastery in the Pacific Rim, Mitchell here argues, are in possession of particular cultural knowledge, involving both affinities with a Hong Kong Chinese identity and the ability to demonstrate various cosmopolitan traits. Thus, the internal control conferred by familism and paternalistic relations (e.g. Wong, 1985), the extended business contacts and geographical flexibility provided by guanxi (e.g. Hsing, 1997), and a strategic understanding of the contemporary economic and cultural "organization of diversity" (Hannerz, 1996) – these are cultural resources on which contemporary Chinese entrepreneurs can draw, and from which they are able to gain significant financial advantages.

Yet the question remains as to how this cultural competence, particularly the cosmopolitan expertise, is actually achieved. How does one learn "the language of the global economic subject"? And what is this language?

Aihwa Ong's Flexible Citizenship

Today, Chinese investors and professionals arrive as cosmopolitans already wise in the ways of Western business and economic liberalism. With new modes of travel and communication, familial regimes have become more flexible in both dispersing and localizing members in different parts of the world. (Ong, 1999; p. 127)

The recent work of anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1999) provides a possible answer to these questions and, in so doing, draws together many of the theoretical and empirical strands
already discussed. Examining migration and capital accumulation amongst what she terms a “Chinese transnational public” she writes:

Chinese traders in transnational settings have been viewed mainly as skillful “handlers of money,” but rarely have they been seen as agents actively shaping their self-identity in a cross-cultural context...What is often missing in accounts of diasporan experiences is a focus on Chinese diasporan subjects as active manipulators of cultural symbols (p. 88)

New strategies of flexible accumulation have promoted a flexible attitude towards citizenship...Chinese entrepreneurs are not merely engaged in profit making; they are also acquiring a range of symbolic capitals that will facilitate their positioning, economic negotiation, and cultural acceptance in different geographical sites (p. 17 - 18).

As Mitchell has indicated, the immediate acquisition of financial capital is clearly not the only concern for the Chinese entrepreneur; success is predicated also on the acquisition of a “range of symbolic capital” (emphasis added). Ong also suggests, however, how this is achieved: through migration. International mobility, she argues, is one of several strategies of accumulation practised contemporaneously amongst Chinese professionals and businessmen:

...those most able to benefit from their participation in global capitalism celebrate flexibility and mobility...Thus, while mobility and flexibility have long been part of the repertoire of human behaviour, under transnationality the new links between flexibility and the logics of displacement, on the one hand, and capital accumulation, on the other, have given new valence to such strategies of manoeuvring and positioning. Flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability (p. 19).

Overseas experience, writes Ong, “has become a rite of passage for the young from well-to-do families, a kind of sojourning abroad that is paralleled and sustained by the itineraries of international business” (p. 93). The children of the family are prioritised, it would seem, in the acquisition of cultural capital. Importantly, however, these
“relocations” are strategic relocations; the overseas experience a considered choice. In true cosmopolitan fashion (Hannerz, 1996), the acquisition of *very specific* forms of ‘cultural capital’ will be sought through migration to a *particular* geographical site:

Thus, while the “global cultural economy” of people, products, and ideas may be characterized by disjunctures, regimes of consumption and credentialization are definitely hierarchized, with Europe and America setting the standards of international middle-class style (Ong, 1999; p. 90).

Euroamerican cultural hegemony determines and judges the signs and forms of metropolitan status and glamour. Hong Kong emigrants seek the kinds of symbolic capital that have international recognition and value, not only in the country of origin but also in the country of destination, and especially in the transnational spaces where the itineraries of travelling businessmen and professionals intersect with those of local residents (ibid., p. 89).

Europe and America are homes to the cultural capital desired by Chinese professionals and businessmen, the places where “the language of the global economic subject” (Mitchell, 1997; p. 551) can be learned, and migration to these regions will clearly facilitate its acquisition.¹⁴ Ong goes on to suggest what, in particular, constitutes cultural capital: the “correct” foreign language, academic interests, social behaviour, and a Western passport,

...for many middle-class Chinese...the ultimate symbolic capital necessary for global mobility is an American college degree, which guarantees that the holder has acquired the cultural knowledge, skills, and credentials that enable the transposition of social status from one country to another (1999, p. 90).

---

¹³ This argument concerning the importance of symbolic capital can equally apply, I suggest, for professional elites.

¹⁴ For her notion of cultural capital, Ong is drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1984). See also Smart (1993) who reconsiders Bourdieus’s social capital in the light of fieldwork on foreign investment in China and the role of gift exchange and *guanxi*.
Turning now to the Astronaut family and Satellite children, I want to suggest how they epitomise such a strategy of locating different family members in particular places for the maximisation of cultural and economic capital acquisition.

The Astronaut and Satellite Phenomena:
Cultural Capital, Transnationalism and the Flexible Family

They [the Chinese middle-class] have adopted a rationalistic, instrumental attitude toward familistic values, thus turning them into a cultural resource to achieve other purposes (King, 1996; p. 270).

I have suggested, therefore, some of the ways in which the Chinese family operates as an extremely efficient unit of accumulation. Historically, the geographical dispersal of the extended family has facilitated business transactions. Currently, the Astronaut and Satellite family forms may, I propose, expose the ultimate flexibility of this social unit, involving the self-fashioning of cultural subjects, through the strategic manipulation of traditional Chinese cultural values alongside a highly cosmopolitan agenda. As described in chapter one, in the Astronaut arrangement the family migrates to North America, Australia or New Zealand, whilst at the same time maintaining substantial economic ties with the country of origin. Usually, the husband and father will spend the majority of his time working there, continuing his business or professional career. In the case of Satellite child(ren), both parents return to the country of origin to work, leaving the children to live and go to school in Vancouver.

These patterns are a reflection of the “cultural logics” described by Ong (1999), informing success in a global business and professional arena. She writes:
It is a cultural logic of many ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia to organize their families according to strategies of time and space so that over time, the family is distributed over a longer distance or a wider expanse of space. These strategies of accumulation, dispersal, and relocation, which are stimulated by the dual impulses of escaping political instability and pursuing livelihoods, are most recently and dramatically displayed by emigrants from Hong Kong. (p. 93 – 94)

Mitchell similarly talks of “a desire” by Chinese elite “to extend family networks spatially” (1993; p. 369). The family is clearly ‘dispersed’ and ‘extended spatially’ in the Astronaut and Satellite situations (providing a perfect example of the “transnational social morphology” described by Vertovec (1999). Although operating with the same ultimate objective of financial accumulation, it is known also amongst the Chinese middle-class that the possession of the correct cultural capital is an integral part of present-day business and professional success. Different goals are to be achieved at different geographical sites, necessitating the positioning of different family members in different places. The English language, a Western education, a Western passport; these cultural commodities can be obtained by locating certain family members in North America, Australia or New Zealand. Economic capital, on the other hand, is often maximised elsewhere - usually in the country of origin (Hong Kong or Taiwan) - where the business climate is more favourable and home-grown professional qualifications are recognised. This profile suggests the profound flexibility of the Chinese family as a social and economic unit; demonstrating the ability to operate effectively in geographically dispersed locations and the power to utilise cultural resources in the acquisition of desired cultural capital. In the second section of this chapter, however, I want to suggest some of the possible limits to this theoretical representation.
A Different Approach to Transnational Mobility:
The Limits to Flexibility and the Family

Diasporic experiences are always gendered. But there is a tendency for theoretical accounts of diasporas and diaspora cultures to hide this fact, to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experiences (Clifford, 1994; p. 313).

By focussing on the migration of the ‘new rich’ of East Asia, what we have seen so far has been the privileged, powerful face of transnational mobility. The Astronaut family, it has been suggested, is perhaps the ultimate example of social flexibility and the exercise of human agency in migration, enacting a strategy of both economic and cultural accumulation, highly responsive to contemporary processes of globalisation, through the geographical placement of different family members. In tune with traditional notions of familism and Confucianism – at the heart of Chinese cultural values – members are assumed to work together as a unit, for the good of the family. As Mitchell (1995) observes, the Chinese family is frequently proclaimed a “particularly successful” sociocultural resource in the contemporary period of global capitalism (p. 369), and the foundation of the achievements of Chinese business. In contrast to representations of a “disorientating” experience characterising the postmodern contemporary era, the Hong Kong elite, she argues, “negotiate the new spaces of late capitalism to their supreme advantage” (1993, p. 268):

Parents and children travel and communicate easily and on a frequent basis. The power involved in the ability to control the experience of travel, trans-cultural communication, habitation, education and business thus produces a completely different experience of late capitalism.... (p. 269).
At this point, and drawing on a different body of theoretical literature, I wish to introduce an alternative to such perspectives on these migration phenomena, and in so doing, challenge some of the general assumptions surrounding transnationalism and the perceived mobility of a privileged Chinese cohort. As Doreen Massey argues in particular reference to ‘time-space compression,’ there is a “power-geometry” to this and related processes of transnational mobility:

...different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it (1993; p. 61).

Along side the “jet-setters” and those who have access to e-mail and fax-machines, she juxtaposes the experiences of refugees and undocumented migrant workers. Her objective is to illustrate the way in which transnationalism involves both differentiated mobility and the varying manner in which it can be experienced. It is imperative, she argues, that a distinction be drawn between those who control the movement and those who are controlled by it.

Perspectives on Gender, Migration and Transnationalism

In the following paragraphs, this notion of a differentiated transnationalism will be pursued with a focus on the migratory experiences of members within the unit of the middle-class Chinese family. In particular, I want to consider the Chinese immigrant woman.\(^\text{15}\) It is only relatively recently that the geographer’s traditional interest in

\(^{15}\) From this point in the discussion, existing theoretical and empirical literature necessitates a focus on the female experience of migration, with implications for the Astronaut family. Although many of the same ideas may also be applicable to the Satellite children, there is a general dearth of scholarly work examining
migration has begun to encompass the work of feminist geographers and, reciprocally, feminist geographers have been awakened to the significant gendered aspects of the migration process (see Fincher, 1993, for this general observation). There are two intersecting perspectives on gender and migration that I will briefly consider. A first relevant body of literature emanates less from feminist geographers per se, than from researchers primarily interested in the economic and labour market-related processes of migration. The dearth in analyses of the experiences of women within these studies has been recently recognised (Halfacree and Boyle, 1999). In these accounts, economic considerations predominate analyses of family migration, and experiences of migration are conceived in terms of the effects of impact on wage labour. In the most recent analyses of gender and migration, the woman is commonly conceived as the “trailing wife.” The economic role of the husband, they argue, is nearly always prioritised in migration decisions, and a common conclusion reads thus:

Male employment leads as the major migration motive for a couple with females adapting their social and economic roles...around the economic roles of their male partners (Bonney and Love, 1991; p. 347).

Migration often acts to frustrate the development of a woman’s career and thus should be associated more with economic disadvantage than advantage (Halfacree, 1995; p. 159).

For some time, geographers have generally been sensitive to the importance of qualitative experience in the explication of human behaviour. In the second of the two approaches to the experiences of children in geography with which this literature could be compared. Matthews and Limb (1999) attempt to define “an agenda for the geography of children,” noting that whilst contemporary cultural geography has addressed the experiences of “many different socially defined populations...the study of children as a generational group has been largely missing as a frame of reference” (p. 62).

16 In some cases, gendered power relations have been generally rendered invisible (for a critique of these approaches to family migration see Halfacree and Boyle, 1999; Bonney and Love, 1991; Li and Findlay, 1999). The ‘human capital’ approach to migration, for example, considers any gendered effect as “an
gender and migration, a more recent inflection to the understanding of experience has come from the examination of social power relations, by feminist geographers in particular. From this perspective stems the insistence that often the woman’s experience of migration is inextricably bound up with her subordinate (gendered) status. Rachel Silvey and Victoria Lawson make this point in a recent review of migration research:

In this feminist research, mobility is shaped by gendered power relations that allow certain household members to make meaning about who migrates and why (Lawson, 1998). Domestic control is enacted in ideological terms that invoke gender roles and responsibilities for various household members. Notions of “tradition” – which include dominant representations of family, morality, sexuality, and domestic harmony – are invoked as a basis for patriarchal control of household members, (1999, p. 127).

The use of “tradition” in this passage indicates a very similar function to its employment in preceding sections of this chapter. Tradition has been conceived as an empowering notion, enhancing the proficiency of the unit of the Chinese family, through various means of “control,” in the quest for capital. I have stressed the extent to which notions of traditional Chinese culture have been manipulated and used to strategic ends. Within these analyses, however, the unit of the family has assumed a sacrosanct status and the notion of the ‘good of the family’ has not been interrogated. Is tradition necessarily empowering for all family members? How do individuals within the family experience familial success?

Although these approaches refer to migration in general, I suggest that the comments made here have direct salience for the woman’s experience of the Astronaut family, and also the experience of Satellite children. There are clearly gendered and differentially

__________________________
unintended consequence of the rational (income maximizing) house-hold level decision making” (Halfacree
(dis)empowering implications of these fragmented family forms, and this thesis will contribute to the empirical examination of the implications for gender and settlement. However, before we can hope to understand the post-migration experience of the women, an additional perspective is required. Ruth Fincher (2000) perceptively defines the immigrant woman’s experience of ‘settlement’ as “the bearing of a past in a different location.” More generally, as suggested by Li and Findlay (1999):

Much work remains to be done on …how cultural specificity mediates to produce diverse gendered meanings for the migration act in different places around the globe (p. 173).

As these quotations suggest, it is necessary to have some grasp of the “cultural specificity” of female roles within the Chinese middle-class family in the pre-migration societal context (although this grasp is a necessarily limited one in a thesis of this nature). Examination of the Chinese woman’s experience of migration thus begins with a consideration of the existing cultural and social structures from where she came – her “past” experience of family and social life.

Modern Societies and Patriarchal Structures

In Taiwan and Hong Kong, notions of patriarchy and tradition have to be reconciled with a newly modernised outlook (Chiang and Ku, 1986; Li and Findlay, 1999). Gender research within these territories dates only from the middle of the 1980s as a coherent field, when three gender-studies centres were set up independently in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong (Cheung et al., 1997). Early studies were highly empirical, and in the words of Cheung et al., there has been:

and Boyle, 1999; p. 6).
little co-ordinated effort to answer some of the broader research questions about gender roles. For example, how do we define traditional gender roles? To what extent have these roles changed in modern...society? (p. 202).

What defines male and female roles in contemporary Chinese culture is therefore unclear; representations are often overly reliant, they caution, on “Confucian classics” and “folklore” (Cheung et al, 1997). Traditional conceptions of female roles within the family suggest that women primarily serve a supportive role in managing the home and supplying male heirs (ibid.). A typical Chinese “ideal wife” is presented in a case study by Lo (1989). He writes:

A working-class man describes his wife as good because she was very nice to his parents, liked by his mother, did not talk much, agreed to everything, and always did the things he liked her to do. She seldom went out and hardly had any friends. A wife should stay at home and be a good mother, a good wife, and a good daughter-in-law. She should not have her own opinions. (p. 209)

In this section, issues of gender and migration will be examined with specific focus on middle-class female migrants from Hong Kong. There are a number of quantitative changes in Hong Kong society, which would suggest that women are achieving a degree of gender equality (Mak and Yue-ping, 1997). Educational attainment of women in Hong Kong, for example, has increased significantly in the last few decades. In 1961, Cheung (1997) reports, only two percent of women had received a post-secondary or university education, compared with 5.3 percent of males. By 1991, the number of females in this category had risen to 9.4 percent. Increasing educational opportunities clearly has an impact on patterns of employment (Mak and Yue-ping, 1997). The absolute number of women earning a wage increased dramatically between 1961, 1981 and 1993 from 324

17 Reference to similar experiences in Taiwan will also be made, although there is much less research available on Taiwanese society.
000 to 843 000 and 1, 059, 700 respectively (Cheung, 1997). At the same time, both fertility rates and family sizes have decreased over the same period. In 1961, at least twenty percent of households were said to have seven or more family members. By 1991, around sixty two percent of households could be defined as an “unextended nuclear family” (ibid.). Another important change with regards to women’s employment, has been the extent to which families with sufficient financial resources hire domestic help. Cheung (1997) reports that twenty-one percent of the “professional group” of women surveyed in her study made use of paid helpers to take care of their children. Hiring assistance implies the ability of both partners to pursue a career independent of household and childcare needs, and the consequent loosening of traditional roles within the family.

However, in spite of these changes in the opportunities available to women, the operation of patriarchal gender roles is still apparent within the domestic sphere. Feminist scholars have argued that domestic work is an important potential area of female oppression (Ng, 1989). Po-king and Ching-kwan (1997) report on several surveys conducted in Hong Kong in the 1980s that addressed issues of domestic labour from the perspective of women. In sixty to eighty percent of cases, the woman in the household assumed primary responsibility in housework and childcare, irrespective of her employment status outside of the home. In Hong Kong society, housework includes the preparation of meals and shopping for food, the maintenance of clean and orderly conditions in the home, and childcare, including the supervision of schoolwork. Yet, the women also frequently get help from other family members reflecting, as Po-king and Ching-kwan suggest, an enduring ethos of familism in contemporary Hong Kong society. Domestic help is also
affordable for many more women in Hong Kong than, for example, in Canada.\(^\text{18}\) However, Salaff (1981) acknowledges that although opportunities for females have widened over the years to increase the woman’s decision making power within the family:

Chinese families in Hong Kong still work as economic entities to accomplish their goals and, as in the past, daughters’ contributions to the ongoing family unit are unquestioned.... (p. 271).

The crucial implication of this statement, of course, is that the woman’s experience within the family remains fundamentally structured by established gendered roles, and yet, because this occurs within the unit of the family, her oppression is invisible. Representations of the Chinese family as a sacrosanct unit (and the discourses of familism inherent in this) can preclude the examination of intrafamily inequalities (see Greenhalgh, 1994). An enduring, romanticised view of the Chinese family obscures the possibility that notions of tradition can be used strategically and oppressively against certain members within (Silvey and Lawson, 1999).

Furthermore, the assumptions of privilege and power that dominate representations of the Chinese middle-class migrant do little to dispel such an uncritical rendering of the family. The ability to exercise significant personal control over decision making is automatically equated, in these accounts, with perceptions of privilege and wealth. This, however, precludes the possibility that the Chinese middle-class family, of a highly modern and cosmopolitan bent, is an oppressive and negative experience for the woman and children within it. Approaching the Chinese family from the perspective of intrahousehold power

\(^{18}\) Home-workers from the Philippines provide an abundant source of cheap domestic labour.
differentials, as described by Lawson (1998), may therefore offer a crucial alternative vantage point from which to view the Astronaut and Satellite variations.

The Social Limits to the Flexible Family:
Migration, the Localisation of Women, and the Astronaut Circumstance

In addition to examining the powerful and flexible strategies of accumulation exercised by the contemporary Chinese middle-class, Ong’s (1999) work has another crucial dimension - highlighting the issue of gender inequalities and providing another key theoretical perspective on the migrant family. She is highly critical of the way in which the “Chinese family,” along with guanxi, have been romanticised - “thoroughly fetishized as objects of cultural analysis” (Nonini and Ong, 1997, p.21) - within scholarly accounts. She argues instead that “the family” should be conceived as one amongst several “discursive tropes,” which operate to limit human agency. It is therefore imperative that detailed empirical analyses of experiences within the family help dispel, or indeed prove the existence of the myth. This is the objective of the following chapters.

Suggesting that tactics of domination, violence, and exploitation may occur within the privileged Chinese family, Ong invokes the concept of “regime” to emphasise the existence of female oppression (see also Ong and Nonini, 1997). She writes:

Family regimes that generally valorize mobile masculinity and localized femininity shape strategies of flexible citizenship, gender division of labor, and relocation in different sites. Transnational publics based on ethnicized mass media, networks of Asian professionals, and circuits of capital add a geometric dimension to male mobility, power and capital vis-à-vis women, not only in the domestic domain but also in transnational production, service, and consumer realms (1999, pp. 20-21).
I want to consider the possibility that the Astronaut and Satellite family forms may epitomise this kind of regime. Certainly they can be seen to utilise strategies of “flexible citizenship” and “relocation.” Existing research points to the significant mobility of men vis-à-vis women and children in families, in addition to a notably gendered division of household labour (Man, 1995; Pe-Pua et al, 1998). It is almost always the man who travels back and forth, between a moneyed and high status lifestyle in Hong Kong or Taiwan and the relaxation of ‘home life’ in Vancouver. In contrast, it is the woman and children who find themselves literally placed (“localized”) in a new country, generally without paid work, domestic help, usually without the aid of friends and the extended family they had experienced hitherto. In the Satellite cases, the children are left without parental guidance and emotional support, often for significant periods at a time. The women in the Astronaut family, and the Satellite children, are notably immobile, and yet continue to be conceived in the majority of literature around middle-class Chinese migration as part of the ‘transnational’ unit of the flexible family.

In the following chapter I will use the empirical material gathered through interviews to first approach the general question of why the Astronaut family in particular has emerged in Vancouver. Reminded of the contradictory media reports presented in chapter one, I ask (in the words of Ronald Skeldon, 1994), are these “reluctant exiles or bold pioneers”? Are they really an example of the flexible, strategising and powerful family that I have profiled, or do they represent something far more fragile? From in-depth interviews with family members, over the next four chapters I hope to insert a crucial notion of human
agency into the wider societal contexts (outlined above), within which individuals necessarily live and act (see Ley 1982, p. 249; Findlay and Li, 1997). What will become clear, through empirical investigation, is that these particular migrants are neither wholly victim nor wholly strategiser, but somewhere in between. It is the important realities of people’s lives, omitted by theoretical abstraction and various forms of reductionism, which I hope to elucidate within this thesis.
CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARY CHINESE MIGRATION AND THE ASTRONAUT PHENOMENON IN VANCOUVER

Recent Chinese Migration to Vancouver

This chapter details the institutional context of Chinese migration in the 1980s and 1990s, focussing on Canadian policy, and specifically its impact on immigration to Vancouver, British Columbia. What I hope to demonstrate in this first section is the intersecting relationship between changing immigration law, conditions in Vancouver, and the growth of the new and mobile middle-classes in Hong Kong and Taiwan (as discussed in chapter two). I emphasise how Canadian government has sought, through immigration policy, to achieve "a perfect marriage of capital, labor and migration," (Smart, 1994; p.117): its intention to attract a specific type of immigrant with considerable wealth and/or skills. The middle-classes from Hong Kong and Taiwan have been especially implicated in subsequent patterns of immigration to Canada.

Historically, Vancouver’s population (and Canadian population more generally) has been founded significantly on immigration from Europe. In 1921, for example, the population of Vancouver was 163,000, and 80 per cent of this figure claimed to be of "British

---

1 The research for this thesis was conducted within the Greater Vancouver Regional District, British Columbia.
origin” (Ley, 1995). Immigrants of Chinese origin have been excluded or discouraged at various points throughout Canada’s history.²

Figure 1. Immigration to Canada by source area at five-year intervals, 1961 – 1996. Source: Ley (1999)

A crucial change occurred in 1967. Resulting from a White Paper on Immigration, a ‘point system’ was introduced that transformed the selection procedure; potential immigrants were subsequently evaluated on the specific skills they could bring into Canada, in accordance with the needs of the national economy. Migrants were judged on a range of expedient criteria, such as age, the level of education, occupational status, etc.

² In 1885 a head-tax on Chinese immigrants was introduced for the purpose of restricting the number of Chinese migrants entering Canada. The Chinese Exclusion Act operated from 1923 – 1947. “According to this law, the entry into Canada of ‘persons of Chinese origin or decent irrespective of allegiance or citizenship’ would be restricted to diplomatic corps, children born in Canada to parents of Chinese race or descent, merchants, and students. All other Chinese were in essence excluded from entry.” (Li, 1998; p. 34 – 35). See also Anderson (1991) for the historical geography of Chinese exclusion and marginalisation in B.C..
family members in Canada and language ability (Smart, 1994). As suggested in figure 1, the new policy signified an end to a selection procedure that discriminated explicitly on the basis of country of origin, and resulted in a historically significant change in the major source area of immigration to Canada (Asia was no longer excluded on this basis). In 1977, provisions for an entrepreneur category were explicitly introduced under the Business Immigration Programme, and subsequently modified in 1986 to include a second investor category, thereby making the wealth of migrants a more expressly worthy asset. Together, the skilled and the business migrants fall within ‘economic-class’ immigration according to official classification. There has been a recent growth in economic-class immigration – rooted in these changes in immigration policy since 1967 – to which the emergence of Astronaut families in Vancouver can be directly linked.

The generation of significant wealth in the 1980s within the four tigers of Asia-Pacific (noted in chapter two) did not go unnoticed by provincial and municipal governments in British Columbia, who had an eye on bringing some of this money to Vancouver. In the 1980s and 1990s, lower-level government paralleled efforts at the federal level, making explicit attempts in trade missions to attract Asian investors to Vancouver. Katharyne Mitchell, for example, notes “a campaign to sell Vancouver as a secure, profitable and livable city in which to do business and reside” (1993, p. 266). She continues: “The major reason for the heightened interest in attracting Hong Kong capitalists to Vancouver is

---

3 To give an indication of the economic desirability of immigrants under the Business Migration Programme, in the investor category, since implementation in 1986 over $4.22 billion has been invested (according to amounts specified on applications) by 16,417 investors participating (Citizenship and Immigration Canada).
4 The ‘economic class’ of immigration under current Canadian policy constitutes the sub-classes of: ‘assisted relatives’, ‘other independents’, ‘entrepreneurs’, ‘self employment’ and ‘investor’. The latter three categories fall under the Business Immigration Programme.
quite simple...there is a lot of money there" (ibid. p. 266). The targets of campaigns were, of course, the “new rich” profiled in the previous chapter; the entrepreneurial middle-class population of Hong Kong who possessed significant financial capital (which they did not mind spending) and technical, entrepreneurial, or scientific expertise (Robison and Goodman, 1996; Lo, 1996). More recently, Taiwan has also become a significant source of skilled (and moneyed) immigration.

It would seem at first sight that the political strategy worked. Statistics indicate that a significant number of immigrants from East Asia – in the business but also skilled categories – landed in Vancouver in the 1990s.\(^5\)

---

\(^5\) Citizenship and Immigration Canada provided the data used here (including data in charts). It should be noted that although business class immigration led figures in the early 1990s, in the later 1990s this was overtaken by skilled migration. From 1995 to 1997, skilled migration to B.C. increased annually from 11, 670 in 1995 to 16, 435 in 1996, to 18, 171 in 1997. This latter class has a larger proportion from Taiwan than Hong Kong, and this difference is significant and has implications for the causes of the Astronaut phenomenon. I will consider this distinction later on in the chapter.
Of the total number of immigrants to Vancouver in 1995 (38,864), for example, Hong Kong and Taiwan accounted for 29.9 per cent and 13.6 per cent, respectively – constituting the top two highest source areas by number. Within the province of British Columbia, Vancouver was overwhelmingly the primary destination, receiving around 98 per cent of Hong Kong and Taiwanese migrants. Combined, Taiwan and Hong Kong represented over 71 per cent of all economic-class migrants to Vancouver. As for the wealth so desired by the Canadian state, the financial capacity of this group is significant. For example, in 1997, the total net worth declared by migrants to B.C. was $859 million by entrepreneurs and $1,209 million by investors.

As the statistics indicate, in contrast to the historical patterns of Chinese immigration, Vancouver has recently witnessed a substantial influx of relatively wealthy and/or skilled Chinese migrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan - suggesting the international mobility of the new middle classes of these regions. Significantly, it was around the time of this

---

6 This date is intended to indicate the time around which many of the research participants entered Canada.
increased immigration that academic accounts of the Astronaut family began to emerge, and I suggest that the two are inextricably linked. Before turning to the empirical findings of the thesis, I will first consider briefly what statistical data are available more generally on the Astronaut phenomenon.

Available Statistics on the Astronaut Family

Whilst anecdotal, journalistic and academic reports leave little doubt that the Astronaut family is both important and worthy of attention (although also significantly under-examined), specifying the phenomenon numerically is problematic. In New Zealand, Ho et al (1997) have developed a methodology for linking individual migrants to their family and household contexts, using data derived from the 1991 New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings. For this they utilised Supercross - the standard census tabulation package available to Statistics New Zealand - and their aim was to identify “astronaut” families amongst recent Hong Kong immigrants. In result, they found 732 families containing Hong Kong children living with their parents: eighty-two percent were two-parent families, fifteen percent were one-parent families, and three percent were what they define as ‘non-family units’. For Vancouver, however, there are no figures for the number of lone-spouses with partners working abroad. The best that can be done is to infer the phenomenon from the data available in census statistics. Skeldon (1997) has attempted this task with 1991 census data for Hong Kong immigrants in Vancouver and Toronto. Looking at the age structures of ethnic Chinese born in Hong Kong and non-Chinese born in places other than Toronto and Vancouver, he observes a notable female bias for both cities in Hong Kong-born populations over twenty-five years
old. Compared to an almost equal number of males and females amongst non-Chinese in Vancouver, there were only eighty-five males for every one hundred females amongst the Hong Kong-born. Skeldon’s claim that these figures may represent cases of Astronaut families is based on the assumption that it is the male head of household who will work in the country of origin, and consequently it is the wife who will remain in Canada. He further notes that the trend is more marked for Vancouver than for Toronto, perhaps reflecting the higher number of economic-class immigrants (those who may wish to maintain a high status job in Hong Kong) in the former profile. If his analysis is correct, the number of Astronaut families within these two Canadian cities is significant.

The difficulties associated with quantifying the Astronaut phenomenon, however, necessitate that my research takes the existence of the Astronaut phenomenon as given. Quantification of the phenomena is not the objective of the thesis. Instead, the research utilises qualitative data to try and gain a more in-depth understanding of the situation; why it comes to be, and what are the experiences of those who remain behind in Vancouver.

**Research Methods**

The empirical data for chapters three to five of the thesis derive from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty-eight adult Chinese immigrants who live in Vancouver and are currently part of an Astronaut family, or have recently been so (i.e. their partner has recently joined them). Some participants were interviewed on more than one

---

7 On a national scale, no exact figures are available because departures from Canada are not recorded.

8 Skeldon does not give actual numerical figures for these proportions.
occasion. Participants were identified using a snowball sampling technique, although several different ‘starting points’ for this were used, including two different ESL classes, and attendance at the LEAD programme, and the Taiwanese Canadian Cultural Society. The migrant families contacted are considered recent immigrants: twenty-one participants have been in Canada for five years or less, and twenty-six for less than ten years. Fourteen participants are from Hong Kong and fourteen from Taiwan. Twenty-four of the twenty-eight were women \(^9\) - thirteen and eleven from Hong Kong and Taiwan respectively. The immigration class of participants was as follows: twenty-seven of twenty-eight families were classed as ‘economic’ immigrants: 13 ‘independent’, 5 ‘entrepreneur’, 7 ‘investor,’ 1 ‘self-employed’ and 1 ‘assisted relative’. One participant entered Canada under the ‘social and humanitarian’ category as a ‘family reunification’.\(^{10}\)

Interviews were conducted specifically with the lone-spouse of the migrant couple who resides more or less permanently within the Greater Vancouver Regional District (G.V.R.D.).\(^{11}\) All participants had children under the age of fifteen living with them. Interviews were conducted within the G.V.R.D. between June 1999 and February 2000, all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in full. Six interviews were carried out wholly or partly in Chinese, with the assistance of a translator; the rest were carried out in English. Interviews lasted one hour on average. All participants signed a consent form

---

\(^9\) Ho et al. (1997) similarly found from their questionnaire survey that the majority of astronauts were males.

\(^{10}\) Knowledge of the immigration class of participants gives an important insight into their socio-economic status. Previously, investors required successful business experience and a net worth of at least CA$ 500,000. In B.C. the minimum investment amount is $350,000. The present requirements (implemented in April 1999) for investors are that a CA$ 400,000 payment be made to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which is then ‘locked in’ for 5 years without interest. Investor minimum net worth is CA $ 800,000. Entrepreneurs “require enough money, transferable to Canada, to start a business in Canada...This business must bring significant economic benefits to Canada,” and “a person with specific occupational skills and experience may qualify as an independent immigrant.” (http://cicnet.ci.gc.ca)
before the interview proceeded, guaranteeing their anonymity and their ability to withdraw from the interview at any time. All names used here (unless otherwise stated) have therefore been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

The Astronaut Family: A ‘Strategy’ or a ‘Syndrome’?

Immigration statistics, of course, do not explain why the Astronaut family form has emerged. Why are a significant number of economic-class immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan continuing to work in their country of origin? Why does a family migrate to Vancouver, and yet accept the absence of one family member? The question of ‘why’ is the focus of the remainder of this chapter. Many historical patterns of migration have involved the separation of husband and wife for economic reasons. Peter S. Li (1998) writes: “except in isolated cases, the Chinese-Canadian family as an intact unit did not emerge in Canada until after the Second World War” (p. 61). Politically imposed constraints have historically prevented the Chinese husband and wife from living together in Canada; between 1923 and 1947 - the period of the Chinese Exclusion Act - women were legally prevented from joining their immigrant husbands. In the contemporary period of international migration, the migration of one family member and the subsequent sending of remittances to the family back home can still be observed. What is unique to the Astronaut situation is the inversion of these usual patterns: in this case, the whole family migrates, and the household head subsequently returns to the country of origin to work.

11 The one exception to this was Den, who takes turns with his wife to run the business in Hong Kong and stay in Vancouver. They alternate roles every 1 ½ months.
The question as to why the Astronaut phenomenon has emerged in Vancouver in recent years can, I suggest, be answered with one of two different responses; each reflecting a distinct interpretation of the role of the Canadian state and the agency of the migrant family. In the first response, the Astronaut situation is conceived as a "syndrome" (Skeldon, 1995) – a result of the important observation that economic-class immigrants to Canada face significant barriers when setting up a business or transferring their professional qualifications (Smart, 1994; Lam, 1994; Ley, 1999; see also Mak, 1997, for similar observations on Australia). Failure to find adequate work thus forces one family member to return to the country of origin. In enduring the separation of family members, spouses in the Astronaut circumstance frequently suffer loneliness, isolation and other practical and emotional difficulties. A second, significantly different interpretation of circumstances, however, has also been made, expressed in the concern about "unscrupulous immigrants...bent on taking advantage of the Canadian immigration program," (Smart, 1994; p. 117) and reflected in media reports claiming that "Most 'astronaut' families cheat on their taxes..." 12. The implication of this second interpretation is that the Astronaut family is a deliberate and strategic choice on the part of the family. Should the phenomenon therefore be more accurately conceived as an example of the flexible, transnational strategizing of an elite Chinese population rather than a "syndrome"? Using evidence gathered through interviews with the members of Astronaut families in Vancouver, this question and its possible answers will be examined.

12 See chapter one.
Barriers to Employment and Success in Vancouver

In various media and academic writing, strong and unequivocal connections have been frequently made between recent Chinese migration to Vancouver, wealth, and family power (Mitchell, 1997a; Olds, 1998; also Lam, 1994 on Hong Kong migration to Toronto). The so-called ‘monster house’ issue, for example, revolved around exactly such representations and brought them firmly into the domain of public awareness and debate. In a recent article, David Ley (1999; see also 2000) addresses these common depictions of the powerful immigrant, attacking what he calls “the myth of the immigrant overclass.” In opposition to the myth, he highlights the experiences of recent business-class immigrants to Vancouver, revealed through interviews, and paints an alternative picture of significant human fragility. He suggests the trauma of under-achievement – the loss of self-esteem and depression - that has beset many apparently wealthy Chinese immigrants who have experienced business failure, and often the subsequent adoption of a relatively low-status job. Writes Ley:

The modest economic achievement of business class immigrants in the 1995 tax year is striking. Among none of the annual cohorts landing between 1980 and 1995 did more than 50 per cent of the Principal Applicants in the business class report any employment earnings whatever in 1995, the lowest proportion of all immigration classes (p. 16).

13 The immigration of large numbers of Hong Kong Chinese in the early 1990s, who chose to display their wealth in large houses, incited a heated response from long-time residents of certain areas of the City of Vancouver. In what Ley (1995) describes as a “moral panic”, Anglo-Canadian residents (the traditional elite) expressed the sentiment that their very identity was being threatened by the removal of trees and the building of monster-houses. The perception of the power, exercised through wealth, of recent Chinese immigrants underlay these debates.

14 Statistical evidence for the poor economic performance of business-class immigrants in Canada can be found in available data on taxation.
In examining the business immigration programme, Smart (1994) finds that part of the problem lies in the inherent contradictions within the programme itself – and the inability of immigrants to be truly ‘entrepreneurial’. She writes:

The stipulation of the business immigration programme that entrepreneur immigrants must be bound to a specific geographical location for a specific business proposal approved by the government a year or two before immigration is untenable. The bureaucracy does not allow the immigrants the freedom to exercise their entrepreneurship that is crucial to business success (p. 117).

Tania Boyer (1996) has observed very similar trends in underemployment amongst Taiwanese immigrants to Auckland, New Zealand. Focussing instead on the independent-class of migrant, she writes; “By the end of June 1995, over 21,000 Taiwanese had been granted permanent residence in New Zealand on the basis of their skills, qualifications and work experience. The study shows that although migrants expected a fall in income (the necessary ‘price’ to pay for an improved quality of life), as well as some language difficulties,

few immigrants were prepared for the magnitude of the drop in income, the hardship it would bring and the heavy reliance this would place on their remaining investments in Taiwan. Despite being based on a point system which rewarded education, few migrants were aware that gaining points and gaining recognition of qualifications by professional bodies were two quite different things. As a result, many immigrants have been denied access to employment opportunities commensurate with their qualifications (Boyer, 1996; p. 60).

The blame for this situation is again placed at the feet of the State:

The biggest single culprit appears to be the immigration policy, which at the time gave points for qualifications for which the Taiwanese immigrant at least found little demand, and by so weighting academic qualifications implicitly gave immigrants unrealistic impressions about the ease of finding a job or establishing an entrepreneurial venture (Boyer, 1996; p. 76).
Lam (1994) has considered these observations and linked them to the causes of the Astronaut family amongst Hong Kong immigrants in Toronto. Based on his own interviews with business-class migrants, he is led to conclude thus:

A far more intractable dilemma impacting on these immigrants’ settlement is related to the receiving society’s institutional barriers and practices. The well-paid jobs and profitable business ventures in Hong Kong compared with Canada enticed some of the immigrants to become “astronauts”. However, the interview data revealed that, if the previously acquired qualifications, training, skills, and experience of the respondents had received appropriate means of accreditation and they had correspondingly obtained comparable jobs with equivalent remuneration, some of these families (at least seven in the study) would not have become “astronaut” households. With years of working experience in their professions (social work, teaching, administration, medicine and health), performing menial tasks in Toronto (demotion in occupational status) may have convinced them to consider other available alternatives (p. 177 – 178).

He places the blame implicitly with the State:

Clearly then, the institutional barriers and practices in the receiving society have resulted in forcing these immigrants to jet back and forth as the only viable alternative in their struggle to secure a safe haven in Canada and to maintain a comfortable living standard by continuing to work in Hong Kong. The “choice” has been made by these reluctant migrants, but the long-term effect of this choice on their settlement in Toronto remains to be seen (p. 178).

The implication of many of these arguments is that immigrants are “reluctant exiles” (Skeldon, 1994) – residents of Hong Kong who have been ‘forced’ to leave their home because of political uncertainty surrounding 1997,15 and who subsequently fall victims of

---

15 This recent international migration of highly skilled Chinese, especially from Hong Kong and Taiwan, is impelled by a crucial political dimension. Political instability, and the risk posed by uncertainty about the future of the territories, has for many been a major factor in the decision to emigrate. It has been widely noted that, for the professional and wealthy of Hong Kong, 1997 was a significant concern, and in the years immediately preceding this, the high numbers of people emigrating from Hong Kong were unprecedented. It reached a peak in 1990 when around 62 000 Hong Kong residents emigrated (Lo, 1996). From an in-depth study of thirty families in Hong Kong, conducted in the early 1990s, Salaff and Wong (1995) were able to suggest the main reasons why migration was sought. “Affluent” respondents, they argued, were less concerned with democratic freedoms than the implications of the hand-over for the political-economy; specifically the potential affects on administration, legal and public security, local prosperity and the reliability of investments (p. 210). At the same time as the anxiety around 1997 grew in Hong Kong, so
a strategic immigration policy. The state is unconcerned for their welfare after they have arrived and invested. Faced with employment difficulties in the new country, the immigrant family must rethink their circumstances of settlement. One option often subsequently pursued by recent migrants is reflected in the high rate of return migration since 1992, observed for the Hong Kong-born immigrant population of both Canada and Australia (Skeldon, 1994; Mak, 1997; Yang, 1998\textsuperscript{16}). A second option is for the family to remain in Canada and the wage earner to take either ‘early retirement’, or a job of significantly lower status, or to continue to look for a desirable job and accept unemployment in the mean time. The stresses caused by this second option - to remain in Vancouver - are illustrated by Ley (1999), who describes the loss of self-esteem and motivation among many Chinese entrepreneurial immigrants who have accepted jobs below their own perceived status. A third option open to the immigrant family – and the one that principally concerns me here - is to become an ‘Astronaut’ family. One partner can return to the country of origin to work, regaining his former wages and social status. This can continue until enough savings have been accrued to allow the family to retire in Canada, or at least until the citizenship has been achieved and the desirability of settlement in Canada can be subsequently reassessed. All three of these options suggest a ‘fragility’ thesis, whereby the immigrant family is conceived as a victim of unforeseen

\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{World Journal Daily News} reported in June 1998 an increase in return migration to Hong Kong from Vancouver. Yang writes: “Those who are returning are mainly disappointed by the local situation in Vancouver. They are ‘forced’ to return for they could hardly make a living here.”
circumstances. The Astronaut phenomenon reflects, in part, institutional barriers to employment, which have thwarted the intention of permanent settlement in Canada.

Evidence for the fragility thesis was found in three of the twenty-eight families interviewed for this research. Claire and her husband entered Canada as a business-class family. Their main reasons for coming to Canada were “the education,” and also because the daughter of the family suffers from asthma, was physically very weak, and Vancouver was perceived to have clean air. Claire’s husband stayed in Vancouver for three years, trying to start a business, but he failed, finding that “the system is different, the rules are different, and especially the connections”. She said: “It was really hard and difficult...to find a job here. So we had to really, you know, separate.” His failure to succeed in his business venture left them with no option other than to become an Astronaut family. In the second case, Fiona and her husband landed in Vancouver four years ago with the intention that they would open a business; making a fresh start in their own lives, and, like Claire, hoping to provide their children with better educational opportunities. Unusually, Fiona was the principal applicant for immigration and her husband was the dependent. After several months of inquiries, they found that they were unable to open the type of business they desired and, in addition, they were warned repeatedly of the difficulty of succeeding in business in Vancouver. Fiona told me:

A lot of friends told us, ‘put your money in a bank. They give you interest. If you put it in a business you lose the lot’...A lot of people told us, and they were businessmen here...and they’d lost their money...We just don’t find anything that we...we feel comfortable to manage. So after a long talk we just decided that he would go back.
Her husband subsequently returned to Taiwan, where he was able to continue with his profession as a doctor. She explained to me why her family, and many families from Taiwan, chose the Astronaut situation after immigrating to Canada.

I think... probably we can make a survival – we can survive here. But it won’t be enough for us...People in Taiwan have a lot of savings. We feel comfortable to have a lot of savings, but we don’t here...We just feel comfortable if one of the spouse...spouses can have a better job, so we can make more choices. We can choose to go back or we can stay here...That’s my thought in the beginning, but after two years, I don’t think it’s right.

The image of the ‘flexible family’ is evoked in Fiona’s account with her initial belief that the Astronaut situation would present the family with more choices in the future. She believed it could provide the financial security wrought by the “better job” in Taiwan in addition to the educational opportunities and prospects for a new life in Vancouver. After two years of the transnational family arrangement, however, it is apparent that Fiona feels this decision to have been a mistake.

Although Elizabeth’s husband kept his business in Hong Kong, he made significant effort to establish work in Vancouver, yet he was hindered by the lack of ‘contacts’ previously available to him:

Sometimes, when he’s out of a job, he went to the McDonald’s restaurant on Main Street near Chinatown hoping to meet other tradesmen to look for a job...He was new and he didn’t know English, the jobs he could get were very small ones...or ones that were in a great distance...Like North Vancouver, West Vancouver...

Witnessing her husband’s suffering, she suffered also:

There was not much I could do. I prepared dinner and when he couldn’t make it I was waiting and waiting - longing for his return. Many times it was very late...He’s working so hard outside, he sometimes found it depressing. He
didn’t want me to call him, so he had no pager, no cellular phone, I could only wait for him at home.

Their relationship came under strain as a result of this depressed situation. She said; “he could not stay here any longer...working hard for nothing...he started staying in Hong Kong for a longer period of time...I find our relationship better during his absence...Since he stays longer in Hong Kong I am gradually getting out of the miserable past.” As these three case examples indicate, the barriers to employment faced by the “new rich” of the Asian tigers after migration to Vancouver puts them in a much more vulnerable position than is often assumed (see Ley, 1999).

Anecdotal and academic research together provide sufficient evidence to justify the claim that this experience of business failure is a common occurrence among middle-class Chinese immigrants to Vancouver. However, the interviews that I conducted with immigrant families did not suggest that business or investment failure – or the failure of skilled professionals to transfer their skills – was in fact the main reason why the Astronaut option was pursued. It was clear that the majority of participants were aware, when they arrived in Vancouver, that their spouse would not be remaining with them. In other words, the Astronaut option was planned before migration, and not the result of a failure to find work in Canada. As one interviewee exclaimed:

The main reason why both stay here is that they can’t find any profits and job or any future in Hong Kong. Then they have to stay – both stay here. If they can find a job or make money in somewhere else or in Hong Kong, no one would like to stay here, for a man. (Emma)
If money is being made in the country of origin, Emma here argues, then the normal situation is for the man of the family to remain working there. The migration of the family to another continent does not affect this circumstance. This observation is significant because it may shed some light on Ley's (1999) discovery that many business-class migrants are economically underachieving in Canada, according to taxation statistics. The low earnings reflect earnings in Canada. Yet one participant admitted (off record) that what is earned abroad (i.e. the principal household earnings in the case of the Astronaut family) is frequently not declared to Revenue Canada, drawing on his own actions and those of his friends in support of his claim. Of course, one declaration certainly does not validate a generalised statement regarding the practices of Astronaut families. The empirical data reveal a complex picture; there are varying motives and varying personal implications in choosing the Astronaut option, and no evidence to suggest that most or even many of these families are 'cheating the system'. Nevertheless, this claim is interesting in the suggestion of the strategic nature of migrant transnationalism - in ways that are not always necessarily legal. Since my intention is to examine the utility of the notion of the flexible strategies of a Chinese transnational elite (Ong, 1999) in explaining the occurrence of the Astronaut family this is surely an important observation. In this situation, the Chinese family unit becomes the transnational family arrangement par excellence, and places the migrant – not the State – in much more control of the situation than the image of the fragile migrant would imply.

---

17 This was the concern of the 1994 *Vancouver Sun* article outlined in chapter one.
The Astronaut Family as a Migration Strategy

Now I turn to the second of the two responses offered as an explanation to the Astronaut phenomenon earlier in the chapter; that the Astronaut family employs a migration strategy planned to maximise both financial and cultural accumulation within the family unit. It stands in contrast to a traditional conception of family migration - as a discrete move from one country to another in search of relatively permanent settlement – in its transnational and potentially impermanent nature. For the majority of interviewees, there would be no settlement of the whole family together in the immediate future. Lisa’s husband stayed in Vancouver only one week, before returning to Taiwan after the wife and son had found a house. Lisa knew that they would be apart after migration; they had discussed the situation at length in Taiwan. They “knew” that the husband would be unable to find a good job in Canada, and so there was no question of his giving up his work in Taiwan. Concern over the political situation made migration nevertheless desirable. This prior ‘knowledge’ of the difficulties faced by immigrants in Canada was commonly articulated. Joan explained why her husband continued to work in Taiwan after the family moved to Vancouver:

Because he couldn’t find a better job than Taiwan.

JW: Did he look for one when he came over [to Vancouver]?

No. Before we came to Vancouver we had travelled here a lot of times and we got information. It’s difficult for him...so he has to go back to Taiwan.

Cheryl came to Canada with two young children, in the full knowledge that her husband would continue to work for his parents’ company in Taiwan. His English is not good

18 In terms of the legality of the arrangement, it must also be borne in mind that the Astronaut situation is often contrary to fulfilling the residency requirements of citizenship in Canada.
enough, she told me, and they both knew that it is difficult for the immigrant to find work in Canada. Recent migrants, it would seem, have much more information about the nature of employment in Canada than has been previously thought. Claire and her husband had worked hard to establish their business in Taiwan, and had thought about giving it up so that the whole family could move to Canada:

Of course we want to give it up and then the whole family reunited. But the reality, if you do this and then it’s so difficult to find a job in here...What can my husband do? So my husband and I think, okay...maybe when the kids are grown up – maybe after one or two years – you will come back...more often to visit kids and the family...When we dismiss the business, you know, so many people can’t find a job and...Suddenly, you know, how can life just carry on?...So we don’t have choice, to tell you the truth.

Choosing the Astronaut option does not just reflect the assumption that employment in Canada will be difficult to find - salary and status are also important considerations. As Ley discovered in his 1999 examination of business migrants to Canada, wealthy immigrants are often found working in jobs of significantly lower wages with much diminished social prestige than they previously held in their country of origin. This understanding – again formulated prior to migration - was articulated by several participants. For example:

I think...if we do want to find a job here, I think most of the people can, but probably just a very low-end job. Probably they’ll get seven or eight dollars an hour, but in comparison to the salary in Taiwan, it’s...very low. (Fiona)

For Fiona and her family, the decision to adopt the Astronaut situation was based upon the desire to accumulate savings, facilitating greater choice in the future. Jill’s husband is a marketing manager with “good pay” in Hong Kong. She has been in Vancouver with her son for two years and nine months. She explained why her husband would not consider attempting to find employment in Canada:
He knows he can’t get...He couldn’t easy to find a good job from here...and better salary. Because especially his age is over forty, so I think too hard.

JW: Did any of his friends try and get jobs in Canada?

Yes. They could get jobs, but the salary is not good.

In several cases the ‘transnational’ business strategy is epitomised when couples have a business in both Canada and the country of origin simultaneously. When Barbara and her family migrated to Vancouver, her husband would spend roughly three weeks in Hong Kong and three weeks in Canada, taking care of a business in both countries. The business in Canada, however, was not doing well - a fact that they blamed on high provincial taxes in British Columbia19 - and her husband subsequently closed it down. His business is now based solely in Hong Kong. In a similar situation, Den entered Canada as an investor, becoming a shareholder in a company producing cardboard boxes, whilst keeping a business in Hong Kong. He decided to end his involvement with the Canadian company over a year ago. He had lost money in it, he told me, and the demands of his Hong Kong company prevented him from spending the necessary time in Canada. As these examples illustrate, the overseas business remained a priority even after migration to Canada.

Not only was prior knowledge of the business and investment opportunities in Canada demonstrated; participants who hold professional jobs in their country of origin were also aware of the problems of transferring professional qualifications overseas (Boyer, 1996). Maria’s husband is a gynaecologist and obstetrician in Taiwan. When the family migrated

---

19 Income tax in Hong Kong, at fifteen percent is less than a third of the marginal rate for moderately successful business persons in Vancouver.
to Canada, for the children's education and concern over crime in Taiwan, he did not try
to find work in Vancouver - aware that he would have to "start at the beginning" if he
attempted to transfer his qualifications to Canada. In a similar situation, Fiona's husband
returned to Taiwan to work as a doctor. He did not even consider continuing his
profession in Vancouver.

When asked if her husband planned to join her in Vancouver, Joan answered; "he will be
here, but after he retired..." This will be in six or seven years time, she predicts. On
several occasions participants expressed the sentiment that Vancouver 'is a good place to
retire to.' The attractive environment and perceived leisurely lifestyle mean that the
Astronaut option is sometimes pursued to this end, when enough money has been
accumulated, the husband will then join his family in Vancouver and enjoy a relaxing
retirement in beautiful surroundings. Den, who has a business in Hong Kong but spends
significant time in Vancouver, reflected on his reasons for living the Astronaut existence:
"I like the living style in here [Vancouver]...But I like to keep my business...For
retirement I like here". People do not come to Canada, he told me, to do business. Sarah
and her husband planned to come to Vancouver to live as a family; her husband wanted
to take early retirement, but since his company would not grant approval for this he was
forced to keep working in Hong Kong or face the loss of his pension. He has to wait five
to six years before he can retire. In the meantime, he is an 'Astronaut,' and has not
considered seeking work in Vancouver. In another example, Emma's husband kept a
business in Hong Kong when Emma and her children migrated to Vancouver. When the
business almost failed, he decided to take early retirement. He is not yet fifty years old,
and yet has not worked at all since moving to Vancouver two years ago. I asked Emma if her husband would like to get work:

Of course he wants to get work, you know, but it's not easy. Especially at his age. He's nearly fifty and he's not a professional – just a businessman.

JW: So it would be hard to start up a business... Has he tried?

Never tried, because we can see it's no use to run a small business here. It only costs you time, energy, but with no return... We had better keep the money.

Like many others, Emma and her husband entered Canada with the perception that pursuing work is a useless option, and so it is not even attempted. Several participants mentioned that their husband intended to invest money in the stock market, after he retires to Vancouver; it is hoped that this will be enough to keep the family in Canada without the need to seek paid employment.

As I have demonstrated through the interviews, the Astronaut family is often not a result of failed attempts to find work in Vancouver, but is pre-planned, and maintained for more strategic reasons than a simple desire to become a Canadian citizen.20 I will now consider the reasons motivating the decision to migrate to Canada in the first place. Aside from retirement, what drives a family to migrate if they have no intention of finding work in the new country? The extent to which migration - and the act of seeking citizenship - can be conceived as ‘strategic’ is difficult to determine. However, commonly articulated

---

20 Concern over so-called instrumental citizenship vis-à-vis notions of belonging and national identity is a prevalent contemporary debate (see Kymlicka and Norman, 1994). Ip et al (1997) discuss this issue with regards to recent Asian immigrants to Australia.
motivating factors offer some clue.\textsuperscript{21} Here I will review the primary reasons offered by participants.

**Reasons for Immigration:**

**Political Uncertainty**

In existing analyses of the Astronaut family (Lam, 1994; Man, 1993; Pe-Pua et al, 1998), concern over the political stability of the home region – namely Hong Kong – is understood to be the major reason for emigration (see chapter two). The subsequent adoption of the Astronaut family form was linked to a desire to accumulate as much wealth as possible in the form of savings before 1997, when the family will settle more or less permanently in the new country of destination. For those interviewed from Hong Kong and Taiwan, concern over the political stability of the area was certainly very important.\textsuperscript{22} Sylvie, from Hong Kong, here expresses a widely held sentiment:

\begin{quote}
I'm not really confident in...the leadership of the Chinese government, because they change, on and off; they often change their mind...They don't have the definite laws or rules to govern the place...Not democratic and not systematic...If I immigrate then they have choices to stay in Hong Kong later, or in Canada, but if I didn't do that, they've got no choice. No citizenship.
\end{quote}

Hannah, also from Hong Kong, said simply; “I don’t want to live under the government of China, so we have to find a place where we can enjoy our life and where our children can live safely”. For those from Hong Kong, the 1997 hand-over was frequently

\textsuperscript{21} It is of note that not one of the twenty-eight participants gave ‘economic betterment’ as a motivating factor behind their decision to migrate.

\textsuperscript{22} Eleven participants gave political concerns as one of the major reasons for their migration.
mentioned. Participants from Taiwan similarly voiced political concerns. Rose had been in Vancouver for three years and one month at the time of the interview. She has two young children, one five and one seven years old.

JW: When you came to Canada you knew that you’d be living apart from your husband?

Yeah.

JW: So why, then, come to Canada? Why not stay together?

I think a lot of Taiwanese, they want to come because passport...because we worry about China...So my husband say, ‘first you want to get a second passport and then maybe we can go back to Taiwan.

Although the idea of permanent settlement in Vancouver was therefore not always planned, it remained a possibility. In the cases when political worries were overwhelmingly stressed, it is perhaps more accurate to conceive of a Canadian passport as a desire for security and safety for the family and not as an example of the strategic accumulation of cultural or financial capital. The way in which citizenship may aid financial accumulation was suggested by one participant, Anne, who alluded that a Canadian passport would greatly facilitate her husband’s business-deals between Taiwan and China. She clearly does not want to live in Canada and views her three years in Vancouver as a means to this end. This, however, was not a reason for migration that was often given; the financially strategic benefits of a Canadian passport were much less important than other motivating factors.

---

23 The Chinese government is increasingly threatening force against Taiwan if the region continues to profess political independence from China. This threat is likely to increase in the near future, as Taiwan has recently democratically elected a pro-independence leader.
Environment and Lifestyle

More common reference was made to the perceived desirability of Vancouver's "environment" than to the financially strategic advantages of a Canadian passport. Sometimes participants expressed a concern about the level of crime in their country of origin; Vancouver was perceived as relatively "safe" for their children. The "beautiful scenery" was mentioned on several occasions. Barbara and her husband had read newspaper and magazine articles on Vancouver before migrating, they had images of Canada from the movies, and asked friends who had already migrated: "they say that they come to Canada for living – the lifestyle." Several women were concerned for the health of their children. In Taiwan, specifically, the air quality is understood to be especially poor. Asthma problems among children were given by three participants as a major reason why they chose to come to Vancouver. In addition, several women mentioned the desire to change their lifestyle. As in the last example, it is not clear that conceiving these reasons in terms of the acquisition of cultural or financial capital would necessarily aid an understanding of this migration process.

Education and Cultural Capital

One major reason for migration, however, overshadowed all others - both in terms of the frequency with which it was mentioned in interviews and in the significance participants placed upon it. This reason is clearly the epitome of migration for the sake of 'cultural capital'. The majority of participants came to Canada for the sake of the children's "education"; 24 a factor that has been mentioned, but not prioritised in most previous

---

24 Sixteen participants made explicit reference to the 'education' of their children as being a major reason for migration.
accounts of the Astronaut family. I want to suggest that this is a particularly recent migration trend, in which families from Taiwan are especially implicated.

In explanation of these findings, I return to the theoretical ideas of Ong (1999), particularly her claim that much middle-class Hong Kong migration in the contemporary period is motivated by the desire to accumulate some form of 'cultural capital'. She writes: “For many ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, both the well-off and the not-so-rich, strategies of accumulation begin with the acquisition of a Western education” (p. 95). She is drawing heavily on the ideas of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), whose examination of culture, through an ethnographic study of social class in contemporary France, highlights the importance of certain acquired cultural traits and signifiers in social class distinctions. The importance of “education” in his analysis is explicit - both in terms of the acquisition of a distinct qualification, and also in terms of some notion of the learning of ‘taste’.

It would appear that amongst those interviewed, the concept of ‘education’ retains a certain ambiguity. It is not simply reference to a specific educational qualification or system found in Canada, vis-à-vis that found in Hong Kong or Taiwan, although this is sometimes true. Rather, three main conceptions were implied: a) the nature of the actual

---

25 The exception is a study by Ho et al. (1997) who found that, in the reasons given by Chinese immigrants to New Zealand who similarly chose the Astronaut option, “education” was the response given by the majority of Taiwanese respondents. This was significantly lower for Hong Kong migrants, who overwhelmingly prioritised political considerations. Other academic accounts have looked only at Hong Kong migrant families, and overwhelmingly prioritised political factors surrounding 1997 in explanation of why migration was sought. More recently – especially for those who came to Canada after 1997 – the political factor has been less important. For the immigrant families from Taiwan, political considerations are not unimportant, but neither are they the main reason. I suggest that migration from Taiwan is much more strongly motivated by the desire for ‘cultural capital’.
educational system; b) the cultural meaning of the educational qualification; and c) the implications of living and schooling in Canada for the opportunity to be fluent in English. These in many cases overlapped in participants' explanations. I will give brief examples of each from the interviews.

Several participants implied that in order for their children to be able to continue in higher education, migration to Canada was necessary. Simon described the education system in Taiwan as "too tight for my son...I think he got a little bit difficulty in entering his university." His son had failed his required exams in Taiwan, and the threat of failure was clearly a concern for several participants. There is a common conception that the entrance requirements for university in Canada are much less demanding than in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. In addition, several participants alluded to the "free" style of education in Canadian schools: encouraging creativity and group interaction. Nancy did not like the way in which, in Hong Kong, her children were 'fed' information, without the chance for creative thinking. Many also felt that the Hong Kong and Taiwan systems put too much pressure on their children. Canada offered the opportunity for their children to have a more rounded educational experience, and also to participate in many more extra-curricular activities - sport was especially mentioned - than in the country of origin.

Frank is a lone-husband who has been in Canada for two years. His wife works in Taiwan. He explained why he thought it important that his family migrate to Canada:
Because my kids’ education...I want my children to have another good educational system. They want to go abroad.

He perceived migration to North America more generally as crucial for their future careers. He is unable to say whether his children will return to Taiwan to seek employment: “the world changes so fast, and we must keep our flexible attitude...We must do something to prepare for the future,” but he knows that it will be easier for them to find a good job with a North American education.

Because I think...the USA and Canada has a more...acceptable to another opinion and they can set a new idea or innovation...And English is more important in the future, because national boundaries are...English maybe get around the world. If you have good English communication it is better for you in the job.

It was notable however that many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which their children were actually being taught in Canada. There was a common concern that children were not given enough homework, and teachers were not strict enough. Frank described the system of learning as “too mild” for his liking. Lisa feels that school in Vancouver is “too easy...No homework.” Several participants expressed concern over the perceived lack of discipline in schools. These observations indicate that migrants may be generally ignorant of the way in which learning is conducted before they migrate. Alternatively, however, they may be less concerned with the reality of teaching than with the symbolic meaning of a Canadian educational certificate (as a form of cultural capital), which overrides any dissatisfaction.
For Jen, education was inseparable from the opportunity for her children to be fluent in English. She reflected on why she thinks that it is important for her children to learn English:

In the future, people use English to communicate and, you know, the language of the internet is English, mostly...Fluency in English is very important.

Hannah has been in Canada since 1991. She has observed that her daughter has only Chinese friends in school, and is concerned about the implications of this kind of social segregation for her daughter’s future:

If she keeps going this way she will only make Asian friends...I don’t want her to be like that, so I have already provided tutors for her to concentrate on her English study...I want to train her to be very excellent in English, and then when she goes to university she won’t be scared to talk to people or communicate in English....And when she went...to work she won’t have to be scared to talk in English.

I asked Hannah if she had explained this to her daughter:

I just told her that English is very important in North America. Even if your Chinese standard is very high, but your English standard is low, you won’t be able to get a good job in the future.

Hannah clearly sees her daughter’s future career as intimately connected to an ability to articulate in English. Yet, it is not just the “education” and “English” of the children that is sought through migration. Simon has his own personal reasons why his wife, rather than himself, remained in Taiwan when the family migrated to Canada. He gave up a position as Assistant Vice-president of a computer firm in Taiwan in order to migrate. He said:

I intend to learn English as best as I can and then I intend to return. I didn’t waste my time to straighten my competition because I got the better English speaking, listening and everything...If you want to get better business you have
to speak the better English...I'm crazy for speaking English and reading English...I like an adventure; a new world, a new species or a new concept.

Simon saw migration as a strategic opportunity to improve his own competitive advantage in business; learning English was perceived as the key to this. In all these examples, language would seem to represent a crucial form of cultural capital, explicitly connected with career or business advantage.\textsuperscript{26}

In Summary

In this chapter, I hope to have shown why the Astronaut family is an option chosen by many recent Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrant families to Vancouver, and to have demonstrated the strategic nature of the Astronaut migration phenomenon. The ways in which migration to Canada frequently reflects a desire for particular cultural capital were also stressed. In the following chapters, the focus shifts to a detailed consideration of how those remaining in Vancouver experience the Astronaut arrangement in their everyday lives.

\textsuperscript{26} To make an additional observation with regards to the issue of cultural capital; it was notable how many participants mentioned that their children studied Chinese whilst in Vancouver. "China is, now, is really big, big, big!" said Cheryl, in reference to the future business opportunities she perceives in Asia. Laura told me: "Because you only learn English it's no good. Some job needs Mandarin, English and Japanese. If you know three languages it's better to find a job." The desired cultural capital is therefore not limited to what is provided in Canada. A truly cosmopolitan culture is sought (Hannerz, 1996), requiring fluency in several languages, and an ability to move effectively between different cultural sites.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE LONE-WOMAN’S EXPERIENCE OF TRANSNATIONALISM: THE ASTRONAUT FAMILY AND LOCALISATION IN THE HOME

I have to take care of everything. (Emma)

If you can, I would suggest that the whole family – the husband and wife and the kids – they come here altogether. But not just keep moving back and forth. It’s not good, at all. (Fiona)

In chapter three, the reasons motivating the adoption of the Astronaut arrangement were discussed, and it was concluded that, in the majority of cases, immigrant families had planned the arrangement before they landed in Canada. This chapter considers empirically the experience of the Astronaut family for the women who remain in Vancouver, whilst their husbands return to Hong Kong or Taiwan. I want to focus once again on the particular theoretical perspective outlined in chapter two, asserting the importance of gender relations within the migrant family to the migration experience (Lawson, 1998; Silvey and Lawson, 1999). In particular, the work of Aihwa Ong (1999) would seem to have direct applicability to the Astronaut family form. Ong considers how a specific “family regime” - enacted by the middle-class Chinese family - serves in the process of migration to “valorize mobile masculinity” at the same time as it ‘localises’ femininity and the female subject. She argues:

Familial regimes of dispersal and localization...discipline family members to make do with very little emotional support; disrupted parental responsibility, strained marital relations, and abandoned children are such common circumstances that they have special terms. When the flexible imperative in family life and citizenship requires a form of isolation and disciplining of women and children that is both
critiqued and resisted, claims that the ‘Confucian affective model’ is at the heart of Chinese economic success are challenged (Ong, 1999; p. 128).

The issue of “abandoned children” – otherwise known as ‘Satellite kids’ – will be pursued in chapter six. Here, I want to consider the more general proposition that the Astronaut family reflects the family “regime” to which Ong alludes, involving the geographical dispersal of family members. What does it mean for the woman to be ‘localised’? One interpretation would suggest that following migration, and the adoption of the Astronaut arrangement, women are required to take full responsibility for the execution of childcare and household tasks without the support of the husband and, usually, the extended family. In contrast, her husband is able to leave all family chores behind in Vancouver, and pursue his career overseas— a choice not given to the woman who has been disciplined to undertake the ‘female’ role of housekeeper and mother. As a new immigrant, without the support of family and friends and without paid employment, she may also find herself significantly isolated and confined to the home.

When we turn to the empirical data, the overwhelmingly gendered bias to this migratory experience is clear. Man (1993), in her brief consideration of the Astronaut family amongst Hong Kong immigrants in Vancouver and Toronto, observes that: “Generally speaking, husbands (typically the ones who stayed in Hong Kong) did most of the travelling to visit the family. This could be due to the fact that the children usually stayed with the wives (typically the ones who resided in the “family home” in Canada)” (p. 274 - 275). Her observations are certainly apparent in this sample. In twenty-four of the twenty-eight cases I have examined, support for her observations was found. The
husband has adopted the role of the Astronaut, returning to Hong Kong or Taiwan after
the immigration of his family to Canada.) Often for the economic reasons Man suggests,
it is the man who visits his wife and children in Vancouver, rather than the more
expensive option of transporting the wife and children to him. There is also the factor of
the relative flexibility of the husband’s work – especially when the children are in school
– which allows him to take time to visit his family. Lesley, for example, told me that even
though her husband works in Hong Kong, he is frequently on business trips that allow
him to ‘drop by’ Vancouver and visit his family for short stays. Overall, the relative
mobility of the husband vis-à-vis the wife is highly conspicuous in Astronaut practice.

Not only is the woman of the family increasingly tied to Vancouver, then, but also in
almost every case examined, the husband thereafter adopts the role of sole breadwinner
for the family. In a later section I will consider further the striking fact that the majority
of the women interviewed had what they perceived to be “good jobs” in Hong Kong or
Taiwan, which they relinquished in order to migrate to Canada. Now, in Vancouver, only
2 of the 24 women are in paid employment. I wish to highlight here the work on gender
and migration outlined in chapter two, emphasising the fact that frequently,
“Migration…acts to frustrate the development of a woman’s career and thus should be
associated more with economic disadvantage than advantage” (Halfacree, 1995; p. 159).
My evidence suggests that women are often completely financially dependent on their
husbands (see O’Connor, 1991),¹ and furthermore, in most cases they are solely

¹ O’Connor (1991) notes that “Marxists and feminists have stressed the importance of economic
dependence as an element in understanding power relationships within marriage, although there has been
little empirical work to support/undermine their views” (p. 823). Economic dependence surely indicates
some form of patriarchal dominance within the family.
responsible for undertaking all the household and childcare tasks. They have to cope practically and emotionally in a new and alien living environment, in addition to dealing with the absence of both their partner and extended family support. In the majority of the cases reviewed for this research, the husband stayed in Vancouver only briefly (less than a few months, in several cases only a couple of weeks) before returning to the country of origin to work. The wife has therefore but a short time to adjust to the move, before any practical support he may offer is removed.

The objective of this chapter is to examine these issues empirically; specifically, how the flexible strategies of the Chinese middle-class family imply a lack of "emotional support"; "strained marital relations," and "the isolation and disciplining of women..." (Ong, 1999; p. 128). The Astronaut family displays an exemplary case of the flexible family strategies within a particular Chinese migrant population, and it is therefore crucial that the experiences of family members be explicated if the details of transnationalism in its various guises are to be understood.

"For the Good of the Family": Reasons for Migration to Vancouver

[I thought] I was so dumb, you know? In Hong Kong I have a job, with my family, my brother and sister around me...And then all my best friends...I don’t have any friends here. Even though I want to buy something, I don’t

---

2 The cases where the woman becomes the Astronaut and the man takes on the role of housekeeper in Vancouver are especially intriguing. I interviewed four such men in depth. It is important to note that these men felt very much in a minority. They wanted to be the Astronauts and breadwinners. I met these men through the Taiwanese Canadian Cultural Society, based in Vancouver, and talked with Lena Hsu, who works for the society and was responsible for initiating a men’s support group, specifically for Taiwanese men in this Astronaut family position of lone-parenting. She told me that roughly twelve men attend the group for the whole of the Vancouver region. Like the cases of lone-wives, I have no exact figures for the number of lone-men in this position. However, it is the consensus of everyone that I have interviewed around the issue of the Astronaut family that it is very unusual for the man of the household to be the one to remain in Vancouver.
know where to go...I want to do so many things in the first year but I can't make it because of my language. Why I come here? Because my husband Micky, he really likes it here. We think this place is good for the children. Not for me. (Barbara)

As Barbara emphatically demonstrates, the reasons given for migration – and for the chosen adoption of the Astronaut situation – seldom reflected the personal needs or desire of the woman herself (although these were sometimes stated as secondary reasons). Overwhelmingly, reasons for migration revolved around the children and their ‘best interests’. Claire said; “every decision is based on my children first.” Fiona here reflects the general sentiment amongst participants:

Because Taiwan is a special area - they are under the threatening of mainland China - my husband and I think it is our responsibility to give the kids a better environment for education, also a safe environment. If the kids can have a Canadian passport, they can go wherever they like. If something really happened, they can survive here.

Several women were concerned for the physical health of their children (asthma was a particular problem). The issue of crime was mentioned by women from Taiwan, as was the anxiety that sons may be forced to undertake military service. The most common reason for migration was for the “education of the children”; these reasons were covered in detail in chapter three. The important point to note here is that at the time of migration, women generally did not perceive the move as something necessarily beneficial to them, implying the importance of female social roles, and the obligations to family that these entail, in the impetus to migrate.

In most families, it is the wife who stays in the new country, Sylvie told me. The fact that the man is the one who continues to pursue his career was generally assumed to be the
natural state of things; Sylvie and her husband took this for granted: “The only problem is whether my husband came also”, she said. In spite of the assumed gendered roles implicit in this, in most cases women suggested that the decision to become an Astronaut family was a joint decision, and not one undertaken lightly. Frequently, women alluded to lengthy discussion between themselves and their husband; they talked in terms of “we” and “us” when asked about how this decision was made. Nevertheless, all of the women experienced a significant life change as a result of migration, and the adoption of the Astronaut arrangement.

Women’s Employment Status and Migration

The most studied aspect of gender and migration is that of the woman’s employment status and how, as a result of migration, her career frequently suffers (Halfacree, 1995). Chapter two considered the literature describing the migrant woman as the ‘trailing wife’ (Bonney and Love, 1991; Li and Findlay, 1999), as well as the feminist-inspired critique, suggesting household migration to be frequently patriarchal and oppressive (Lawson, 1998; Silvey and Lawson, 1999). The work of Guida Man is particularly relevant to this analysis (1995, 1997). She has examined, through detailed empirical study, the “work” experiences of middle-class Hong Kong Chinese immigrant women mainly in Toronto, with some participants residing in Vancouver. In her own words, Man (1997) attempts:

...to explicate how macrostructural processes in the form of the difference in the social organization of household work and paid work in Hong Kong society and in Canadian society has impact on middle-class Chinese immigrant women, transforming their everyday lives (p. 187).

---

3 In this latter approach, it is assumed that after immigration women are either tied to the domestic sphere, or forced to take low-paid jobs.
To begin with the issue of paid work, Man notes that after migration the women found it
difficult to obtain employment commensurate with their qualifications. Like the
experience of immigrant men in Ley’s (1999) study, access to employment was
obstructed in several ways. The frequent demand for “Canadian experience” was
significant in preventing employment amongst new immigrants, as was a lack of
recognition and calibration of previously held positions and obtained qualifications.
There is also the important issue of prevailing economic conditions within the respective
regions; the unemployment rate in Hong Kong has remained significantly below that of
Canada. Man concludes that:

Because of the differences in the social organisation of paid work in Canada and
their home country, the highly educated, urbanized Chinese women in my study did
not necessarily enjoy a liberating experience when they settled in Canada. They
experience employment difficulties as a result of institutionalized employment
practices and systemic discrimination in the form of employers’ reluctance to
validate their qualifications. The requirement of Canadian experience also rendered
their previous work experience irrelevant (p. 217).

Many of the women interviewed for this research claimed to have had “good jobs” before
migrating. Jen, Sylvie, Lucy and Cheryl were accountants; Maria and Emma were both
nurses; Sarah worked in a bank; Barbara was a dental assistant; Jill described herself as a
“business woman”. Several of the women ran businesses jointly with their husbands,
dealing with different aspects of the administration. Lisa described her changing job
status since coming to Vancouver:

I had a good job in Taiwan. I had a high pay, you know? The salary...I was the
store manager in Taiwan...But here I can’t find a good job because my English
is not good and I don’t have the...like certificates...So I just find waitress work
here, in the restaurant.

JW: How long did you do that for?
About one year.

JW: And you gave it up?

Yes...I felt upset, you know? Because I am a store manager, I manage many people. But when I stay here I am just a waitress, you know? I don’t feel good. Yeah, so I want to go back to Taiwan. I think that if I go back to Taiwan I can find a good job.

In chapter three, the story of Fiona, and how she and her husband became an Astronaut family, was relayed. Fiona discussed her own prospects of finding a job in Vancouver:

People always told me that it’s very hard to find a job in Vancouver, as an immigrant. And I really didn’t think that way, because I got a Master’s degree from the States...It probably just takes time for me to find a job. So I was optimistic at that time...

Fiona’s experience was somewhat different from what she expected. Since her husband returned to Taiwan she has applied for many jobs, and until this year without success. She refused to consider jobs she regarded as below her qualifications. In 1999, she got offered and accepted her first job. She told me:

This year, I was a government employee...It’s the Ministry for Children and Families. But after two weeks I quit, because I just couldn’t manage my whole family and I feel guilty that I couldn’t take care of my kids, because my husband wasn’t here...

She lives with her parents-in-law and although they supported her, she felt that she could not allow them to cut out some of their own social activities in order to care for her children while she was at work. She expresses clearly the guilt associated with the parenting role and associated responsibilities of the woman, and how this may be intensified in the absence of the husband.
Hannah is one of the two women interviewed who is currently in paid employment. She described her situation when she first arrived in Canada:

"I stopped working for three years because I had to look after the kids. I had to drive them to school, cook meals, and do all kinds of housework...After three years I got a job...My daughter, at that time, she was already eleven years old and so it was easier for me to work and look after her."

Again, Hannah’s circumstance illustrates the difficulties associated with the dual demands of sole-parent and career – she was in the fortunate position (the norm for those interviewed) that economic necessity was not a factor in her employment decisions. She also highlights another important point contributing to the ‘localisation’ of the woman in the home - the age of her children. Very young children severely restrict the options open to the woman who chooses not to use hired help in undertaking child-care tasks.

**Child Care and Domestic Tasks:**

**The Loss of Support Networks through Migration**

In addition to the employment situation of middle-class Chinese immigrant women, Guida Man has also considered the effects of migration to Canada on their domestic workload. She claims that this work is:

"...intensified due to the loss of a support system in the home...Differences in physical organisation, in terms of the size of their homes and the non-community-oriented suburban spatial form further escalated their work load, making their everyday lives more difficult in Canada than in Hong Kong (1997, p. 203)."

The “support system in the home” to which she refers includes the previous involvement of other family members in the woman’s domestic chores when in Hong Kong, in addition to the common use of hired help within middle and upper class families (see also
Po-king and Ching-kwan, 1997). Another consequence of migration, therefore, is the loss of these social networks of support in the home, provided by parents and parents-in-law, housekeepers, and nannies.

For the large majority of participants – those from Hong Kong and Taiwan - the amount of domestic work undertaken personally after migration increased significantly. Most seemed to move literally from a position of having no household tasks to having everything to do. As I intimated in chapter two, in order to get a grasp of the woman’s immigration experience it is essential to have some sense of her past – prior to the move. I will therefore sketch briefly the common situation before migration. Jen describes her typical day when she was in Hong Kong:

*At the time, when I was working, we have a domestic helper and we don’t need to do anything. Laughs...Just come back and sit down to eat.*

I asked if she had a nanny for the children. She replied:

*Yes. That’s what the domestic helper does. Clean the house and take care of the babies. Everything, so it’s perfect.*

Lisa explained that she had rarely spent time with her son before coming to Vancouver: in Taiwan the demanding nature of her employment meant that she sent him to a nanny for the week. Sometimes she was required to work on weekends and then her mother-in-law would take care of him. When they first immigrated, her son was only two-and-a-half years old, and not only did she not know how to respond to his needs, but she could literally not understand him when he talked. For Lisa, this initial experience of childcare
was a stressful one; her son would often cry, she told me, and she would respond by getting angry and shouting at him.

The burden of childcare under normal circumstances can be compounded by the absence of the father, not just in terms of the practical help that he can provide, but also the emotional strain initiated by his absence. Young children required additional reassurance:

I have to play with them all the time, right? Because I just don't want to let them...let the kids feel that we are lonely or nobody cares about us since Daddy left...I just feel I have more responsibilities to the kids. (Fiona)

Barbara assumed that when she came to Canada she would “go to school and study again...and then find another job.” After migrating, however, she found that her views began to change. She told me: “I find that the two sons need me more, need me more than I need the work. So I decided better to take care of them, because they are not used to the new country....”. It was common for women to express a similar sense of obligation to the children after migration.

Sylvie’s hired housekeeper “did everything” for her in Hong Kong, which included cooking the meals for the family. Sylvie could not cook even basic dishes when she arrived in Vancouver. Finding herself in a similar situation, Joan and her children were forced to live off fast food for the first half-year after immigration – making frequent trips to “McDonalds.” She relied on a friend to teach her how to cook. Many of the women therefore found that they had much to learn in terms of basic domestic skills and this initially took up a significant part of their day. After migration, minor household repairs suddenly become much more of a problem. In Hong Kong, Sylvie told me, it is
usual to pay someone to fix small problems around the house; the service takes a short time, and is inexpensive. In contrast, the equivalent repairs in Vancouver are very expensive and the waiting time for the job is significant, so the woman has to either do the job herself, or rely on a friend’s husband to do it for her. Even the apparently smallest jobs posed difficulties for women who had hitherto passed this responsibility to someone else. Sarah told me:

Umm...At first it’s very hard for me because in Hong Kong I have a husband that help me. But the first years I come here I do everything. I do the mother job and the father job. Yeah, also, only me. So...such as, in Hong Kong I never change, how do you say this?

JW: The light bulb.

Yeah, the light bulb. I never change it.

After migrating, dealing with the family’s finances - usually previously the job of the husband - becomes an additional undertaking for the woman. This responsibility was taken on reluctantly.

I don’t like to do...the financial...planning or calculations, because I don’t want to take care of the money...[Before migrating] He did...everything! Laughs. When I need money I just ask and he give me some...Before he left he had to tell me of the accounts, the money, the bills and everything. So I have to take care of all of this, besides of taking care of the children. (Emma)

The extended family provided an important source of practical support in Hong Kong and Taiwan for the majority of participants. The mother-in-law had played an especially significant role, often working as babysitter, cleaner and family cook; in the case of Rose, her mother-in-law would even shop for all the family’s groceries. Barbara reflected that in Hong Kong she did not have any household tasks to do. I asked her if she had a cleaner and she replied, “umm...In Hong Kong I have a mother-in-law”. Lisa lived with her
mother-in-law before migrating; in her own words, "She did everything!" She looked after Lisa’s son, she cooked for the family, she paid the family’s bills, and she even undertook any maintenance required on Lisa’s car. She tried to teach Lisa to cook before she migrated and her son still comments that he ‘prefers Grandma’s meals’. For most of the participants, migration and the Astronaut situation have therefore transformed their personal domestic workload on a daily basis. The loss of the support of friends and relatives is a key aspect of this.

The supporting role of friends and relatives was often much more encompassing, however, than alleviating the burdens of practical household tasks. When Lisa arrived in Vancouver with her two-and-a-half year old son she knew no one. Her husband stayed about a week, before returning to Taiwan to work. Her experience highlights the implications of losing a taken-for-granted source of support in the new surroundings. She said:

I don’t have any friends. I remember one time I fall... I fall down the stairs and I strained my... ankle. Yes, and I sit on the ground and cried. And my son... I cried. I can’t walk, you know. Yes, and I don’t have a friend, so I told my son, you pick up the telephone....

JW: Who did he call?

My husband had a friend here. But we never met! And I don’t know him! Yes, just my husband gave me a telephone number... I think, I don’t have anybody I can call. Nobody can help me, but I need help!... I called him and I say, ‘I hurt my feet and I need help. My husband is in the same trade. Could you help me?’... So he came to my house and take me to the hospital. You know, I can’t drive car....

JW: So how long did you go without driving? How long before you were okay?

About two weeks. You know, I stayed home with my son about two weeks! And my husband’s friend buy some food and gave me.
She did not tell her husband until after she had recovered. She told me:

I feel very upset. I don’t want to tell my husband. I don’t want him to worry about it...I didn’t tell him. I say, ‘Ah, it’s very good. Everything is good’.

Having to rely on a stranger clearly evoked feelings of isolation, helplessness, and vulnerability. It is striking that she felt unable to admit her situation to her husband.

When Elizabeth became ill, she was fortunate enough to have a friend on whom she could call to take her to the doctor and bring her food. It concerned Elizabeth, however, there were still times when she had to leave her three year old child unattended as she lay in bed. When there is only one parent, small children and no relatives, a relatively benign illness can become a problem of significant proportions.

Isolation in the Home: Boredom, Loneliness and Fear

At the beginning I feel, sometimes I just feel bored and I feel like...loneliness and emptiness. (Fiona)

In addition to the loss of practical support provided by the husband, relatives and close friends, there can also be significant and unforeseen emotional consequences of their absence. Many women professed to having experienced boredom, loneliness, and fear associated with being alone in Vancouver. The situation is worst for the women with very young children, who often find little reason to leave the home. As one participant who has young children articulated: “I have nothing to do in Vancouver except take care of my children.” Boredom is perhaps the least severe of the complaints, but was mentioned frequently, reflecting once again the contrast between a pre-migration lifestyle, and the
reality of life in Vancouver. A particular perception of life in Vancouver vis-à-vis life in Hong Kong or Taiwan was frequently implied. Vancouver can seem especially ‘slow’ in comparison to a lifestyle previously dominated by constant activity – a demanding career, a demanding social life and continuous shopping and consumption. Cheryl was used to the fast pace of Taiwan; she reflected that she was “very busy, every day very busy.” Vancouver came as a bit of a shock in comparison:

When I first came to Canada I’m really sad. Everyday I sit in that chair and look outside. I think, why in Canada nobody walk? Nobody, nobody...You don’t see any people...In Taiwan, many, many people...Here, nobody. Like just me in the world. Just me. Nobody. Very sad.

Anne said of Vancouver, “Nothing to do in here; no shopping, no night life”. Her friend told me, gesturing towards a puzzle book lying on the kitchen table; “She plays the puzzles, only”. Anne did not disagree with this claim. I asked Sylvie what it was like to be in Vancouver and not to be working. She told me:

I think it’s entirely two different ways of life. Because when I work I see many things. I can see many people and knew many other things from the job, from the colleagues or...Because I am out on the street or at the office...I will face many things more than the housewife. Then the life will be a bit more challenging...more full of energy...And the life’s not so dull, you know? Because I will have colleagues and jokes or something like that. But when I’m a housewife so I only face my two kids, right? So the life is different.

Boredom is frequently accompanied by a deeper sense of loneliness. For Barbara, the absence of her husband was keenly felt: “the difference is at night...Feel lonely, yeah, quite lonely.” Jill said: “My feelings was a little lonely and like the body lose one leg.” The company of family members and close friends was also missed. Sylvie longed for the big family gatherings she would attend in Hong Kong - up to sixteen people – which, she told me, averaged once a month: “so when I am here seems to be entirely difference,
because even though in the festival, or something like that, only four of us.” Fiona missed the sense of stability provided by a circle of close friends. She told me:

I was very active and socialised in Taiwan. I have a lot of good friends, really good friends. But here, I mean, especially in the first year, I kind of locked myself up...I just wouldn’t...I just wouldn’t contact people here.

Friends in Taiwan, contacted through e-mail, were Fiona’s main source of support when she first migrated: “they just made me feel better if I can talk to them and contact to them. I just feel that somebody is...backing me up...” Fiona’s experience of isolation—her reluctance to leave the home and make new friends—was not the normal situation of those women interviewed. Most of the participants speak to their husbands every day on the telephone, and some claimed to discuss all their problems with them. The husbands are able, therefore, to offer a degree of emotional support. Several women, however, relayed stories of friends in the Astronaut situation who suffer profound experiences of loneliness. Hannah told me of a friend who lives in Vancouver with her two daughters.

She sleeps late every day and then watches TV:

She has nothing to do. She doesn’t want to do anything. She has a Filipino domestic helper to help her to do all kinds of household work...She doesn’t like to drive....

Hannah effectively conveys the sense of lethargy and sometimes depression that can beset women whose experience of Vancouver is profoundly isolating. Claire was one of the few women interviewed who arrived in Vancouver knowing no one:

I had no friends, I had no relatives...Nothing, no. Only one car and two kids. I start everything; it’s really difficult.

---

4 The importance of driving as a source of freedom for women will be stressed in the following chapter.
For Claire, her lack of English proved the most difficult hurdle to be overcome. Many of her friends were unable to do so:

There's this language barrier. You...sort of automatically isolate yourself. It happened to so many of my friends, I understand that. And even some of them felt, you know, they had to make the decision to go back to where they came from.

Wishing to avoid the experiences of her friends, learning English therefore became Claire's top priority.

Although my intention was to interview only the lone-spouse of the Astronaut family, additional insight into the phenomenon was provided by two children in particular, who are now classed as 'Satellite' kids, although in the past they experienced living with a lone mother. The experiences of one of the students, Rod, are detailed later on in this chapter. Here, from the perspective of the child in the Astronaut family, Angel tells her story. Angel came to Canada seven years ago with her mother and father. Her father "stayed for about one month, like, getting everything set up and then he went back to Hong Kong." He is a businessman in Hong Kong. Her mother returned to Hong Kong about two years ago at Angel's request. She told me:

It was something, actually, I proposed because...starting in grade ten I just feel like school work is getting really heavy and...umm...My Mum isn't a very good socialising person. She doesn't like to socialise a lot and...she didn't work after she came here – she was at home all the time. And then...it started to feel that...I'm starting to feel that I don't have enough time to spend with my Mum. And I don't want her to be so bored and everything, right?...so bored. And also, on the other hand, my Dad has been living alone for, I guess, three or four years by that time so I'm, like, ... 'you two have to be together later on so...why don't you just go back and...'. So that, you know, they can be happy and I...I feel more comfortable because I can concentrate on my work.

And then after she came here she got to spend more time with me...I get to know her a great deal more, you know, and...umm...then, you know, I figure
out that...she never...like, she’s not a very outgoing person...She doesn’t have, like, a lot of friends here. So then, I just thought that maybe she’ll be happier in Hong Kong because there she still got more friends...Since my understanding...of my Mum was getting better and better, I was considering what she was feeling too.

Angel experienced the burden of caring for her mother – literally providing her with the emotional support usually found in friends and the spouse, in addition to providing her mother’s social life. She is significantly relieved now that her mother has returned to Hong Kong to be with her father. Angel still lives in Vancouver with her grandfather.

Several women admitted to feeling afraid when their husbands first left them in Vancouver. Notably, this revolved around being left alone with the children – a sense of having the sole responsibility for their children, and a fear that perhaps they were incapable of providing adequate protection. The houses and apartments that women occupied in Hong Kong and Taiwan were much smaller than their homes in Vancouver. The amount of space seems to emphasise the absence of persons – not just the husband, but relatives also. Living with or in close proximity to an extended family was common amongst those interviewed, and their constant presence bestowed a certain sense of security. Emma recalled how she felt when her husband left for the first time, after the family had been in Vancouver for two months:

I feel very lonely and I don’t have security to live here with two small children – only eleven and eight – in a new place for me...I have some fear...In Hong Kong we live together all the time, all the day...It’s the place where I was born. I’ve lived there for a very long time and the language and the culture and the relatives all around...Maybe I seldom bother them [the relatives], but I still feel more safe. Whenever need help they can help me...When my husband went back to Hong Kong I was sort of scared...anxious...until he come back, when I feel more relaxed.
Lisa also lived with relatives in Taiwan. She explained how she felt when she was first separated from her husband:

I think, you know, I was afraid. Because in Canada this house is totally different from Taiwan. In Taiwan the house is very small...I feel very safe...And here...at the first year I sleep in the living room everyday and open the TV and then turn all the lights on...Because I was afraid! And a little noise, I jump and check all the place, because I was afraid.

Elizabeth articulated similar feelings: “everything seemed so unfamiliar...I was scared. During the night time there seemed to be a lot of noises that frightened me. I could hardly sleep well.” Fear sometimes also extended to the fear of speaking English. For a long time, Lisa was afraid to pick up the telephone, fearing that the person on the other end may try to communicate with her in English. Since the majority of the interviews I conducted were in English, it is likely that the isolation imposed by an inability to speak English was underrepresented in my sample. Language, however, was still conceived as a ‘barrier’ by even the most articulate of participants.

Communication and the “Language Barrier”

When participants were asked to name the biggest challenge that they had faced after migration to Vancouver, the most common response involved speaking and understanding in English. Most of the women had only high school-level English abilities when they arrived in Vancouver. Participants made it clear that poor English was not a barrier to making friends, opening a bank account, and buying groceries. The significant Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking populations in Vancouver make it easy to socialise and carry out many other tasks in the native tongue. However, women expressed

---

5 English and driving were represented equally in the interviews.
considerable concern over English in two distinct ways. The first and most widely articulated involved their child’s education; specifically, women were concerned about communicating with school teachers and being able to aid their children with their school work. The second concern, expressed by those women with considerably more advanced English ability, involves the perception of a ‘language barrier,’ preventing them from totally integrating into Canadian society as they conceived it.

To begin with the issue of the children’s education, it has been frequently noted that women in Chinese society devote considerable amounts of time to helping their children with their schoolwork. The fact that the education of the children was the most important reason given for migration implies the pressure women felt to fulfil this role. In fact, this preoccupied much of the woman’s time: older children have extra lessons in school subjects - sometimes tutors come to the home - but often women have to drive more than one child to different classes every night of the week. Lisa told me that she feels that the school does not give her son enough homework and the teachers are not strict enough in insisting that homework is done. She therefore gives her son extra Maths, English and Chinese exercises to do at home and he must also attend extra classes in these subjects: “after school, everyday…and different classes.” Sylvie expressed similar views. I asked her about her experiences of the education system in Canada. She told me that, if parents do not have the time to spend with their kids then the Hong Kong system is preferable, because the school will “keep a close look on the kids”. “But here…less homework and many free time, but more creative I can say.” On balance, she seemed to prefer the
Canadian system, but this put far more pressure on her to keep her children on track. If she did not watch them carefully, “they become lazy,” she told me.

The child’s schooling, therefore, is an important priority for the mother, and in order to be able to demand the best by her child she will need to understand the system, and what the teachers require. This is where women feel the considerable pressure to be competent in English:

We have to speak English because we have to help our children. If we only speak Mandarin, how can we support our children in school to speak English? ... So we have to study English. (Joan)

Women must converse with schoolteachers on matters regarding the child’s education. One interviewee, Patricia, would fax her child’s report card to her husband; complete with questions about aspects she did not understand, and he would send a translated version back to her. Lesley asked her brother-in-law to accompany her to the child’s school for her first six months in Vancouver, to act as a translator. Mary waits until her husband returns home from Hong Kong, and he attends the school meetings. Some of the women feel that their children are spending too long in E.S.L.6 classes, but find themselves unable to express this concern to a member of school staff.

Most participants viewed their own English ability in terms of the practical benefits a grasp of the language can confer. For a few women, however, the perception of a ‘language barrier’ indicated much deeper sentiments of social belonging. Hannah lived in Edmonton before moving to Vancouver and found that, although her English was

---

6 E.S.L. is an abbreviation for ‘English as a Second Language’
For those women who have spent significant time trying to perfect their English ability, the perception of a language barrier was a deep concern and gave them a sense of isolation from a larger ‘Canadian’ society.

**Transnational Marital Relationships**

Personal problems, personal trials and crises, personal relationships: what can these tell us, and what do they express, about the social landscape of modernity? Not much, some would be inclined to argue, for surely personal feelings and concerns are much the same at all times and in all places....The world of high modernity certainly stretches out well beyond the milieux of individual activities and personal engagements. It is more replete with risks and dangers....as a more or less continuous state of affairs....Yet it also intrudes deeply into the heart of self-identity and personal feelings (Giddens, 1991; p. 12).

Depictions of the Chinese family as an ultimately strategizing unit, adapted to maximising both financial and cultural accumulation, ignore the implications of this form
of transnationalism for relationships within the family. The implications for gender
relations will be given a more specific and detailed examination in chapter five; here I
want to consider the implications of the flexible family for interpersonal relations,
foocussing on what the Astronaut family denotes for the personal relationship between
husband and wife. Pe-Pua et al (1998), in their study of Astronaut families in Australia,
and Man (1995) who considered the situation in Canada, all imply that the Astronaut
family arrangement has repercussions for the marital relationship. Pe-Pua et al conclude
this aspect of their discussion with the following (inconclusive) statement:

...overall, the Astronaut phenomenon arrangement can have one of the following
consequences: the separation could have no effect on the husband-wife relationship;
or the separation can actually improve the relationship (‘less arguments’); or the
separation can weaken it (‘no common interests’) (1998; p. 292).

It is generally difficult to draw normative conclusions about the ‘improving’ or
‘weakening’ of marital relations within my sample, although it is clear that in almost
every circumstance some change in the relationship has occurred. In a few cases,
however, it is possible to discern that the Astronaut situation has negatively impacted the
relationship, in the form of acute emotional trauma. Understanding the emotive nature of
a strained relationship between spouses requires an appreciation of the extent to which
‘significant others’ factor in our self-identity in what Anthony Giddens calls, ‘late
modernity’ (1991). “In a long term marriage”, he claims “each individual’s sense of self-
identity becomes tied to the other person, and indeed to the marriage itself” (Giddens,
1991; p. 11). The social conditions of modernity enforce on us all, Giddens argues, a
process of ‘finding oneself’ that is no longer based in the externally stable referents
provided by pre-modern social communities and kinship ties. Rather, in marriage, our
reality is sustained through conversation with our spouse, in building a life-world together (Berger and Kellner, 1964). Berger and Kellner argue; “The reality-bestowing force of social relationships depends on the degree of their nearness, that is, on the degree to which social relationships occur in face-to-face situations....” (p. 2).

The question essentially concerns the human limits to the flexibility of the contemporary middle-class Chinese family. Challenging conceptualisations of a powerful migrant community, I interrogate the personal, emotional repercussions of a spatially dispersed family unit. The ideas of guanxi and diaspora rely on notions of loyalty, consistency, stability, whilst at the same time finding their definition in the geographical dispersal of those within this community. Can interpersonal relationships survive the reality of geographical separation?

At the level of the family unit, I have found that transnational marital and parenting relationships, which have close emotional bonds, are very difficult to maintain. Here I turn to examine the affects of the Astronaut family arrangement on the intimacy of the relationship between husband and wife (children are discussed in chapter six). On several occasions, interviews touched on the problems of communication between spouses when they are apart for extended periods. Several couples have noticed a distance growing between them. Mary and her husband felt like “strangers” when he came back to Vancouver after their first three months apart. The situation has since improved because, she told me, they have learned the importance of “talking all the time” over the telephone. Jill is worried that her husband is unable to communicate his stresses of work:
"he can’t share anything with me by the phone”, she said. Barbara noticed a change occurring in her relationship with her husband due to his absence:

At that time, I feel we can’t communicate...because he always come back here and then go back to Hong Kong...I build up my own friends, and then he don’t know them and...the same to him. Maybe there’s something happen to him, but he don’t have time to tell me then... I really want to tell him, ‘Oh! What happen to me...’ Unfortunately he don’t know any of my friends. So it’s less talking. The only topic we talked was the children.

Although they talked every day on the telephone, they were unable to share in the small aspects of each other’s lives. Sometimes they would argue. Barbara was building her own stable social world that, significantly, did not include her husband.

Interviews with women have suggested an important factor in maintaining a close relationship with their absent partner. Those couples who engaged in continual conversation about the objectives of the present circumstance – exactly why they are doing it and, crucially, when it is going to end, seemed to maintain the closest and least stressed relationship. Hannah exemplified this attitude towards the Astronaut circumstance:

At the beginning, I felt bad, of course. But we had the same goal that we were working together for the good of our children. So, no matter what happens, we would have to go through this period, which may be until my daughter is through secondary school and at university, when she will be more independent. Of course we miss one another...but it’s not really so bad because we are looking to the future.

Maintaining and sharing a clear objective is important for the survival of the relationship between partners.

7 I stress that this is a middle-class migration, bestowing certain material privilege
Some women feel that the cost of continuing with the Astronaut situation long-term is just too high. The changes perceived in the family relationships since the Astronaut situation began have forced a reassessment of this initial decision. Fiona’s husband wants to continue with the Astronaut situation until he retires - another twenty years, she told me - for the good of the children (their education and the “environment”). She has decided, however, after much thought, that “we have to go back, for the family’s sake...I don’t really think it’s a very good choice, for Astronaut families.” She finds her reasoning difficult to articulate: “actually everything is fine in my family; he is working steadily...in Taiwan, I am...fine and the kids are fine. Sometimes they say, ‘I miss Dad. I want to see Dad’, something like that, but they’re fine...and I’m with them...”. But, she said, “I just don’t think it’s good for the family”. She continued to elaborate on some of her major concerns. Based on the experience of some of her friends (who have been in the Astronaut situation for seven or eight years) she is worried that the children will “lose intimacy with their fathers...and sometimes problems arise between their marriage...and they don’t really know each other that well any more.” Speaking of her relationship with her husband she said: “it’s not as easy as before for us to communicate that well...That’s why I said I will go back when we get citizenship.” Lisa also expressed concern about the effects of separation; she wants to return to Taiwan as soon as she has obtained Canadian citizenship. She said: “I don’t want to leave my husband for a long time. I want to stay with my husband. I want the whole family together.” Maria and Fiona both expressed the opinion that if asked they would advise friends against choosing the Astronaut arrangement.
Women also provided stories of friends who were unable to bear the separation from their husbands. For example, Hannah said:

One of my friends, she has already gone back to Hong Kong for good. When she was here, her son was 14 years old at that time, in the year 1995. Her husband was in Hong Kong and they were very rich, they had a big house...But she cried everyday. She would phone her husband every morning...She cried over the phone she told me that she was in jail; she felt that life here is like in a jail, that she couldn’t go back to Hong Kong to see her husband because she has to stay here with her son.

Because they make the decision to return to be with their husbands, these women – perhaps those who suffer the most - will sadly remain unrepresented in this research.

New Regimes of Sexual Exploitation?

Try not to do long distance relationship. It's very dangerous. Very very dangerous. Even though you have a ring on your finger, that doesn’t protect you at all. (Rod)

In addition to strained personal relations between husband and wife, extra marital affairs are one commonly noted and tragic consequence of the Astronaut family circumstance (Man, 1995; Pe-pua et al, 1998; Yeoh, 2000). Ong (1999) has attempted to embed this observation within a more general theoretical framework, one part of the observation that “New regimes of sexual exploitation” (p. 20) are emerging as a result of globalisation and consequent transnational social forms. Brenda Yeoh (2000) has observed this pattern amongst Singaporean businessmen who work in China, whilst their wives and families remain in Singapore; the geographical separation of husband and wife facilitates the keeping of a mistress by the man. In this section, I want to consider these issues in terms
of the Astronaut family, drawing on three highly personal stories of the effects of transnational separation on the family.

Rod: A Child's Perspective

An interview with a young man in the Satellite circumstance presented an unexpected insight into the Astronaut family. Rod, a twenty-year-old male from Taiwan, became a member of an Astronaut family when he was thirteen, and his family moved to Canada. His father worked in Taiwan whilst he, his mother and sister lived in Vancouver. It recently transpired that Rod's father was secretly supporting an additional family in Taiwan. Rod explained the situation surrounding this discovery:

Actually, my sister and my Mum were kind of curious. At the time the economic [in Taiwan] was very very good and you can make a lot of money...My father was in interior design...You can make a million dollars very easy. But, how come every time my father put the money in the bank it's only half a million? It was kind of curious.

JW: He was giving the other half to...?

Yeah, the other family...We asked our father what's happened to the other half of the money and then, at that time, my father said he was putting the money into other business to make more money. We believed him, until...the money is getting too less...Things start to have problems. And then two years he hasn't even sent the money to Canada... Because he was having problems...to feed himself...

The family in Canada suddenly found themselves in a financially and emotionally vulnerable situation. Circumstances got even worse for the children:

My mother got into an affair too, because my father don't come to Canada very often at that time...So my Mum feel very lonely. Even when she got sick, my father couldn't be beside her taking care of her. Only on the phone, so always taking care of herself.
On finding out about his wife’s affair, Rod’s father came to Vancouver and the parents began to fight to the point of hospitalisation of the mother and police involvement. Rod found himself drawn into the violence in order to protect his mother; “when he tried to hurt my Mum, of course I couldn’t stand there...I couldn’t stand there and see my Mum get beat up...”. The situation was tragically resolved when both parents left Rod and his sister in Vancouver, with very little financial support. They were both forced to drop out of school in order to work to pay their rent:

My father went back to Taiwan...He planned not to come back to Canada...And my Mum just...moving on with her life...She has her friends, so she moved to another province with her friends.

Rod does not see his parents and has little contact with them over the telephone. He has his own reflections on the Astronaut arrangement:

A word that’s deep of my heart; that is, whatever happens, immigration is never the best way. Because a lot of people that emigrate from their home country to another country, they end up divorced. That’s over seventy percent, eighty percent that’s happened. All of my friends, their family had problems. Even though they are not divorced, but they all have problems...Just think about it...Your boyfriend is not around you and that boy is very gentle in taking care of you. You might just...Your heart might just go to someone else. Even though you still love your old boyfriend, you are afraid to tell them....to tell them the truth. So, I don’t really recommend to emigrate at all. To come here to study, that’s fine. But I don’t really recommend for the family to come.

Nancy

Nancy settled in Vancouver in 1989 with her two daughters, and her husband worked in Hong Kong. It was some time into the interview before she revealed that she and her husband were no longer together:

Actually, this is the part I would like to talk about. That is why it has been on my mind for a while whether I wanted to talk about it or not...Mark is not my husband now...
At first, after migrating, she found a job and continued to work full time in Vancouver, leaving the domestic work to a hired help. In 1991 she suffered her first severe back pain, which prevented her from working full time: "I was staying in bed twenty-four hours a day, having traction and a water bag of forty pounds pulling...the lower part of my body." She continued:

**It was at that time that Anne [the daughter] was at the rebellious stage. She was a teenager at that time, and I found it hard to handle the situation. I was so helpless. The only thing that came into my mind was...no matter what's going on, this is my responsibility - to take care of the kids. And Mark began to have another family in Hong Kong.**

She had no choice but to turn to her children for help. She had wanted to keep everything from them, to shield them from their father’s affair...

**But it was my back that really...brought me to another stage. I had to disclose everything to them because I really needed their help, both physically and mentally. And we had a very good talk...Anne was only...fourteen at that time, and Mary is four years younger. They just couldn’t understand. But they accepted the facts.**

Her children admirably accepted both the emotional burdens of their parents’ broken relationship, and also the practical responsibilities associated with their mother’s illness. They had to walk to school, as Nancy could no longer drive, they accompanied a friend of Nancy’s as she did the grocery shopping on her behalf; they helped with the cleaning, and were generally supportive of their mother. Reflecting on the situation, Nancy concludes that it was the distance – physical and emotional - which the Astronaut situation placed between herself and her husband, that caused the separation. For a while, the distance meant that her husband could conceal his affair from her; whilst she was
oblivious, the situation became “open” in Hong Kong. Her mother-in-law eventually called her and told her of the affair. She concluded: “So I really don’t agree with Astronaut families…splitting in two. Not at all, not at all.”

Claire

Claire came to Canada from Taiwan in 1992 for the education of her children, and also because her children suffer from asthma, and she hoped that the cleaner air of Vancouver would remedy this problem. Her husband stayed with her in Vancouver for three years, trying but failing to establish a business. He subsequently returned to Taiwan as an Astronaut to work, but also to take care of his elderly parents. Chinese culture, Claire told me, dictates that “the sons always take the responsibility,” and he is the only son of his immediate family. Claire was devastated when she found out that her husband was having an affair in Taiwan, but she kept it to herself. Only now, four years on, does she feel able to talk about it, although still with obvious pain:

Actually...something happened here, you know, that almost made me fall down. And I didn’t tell anybody because, you know, I know myself very well. Once I tell someone...I will just totally collapse, so I keep it as myself secret. I don’t tell anybody...My husband has a mistress...And it really hurts me, as I already heard stories; you know, the family separate, the situation like my husband, it happens a lot...So many friends warned me, ‘you have to be very careful...that always happens’.

She had trusted him, she told me, and consequently suffered a “very deep hurt”. She went through a long period of depression, when she tried to forgive her husband – to rationalise the situation – at the same time as caring for her two daughters. She said:

You know, I pushed myself into the home...I found everything around me – people around me, things around me – are sort of like bad. Life becomes very
dark...For quite a long time, for almost two years...Nobody’s helping me, nobody knows this.

Claire presented an extreme example of the way in which a lone immigrant woman may confine herself to the home. I asked her if she had told the children, and she replied that she had tried to conceal it at first, but then she decided to tell them, “Because I needed someone to...to talk to.” Both Claire and Nancy indicate in their stories the way in which children may experience increased responsibilities in this situation. Now, in retrospect, Claire is able to reflect on her role in the family and is very critical of what she calls “Chinese culture”. She felt that she had “sacrificed everything to the kids...” She had not allowed her husband to share the responsibility, and then found herself abandoned by him. “Chinese culture,” dictated that she always thinks about her children and seldom about herself. Remarkably, she was reluctant to put any blame on her husband’s shoulders:

What I think is maybe my husband has physical needs, so I really didn’t take this as serious. And one thing, he told me. I think he’s honest.

He’s not really the kind of person that is bad. I think the situation is...he gets too much pressure. You know, the family pressure, business pressure...So many pressures and he just wants to find somebody that, you know, totally not any relations...Yeah, I understand that. But myself...Who understands me?.... Actually, I think he’s like a lot of Chinese men, because of five thousand years of values to hold to them...he men could have, at the same time, wife and mistress, you know. But in...today’s, you know, as a woman you don’t want this...The men have to learn something.

Claire implied that her husband was equally bound by Chinese tradition – the notion of ‘filial piety’ – and had no choice but to go back to Taiwan to look after his parents.
Evident in this interview, and in several others, was a perception that men are in some way exonerated from the responsibility they have to their wives within the marriage, and some notion of Chinese culture was invoked on several occasions in explanation. This attitude was articulated by Rod, who reflected that men are especially likely to have an affair:

ран

Men are stupid animals. What I say is from the heart because, if there’s a woman taking care of you it doesn’t matter. It’s very easy to have an affair. And then the wife the same thing, but the girl is different from men. They are not that emotional. The female will think more before they do, but men...they don’t think that. They just think, at this time I’m not lonely and I will be fine...So, ‘cos I know...my friends. Their father is having an affair and their wife is holding their temper, trying not to explode.

Another relating insight was provided by Simon: a male participant whose wife worked in Taiwan. He explained to me that it was very difficult for him to make friends within the Chinese community in Vancouver, because he was considered a “dangerous man”.

He told me:

You know, in Taiwan it is human nature that the man is looking for adultery if he has no wife at home.

He was therefore very careful not to give the ‘wrong impression’ when he called a female friend at her home.

Clearly, extra-marital affairs, broken relationships and divorce not only result from the Astronaut situation. Yet these examples demonstrate the tragic human limits to transnational personal relationships, reflecting on the true ‘flexibility’ of the Chinese family. Cultural and economic accumulation are achieved at some cost; emotional hurt
that cannot be reduced to a form of culturally or socially constructed experience. Claire has reflected deeply on the strategy her own family chose to adopt:

So I understand, you know, this has actually happened a lot. The situation like...my situation...Some sad stories happen, they separate. But you know, maybe for Chinese people that want to come to a country like this, you have to pay a price. So I always tell myself, this is the price I have to pay. And it makes me feel more comfort...I don’t mind to take on serious challenge to myself. I think I don’t regret. But I just don’t want people really suffer like I suffer because only myself knows that how bitter it is...I hope this can really help you to write something.

Profound emotional suffering, it would seem, is perhaps the biggest “price” paid by middle-class Chinese families for the flexibility afforded by the Astronaut migration strategy.

In Summary

In this chapter, I have detailed some of the practical changes that occur in the woman’s everyday pursuits after migration, in addition to highlighting the emotional difficulties associated with the initial loss of support networks in the home. There are significant human limits to the flexible family arrangement, as the latter part of this chapter has shown. In the next chapter, I want to suggest another, quite different face to this migration experience.

---

8 I have been told that it is also the case that lone women are sometimes considered ‘dangerous’ by immigrant families. Some families avoid socialising with lone women, and some lone women turn to ‘available’ men for help, themselves then becoming the victims of extortion.

9 It should be noted that I do not intend to imply that these experiences are only found in relation to the Astronaut arrangement, but am merely suggesting that the separation exacerbates these difficulties. Women themselves have expressly blamed the Astronaut arrangement for some of their problems in Vancouver.
CHAPTER FIVE

GENDER AND MIGRATION: INDEPENDENCE, "FREEDOM," AND PATRIARCHAL RELATIONS IN THE ASTRONAUT FAMILY

Many of these highly educated, urbanized women do not necessarily enjoy a "liberating" or "less oppressive" experience when they settle in Canada; rather they experience an escalation of traditional roles, unequal distribution of household labor, gender and sexual oppression both at work and in the home...For many women, their power and status inside and outside the home actually deteriorated when they emigrated to Canada. Moreover, those who have had professional careers in their home country experience a loss of economic power through unemployment or underemployment...They also experience a diminished buying power, and a general lack of opportunity (Man, 1995; p. 320).

In this chapter, I argue that the Astronaut family presents a more ambivalent relationship between migration, patriarchy and gender relations than implied by Guida Man (above). In addition to the negative effects of localisation discussed in chapter four, a different, and more common side to this migration experience emerged through interviews with lone women. Within the Astronaut family in Vancouver, the "localisation" of women in the domestic sphere does not necessarily imply that patriarchal gender relations within the home are reinforced, nor that the woman's "power and status inside and outside the home" deteriorates. In fact, the 'rooted' female experience of the Astronaut family, and the crucial absence of the husband, allows her to exercise significant agency in the creation, over time, of a stable and familiar social environment. Frequently the consequent experience is of significant independence and an unexpected sense of freedom.
This proposal would seem, in fact, to contradict the empirical evidence presented in the previous chapter, where the female experience appears to support claims that migration reinforces structures of oppression (Fincher, 1993; Man, 1997; Li and Findlay, 1999; Silvey and Lawson, 1999). In most cases, it is apparent that women have suffered in some way from migration to Vancouver and the subsequent Astronaut situation; whether from the removal of support networks of friends and close family members; from the loss of their employment; from loneliness and sometimes isolation in the home; or from the added burdens of housework and childcare. In the three poignant examples of what Ong (1999) has termed ‘new regimes of sexual exploitation,’ the negative effects of the arrangement are indisputable. I do not wish to suggest that these experiences are not significantly oppressive, as they clearly are. Yet I maintain that woman are in many cases ‘liberated’ through the Astronaut circumstance. How is this possible?

The Critical Year

The facts regarding the qualitative changes to the woman’s life after migration do not always reflect an equivalent experience. To appreciate how the woman experiences the Astronaut situation, it is crucial to understand how she herself interprets these facts. Perhaps surprisingly, it was far more common for participants to articulate a sense of freedom than that of oppression. For Cheryl and others, the presence of the husband in Canada clarified the meaning of his absence:

My husband, when he stays in Canada he is always at home. Everything he don’t like. He argues to me. If he stays in Taiwan I am free. My heart is free, you know?... When my husband is here I don’t have my freedom.
This notion of “freedom” is not insignificant. Different women, in reference to their experience in Vancouver, used the word “freedom” on several occasions. This, I propose, is the more common experience of the Astronaut situation; not domination of the woman by the man through the reinforcing of patriarchal gender relations, but a significant sense of independence and, consequently, release from such domination. The two crucial variables directing this experience are the absence (and intermittent presence) of the husband, and the passing of time.

Significantly, most of the negative aspects of immigration, presented in chapter four, occurred in the *first year* of separation from the husband. During interviews, one year emerged as the critical juncture, after which an unsettling and emotionally difficult experience of migration transforms into an unexpected sense of freedom. Barbara illustrates a common reaction, stressing her personal doubts about the decision to migrate at first. She said:

*We think this place is good for the children. Not for me. The first year, I don’t know why...not to live, not for me...I struggle for the first year. Only one year.*

JW: But now...?

*Oh, yeah, lovely place! Laughs. I’m used to it now and I have a lot of friends here...I really enjoy the life here...But it’s tough for me for the first year.*

Joan gave a notably similar response when asked about her experience of living without her husband. She said, “the first year, I feel, was the most difficult time...After the first year, it got easier”. After this critical time, the problems encountered initially become achievements, as they are overcome. Barbara described her experience of migrating to
Canada as “good training”; women more generally acknowledged again and again their sense of their own practical and emotional independence:

First time he go back to Taiwan I think that I miss him. I think, if he were here he can do many things; umm...you know, many fixing things or the car has some problems, he can do. But I can’t do this, so sometimes I miss this. But now...anything I want to do, now it’s okay, with anything. I don’t need him. (Cheryl)

In the following pages, I want to examine closely this sense of independence. It is inextricably linked to the way in which women are seen to have re-conceptualised their role in the family and their personal sense of fulfilment after migration. Through a discussion of paid employment and childcare, it is clear that women devote a significant proportion of their time in Canada to their children and not to their careers. What is also clear is the extent to which their whole lifestyle has been remade through the migratory experience, and the meaning of their life has, in many cases, undergone dramatic transformation. Appadurai and Lam here provide a way in which we can approach an understanding of the woman’s experience of migration:

There has been a general change in the global conditions of life-worlds: put simply, where once improvisation was snatched out of the glacial undertow of habitus, habitus has now to be painstakingly reinforced in the face of life-worlds that are frequently in flux (Appadurai, 1996; p. 56).

Thus, regardless of how much and how well they are prepared for the transition from one sociocultural milieu to another, the inevitability of reorganizing their everyday lives to become accepted is accompanied by stress and frustration. As such, the problems experienced by these immigrants may be interpreted as part and parcel of this process of reorganization for all immigrant families, but perhaps more intensified and acutely felt by “astronaut” households (Lam, 1994; p. 177).
An important element of this chapter concerns the way in which the women create around them a new and stable habitus in Vancouver, without their husbands and the societal structures hitherto directing and controlling their roles and actions.

**Paid Employment and Domestic Work**

Some women, who become unemployed or underemployed as a result of immigration, found themselves economically dependent on their husbands. Such dependency has put some Chinese women in a relatively powerless relationship with their husbands (Man, 1995; p. 316).

Globalization has shrunk the distance between elites, shifted key relations between producers and consumers, broken many links between labor and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments (Appadurai, 1996; pp. 9 – 10. Emphasis added).

Any claim concerning the liberation of immigrant women in Vancouver must first address the fact that the large majority of participants were not in paid employment. There are several notional implications to this circumstance. Firstly, as already determined, the women have moved from a situation of economic independence to one of economic dependence on their husbands. It is important to note, however, that when asked the majority of women stressed that they did not want to work in Vancouver, at least not in the immediate future. None expressed concern that they were in a position of reliance on their husband’s financial support. The general attitude to this is captured by

---

1 I want to juxtapose this notion of stability with the words of Aihwa Ong (1999), who writes: “under transnationality the new links between flexibility and the logics of displacement, on the one hand, and capital accumulation, on the other, have given new valence to such strategies of manoeuvring and positioning. Flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability (p. 19, emphasis added). This chapter clearly demonstrates the various ways in which participants seek and achieve stability in their lives in the post-migration setting of Vancouver, exposing once again the limits to an uncritical acceptance of the representations of flexible strategizing by the Chinese middle-class.

2 A couple of interviewees intend to seek paid employment when their children are older, but will not consider hiring a nanny to take care of them in the mean time.
one participant, who said; “most of the wives...they have a good source of economics right? Because their husband will send them money, so they don’t really worry about the money.” The variety of reasons given by the women for choosing not to seek employment or pursue a career in Vancouver was limited. The most frequent involved the desire to spend more time with their children. Some explicitly noted the wish to be away from the stress of a career; it would appear that several of the women worked long hours and had demanding jobs before they migrated. Sarah, for example, explained her dual objective behind migrating: “In Hong Kong I have pressure. Everything has pressure...a lot of pressure for me...and I want more time to spend with my kids”. Joan saw migrating as a way to a more leisurely life, strongly implying the desire to get away from the demands of paid work: “When I decided to immigrate to Canada...I just wanted to come here to study English by myself and I want to relax, because in Taiwan I work very hard.”

There are several important theoretical contributions to be gained from these more general observations. Firstly, women in the Astronaut situation do not experience the “dual work load of housework and paid work” that is assumed to beset middle-class immigrant women more generally (Man, 1995; p. 314). Their work is focussed on the domestic sphere only - they do not have to attempt the “juggling act” that is, according to Guida Man, a source of stress and exhaustion. Secondly, Man suggests that reduced spending-power curtails the ability of women to hire domestic help, as they would have before migration. As was illustrated in chapter four, the facts demonstrate that women undertake a significantly increased responsibility in terms of the amount of domestic work undertaken personally after migration. Despite personal unemployment, a few of
the women interviewed do hire a cleaner, although this is usually for help on a monthly rather than daily basis and it is certainly more common for the women to undertake these tasks themselves. However, the fact of “increased domestic work” does not necessarily reflect an oppressive situation. It is significant that only on one occasion were ‘financial constraints’ given as a reason for this; far more common was the expressed desire to undertake household tasks personally, whether from a sense of obligation, or simply to escape boredom. Thirdly, I would suggest that the Astronaut phenomenon bestows an unusual picture of the role of female domestic work within the family. Writing on the reproduction of labour in contemporary economic labour markets, Jamie Peck (1996; p. 37) suggests the following:

The overwhelming majority of domestic tasks continues to be performed by women, whose increased participation in wage-labor has altered the ways in which their domestic work is organised rather than bringing about a significant “re-gendering” of household responsibilities. The organization of domestic labor is reflected in men’s waged work as well as women’s...Thus, analyses of work done by men should always pose the question, “who does the laundry?” (Massey, 1993b, p.4); the way in which these jobs are constructed “requires that the people who fill them have someone else to look after them” (p. 13).

The assumption is that women’s domestic work is essential to the reproduction of male labour power, and yet it is invisible to it. An important aspect of this is care for the husband’s needs:

For the immigrant men the home is where the tensions generated by their paid work are released. The wife is expected not only to provide physical comforts and a calm and tension-free home, she also has to give emotional support to her husband and to heal him of the injuries inflicted on him by his occupation (Man, 1997; p. 209).

This relationship between the woman’s domestic work and the husband’s career is complicated in the Astronaut situation. On the one hand, she is clearly fulfilling the
gendered role of housewife and mother; without her work the family unit would not function. On the other, however, the physical absence of her husband from the home means that his daily needs are not a factor of this domestic work.\(^3\) She does not ‘do his laundry.’ She is not reproducing his labour power in the traditional sense, yet she is enjoying the fruits of his labour in the money he sends. As Appadurai indicates, “links between labor and family life” have been broken under globalisation. The Astronaut family is a clear example of this condition.

The Informality of Family Life

What are the effects of the man’s absence on the woman’s experience of the home? Feminist literature points to the centrality of gender and intra-household power dynamics in the understanding of a woman’s experience of family life (O’Connor, 1991; Bowlby et al., 1997; Lawson, 1998; Silvey and Lawson, 1999). Two particular accounts provide useful points of contrast here. Firstly, examining “concepts of home” in existing analyses of gender and the household, Bowlby et al. (1997) make the following comments:

The notion of the home as a physical location and a psychological concept is often a positive one of warmth, security and a haven from the pressures of paid employment and public life...However, the home is also a site for the creation and operation of inequitable relations that can be expressed in psychological tensions and violence... (p. 343)

Roles performed within the home can appear at once natural – the preparation and cooking of meals by a woman for her partner and children, or a man putting up shelves in the kitchen – and yet the organization and performance of these both illustrate and determine a gendering of roles and responsibilities. Indeed, domestic violence is often triggered by a woman failing to meet a man’s expectations about “his” woman’s responsibility to provide sexual and caring services...in general, the

\(^3\) An interesting extension to this thesis would be to examine the husband’s daily domestic life in Hong Kong/Taiwan. Preliminary findings suggest the importance of the extended family once again. Several of the husbands live with relatives when they are working in the country or origin.
home is the site for the creation, reproduction, and maintenance of patriarchal relations...(p. 345).

Secondly, discussing middle-class Hong Kong immigrant women in Canada, Guida Man stresses the extent to which a socially constructed image of the "ideal wife" has contemporary saliency: the woman herself defines her 'womanhood' by her own domestic labour. For these women, "power lay in the management and control of every aspect of family life." (1997, p. 210). It revolved around "skilful management" of the household by the wife.

The empirical findings of this research on the Astronaut family suggest an ambivalent relationship between the woman and domestic tasks, which is not captured by either of these two accounts. The Astronaut family disrupts the assumed patriarchal power of the man within the home in a crucial way – the man is absent for the majority of the time. He is therefore unable to know whether his expectations of his wife's 'role' as mother and housekeeper are being met. Several women suggested that they often felt "watched" by their husband or parents-in-law in the pre-migratory setting. In the new setting of Vancouver, away from this critical gaze, they clearly no longer feel the pressure to sustain certain standards, which were previously required of them. In Vancouver, domestic tasks seemed unrelated to a formal expression of the competent wife – they were simply a practical necessity. Consequently, I discovered a distinct sense of informality, which arose in discussions with the women around housework. Sylvie exemplifies this attitude, with reference to her cooking and cleaning chores. She said:
I know how to cook...It may not be as good as others but I think it's okay. And then for the cleaning, I think it depends...It is how often you like to do ...I think it's not a big problem. The only problem is if you want to do it or not.

Sarah echoed this response almost exactly: “I have more freedom...I can do it by myself, whatever I like to do, because no-one asks me to do that. Yeah. I like to clean up now, and then I will clean up.” Jen’s sense of freedom is juxtaposed against that of her sister (her sister has also migrated to Vancouver but lives with her husband). Pointing out to Jen her additional household responsibilities, she replied: “Uh-ha. But no person pushes me to do that. That is the point. I can do those things as I planned.”

The ability to plan her own time was a fundamental aspect of the woman’s positive experience of settlement in Vancouver; it allows women to integrate their social and leisure time with domestic and childcare tasks, and allocate more time to their leisure than they may have otherwise done. It has been assumed that through migration, and the increase in the amount of work expended in the domestic sphere, the immigrant woman’s leisure time will be significantly reduced. Guida Man (1997) concludes her discussion along these lines, with the following statement:

As a result of migration, the middle-class immigrant household lost aspects of its class position that it took for granted in Hong Kong, such as being able to afford domestic help, and having sufficient purchasing power. In some instances, the husbands did offer to ‘help out’ with housework...Nonetheless, the wives were the ones who took on a disproportionate burden of household labor. It is in this way that a gendered division of labor is not only being maintained, but intensified. Moreover, the differences in the physical organization of society in terms of the geographical spread of Canadian cities, and the problem with suburban public transportation compounds the work load of these women, infringing on their daily lives, leaving them with no time for social life or recreation (p. 217).
For the participants in this research, it was clearly not the case that in the Astronaut circumstance they had “no time for social life or recreation”. Several women mentioned a decrease in their purchasing power, but reasoned that there is less to spend your money on in Vancouver, and less social pressure to buy the ‘right’ clothes, the most expensive food, and so on. The “geographical spread of Canadian cities” has made driving a necessity, but also a source of significant freedom and independence for those interviewed. Here I will first address the issue of leisure amongst the Astronaut wives.

Leisure, Lifestyle and Self-Development

The desire to migrate is not always a reflection of immediate and obvious political, material or accumulative strategies, but can be profoundly more personal. Sarah explained her migration decision:

JW: Can you explain to me why you came [to Vancouver]?

You know, in Hong Kong I have pressure. Yes, everything has pressure. Whenever I am walking, shopping...a lot of pressure for me...I always work very late...When I go home my kids are also working, doing their homework, until they sleep.

She lamented the lack of time previously spent with her children. However, deeper psychological forces were also at work. She continued:

The main reason is...I think it’s the influence of my father. Because my father was born in China and when he was young he had the choice to come to Hong Kong or maybe stay in China. And he chose to come to Hong Kong...and then I live in Hong Kong. When I was young...I went back to China for a holiday...I saw the people; the same as me – Chinese – but they haven’t...they don’t know may things...I think it’s 1979...They don’t know what has changed, you know? Western jeans is popular in the world, but they don’t know. Once, I remember, I stand in the bus station for only ten seconds and many people around me are looking at me, because I wear a colourful long dress. They know that the...dress colour is only blue – blue trousers and a white shirt and black shoes...At that
moment I feel very sad...because I know we are both Chinese but why I learn more and they have no chance to see more? So when I had the chance to go to another country, for my kids I think it’s better. I chose the other road for my kids...So now I thank my father for giving me the idea.  

Jill emigrated from Hong Kong because she was concerned about human rights under Chinese rule, although she had another reason too. She said:

The other reason is that I don’t want to stay in a small place in the world...In the past years I have only used much time in my job, and no time to take care of other things.

She was a businesswoman in Hong Kong, and she was concerned about the amount of time her career consumed – “so much time.” Her desire to migrate to Canada was, therefore, inextricably linked both to a desire to widen her experiences and dissatisfaction with her former lifestyle. She said: “[I had] no time to...to learn something for myself. So I want to change my life.” Many of the women articulated a similar concern about their use of their time before migrating. Moving to Vancouver was sometimes perceived as an adventure: as a chance to make a fresh start and to explore a new way of life, and not, in every case, a sacrifice for the sake of the family:

When I was on the plane headed for Canada I had a kind of hope...Looking forward to having a new life here...Certain changes, changes for the kids. Everything will be new, you know? (Hannah)

---

4 I am reminded, by Sarah’s account, of theorist Appadurai’s (1996) emphasis on the role of the imagination in contemporary migration decisions. He writes: “More people than ever before seem to imagine that they will live and work in places other than where they were born,” (p. 6). Sarah highlights also another important aspect of the emigration of people from Hong Kong and Taiwan, that is intimately bound up with the histories of the territories. In 1991, over one third of Hong Kong’s population were first-generation immigrants (Skeldon, 1994a). Writes Skeldon (1994a) “Hong Kong is very much the product of migration and may therefore have a substantial population that has only superficial roots in the territory” (p. 22). Similarly in Taiwan, many of its resident population fled from China after 1949. It is therefore conceivable why migration is, for those who can afford it, an easily imagined possibility.
Neither were the women hapless victims of the migration process; participants indicated that they understood prior to migration, to some extent, that their life would potentially undergo dramatic change as a consequence of migration to Vancouver. Sylvie told me that she felt quite confident:

**Because I have friends who have migrated in Canada. And...in Hong Kong the TV programme, they talked about...the immigrant’s life. And they already mentioned, you know, they have the Astronaut families...They already talk about this. The woman has to do all the stuff.**

The preconception that migrating would give women more time for personal development (outside a career) was commonly articulated as an important secondary reason for migrating. In an unusual example of forward thinking, a year before leaving Hong Kong Jen gave up her accounting job and dismissed her housekeeper. She wanted to prepare herself, she told me, for her ‘new life’:

**Because we are planning to...to live here [Vancouver], so that’s what I am thinking. I have to know how to do before I come so...It’s good practice. So I take up everything, so nowadays I can handle easily. Especially the cleaning; I learn it from a part-time helper...So I know how to clean those glass windows, floors...**

**I had a whole year practice! I practice everyday! Laughs...I learned how to cook...I have to go shopping...I learn kitchen work...Prepare, like, breakfast for the kids before they go to school, and then prepare lunch, dinner...**

Most of the women were less well prepared and faced some difficulties at first (see chapter four). Over time, however (the crucial year), women become aware of their ability to cope with everyday tasks in the absence of their husbands. With increased confidence, they begin to see beyond their role as mother and housewife – a functional role rather than the sum of their person-hood - and seek out new interests and develop new skills. Fiona’s emptiness became transformed:
But after a while...I have a lot of things to do, and I want to learn more about a lot of things so...And especially recently, I just feel quite busy.

...a sentiment echoed by Rose who said:

I don’t have time to think about lonely!

At first, Jill’s new life in Vancouver involved housework and not much else; it was, she said, a boring routine. Like most of the women, she later realised that she could use her time more fully, for her own development and leisure. She said: “I try to find other things to do. Learn some...things and do exercise and make the friends.” She now considers this a positive change of lifestyle. As was noted above, one way in which women show significant innovation in implementing their gendered role is in the integration of childcare activities with personal and social activities. Lisa exemplifies this. She here describes her typical daily routine:

About 8.35 I pick up my son to go to school and...I have English classes at nine o’clock...everyday, Monday to Friday, nine to eleven o’clock. After eleven o’clock sometimes I go to the library...to study my English. I learn painting now...one time a week.

After she picks her son up from school she must drive him to one of his many activities; “I stay there”, she said, “so I read my English...I wish I could improve my English.” After he goes to bed she often has her own homework to complete.

What became clear in the course of interviews was an intense desire by participants to broaden their personal horizons and accumulate knowledge and skills for themselves. And this is not just exemplified in the women. Simon, a lone immigrant husband, faced a dramatic transformation in his life when he came to Canada:
JW: What were the major changes that you had to make to yourself and your lifestyle?

When first here?

JW: Yes.

Three things. One is, umm...I didn’t make any money. This is a very big change for a man, and I thought ‘I’m nobody’. When I make money I think I am somebody, but while I didn’t make money I lost my self-esteem. The second is I have no job so my daily life is empty. The third thing is I have no sex life. This makes it more difficult to live. But after six months I go to school; during those six months every morning, every afternoon, and I study every evening. Because we have a test every morning!...Learning took the place of my job in my daily life.

When Claire arrived from Taiwan in 1992, she said she felt overwhelmed by the amount she had to learn. A desire to master the English language, however, became her top priority and absorbed much of her free time. After attending a few classes, she was dissatisfied with her progress and was concerned about the significant “language barrier” that she perceived. In a display of extremely innovative thinking, she began attending the swimming pool as a way to improve her English. There she could speak with retired people, who are “more willing to...help you”. She also began sitting in the sauna; “I sit in there and just listen to them talk”. Men would “chat...and of course men like to talk about politician, you know, current issues...And so that’s the way. It takes me years, you know”. In addition to English, Claire made it her goal to understand as much as she could about Canadian culture:

I think one thing help me a lot is reading. Yeah, I read...basically every day. For the first two or three years I still read Chinese book, but after that I throw all the Chinese books aside and I think I should read some English books. So I start on the children’s book and then getting more and more until I think, you know, I should learn more about Western history, so in that way I can understand more Western values...three or four hours when the kids go to school! I am just sitting here after the breakfast...
Learning English was both a mission and an enjoyable pastime for most of the women. The ability of the women to articulate themselves during the interviews was testimony to the amount of time and effort that they have invested. Many women said that they could speak very little when they arrived in Vancouver; and this is especially true for those from Taiwan. All of the interviewees attend an English class or stated that they intend to do so in the near future; attending these classes is a major way in which women make friends with other women in their situation and expand their social networks. For women with very young children such as Lisa, their isolation ends when the children begin preschool – affording them time to attend classes, and offering the opportunity to make friends with other parents at the school. Several of the women work as volunteers at their children’s school.

More generally, the hobbies in which the women engage were diverse. For example: quilting, pottery, dance, aerobics, computers, tennis, reading, and sculpture were some of the activities mentioned during interviews. On Sundays and holidays Laura enjoys going on bus tours. She has travelled within the United States and to Toronto, she told me. Claire takes road trips with her children and friends. Importantly, these activities were newly undertaken after migration, and add to the sense of an enriched lifestyle that was so strongly implied:

I chose to go back to school – back to Cap. College as a part time student. I learn my ceramic there and my stone sculpture, meet different people from different kind of field, and I was so happy. And suddenly I found...I can really

---

5 English teaching in Taiwan schools begins at a much later age than in Hong Kong. Consequently, women from Hong Kong tended to have experience more schooling in the English language and this is often reflected in their ability to express themselves.
improve my English. So I gained more confidence...it's been almost eight years, and I had to push myself...to give myself a chance. I had to push myself, but only myself knows that it's not easy – it's really difficult. So now...I go to LEAD group. I think maybe I can help a newcomer because I understand that feeling. (Claire)

Claire now volunteers as a ‘host family’ to new immigrants, wanting to share her knowledge. This is clearly a reflection of her significant sense of her own competence in negotiating her new surroundings.

Spending time with friends becomes a source of pleasure in itself; women (and men) frequently mentioned chatting to, or going to lunch with friends as a favourite activity. Laura explained: “In Hong Kong you have not much time to meet your friends. Yeah, very busy...But here there’s many time...” Penny made the point that her relationship with her friends is much closer than when she was in Hong Kong. Jen finds that she spends more time talking to her friends in Hong Kong since she arrived in Vancouver than she did when she was in Hong Kong herself! Before migrating, women’s careers placed a significant restriction on leisurely pursuits.

Several participants suggested that migrating had allowed them the time to reflect on the meaning of their lives, and stressed the importance of the church in both providing a source of spiritual fulfilment and also in the forming of friendships. Hannah was baptised as a Christian six months before she came to Canada, but she knows many friends from Hong Kong who became Christians after migrating. She said:

I have a lot of friends they became Christians in Canada, because they have more time to go to church. In the new environment they need spiritual support...I have a lot of friends like that.
A lot of friends told me that they became Christians in Canada but if they hadn't come to Canada they won't be a Christian.

JW: Why is that?

Because they have a busy life, they have a lot of activities...They don't think of going to church. But here life is more peaceful and quiet and people tend to have family life here so they will have chances to go to church. I have a friend, she returned to Hong Kong, and now whenever I call her I have feedback from her that she doesn't have time to go to church.

For many lone immigrants in the Astronaut family situation, spiritual reflection is intimately bound up with the increased personal time that migration to Vancouver, and freedom from paid employment, has provided.

Reduced Purchasing Power and Lifestyle

Overall, these migrants' adjustment to life in Canada is filled with disappointment which has been heightened by the sense of loss of the “good things” they used to have or enjoy in Hong Kong. For example, driving a luxury car represents a symbol of status and success in Hong Kong, while in Canada it is necessary to get around. Not only does it not seem to have the same symbolic value but it may be seen as being snobbish, typifying the recent Hong Kong immigrants who are doing nothing but “flaunting their wealth” (Lam, 1994; p. 171).

Lam (1994) stresses the disappointment with life in Canada felt by Hong Kong migrants: “seen primarily as a contrast between what they experienced in Hong Kong and what they have to face in a changed socioeconomic and sociocultural milieu.” (p. 170).

Focussing specifically on the negative impacts of migration on women, Guida Man (1995, 1997) highlights the fact that most middle-class Chinese immigrant families experience a reduction in purchasing power – and status – when they immigrate to Canada. Several of the women raised the issue of decreased spending, but these same women also placed this in the context of a Vancouver lifestyle, where social status is not
so easily gained through a display of wealth.6 Nancy paints a powerful picture of the lifestyle difference between Hong Kong and Vancouver:

When I was in Hong Kong and I was working I thought everything is in my hand, everything is under control....We were in the middle class, we could afford to have two helpers at home...So when we came over here I just couldn’t get rid of the same kind of lifestyle. That’s why, when I first came here, we had a big house...expensive cars. I had one of the helpers brought here with us – the Filipino girl.

She has been in Vancouver for just over ten years and her attitude towards material goods has changed dramatically in this time. Penny and Laura suggest that the demands placed on the woman to display wealth in Hong Kong are absent in Vancouver.

Because...here you wear the T-shirt, it’s okay, but if you go to work in Hong Kong you must dress very good and your hair...Laugh. (Laura)

The Canadian is different style. It’s very casual. But in Hong Kong it’s more brand names...fashion, you know. (Penny)

Yet, importantly, they both expressed satisfaction with their new, more casual, lifestyle. Laura said: “When I come here I feel very relaxed...It’s good for me.” Jen made a similar point about lifestyle and spending; “here we don’t need to spend too much money...Life is very simple here. I can accept that.” She compares life in Vancouver to life in Hong Kong, where there were “so many celebrations...”.

The necessity of driving in the spatially dispersed urban environment of Vancouver is another ‘fact’ that does not confer a straightforward interpretation of the woman’s

---

6 Aihwa Ong (1999) notes how “the politics of location reduces the immigrants’ ability to convert economic capital into cultural capital” (p. 96). The debate over the aesthetics of monster houses in Vancouver (Ley, 1995) highlighted problems associated with displays of wealth by Hong Kong immigrants.
experience. Jen’s sister lives in Vancouver with her family (and husband) She suggested "maybe I am happier than her." I asked her why she thought this:

I’ve got more freedom...She has to take care of the house, her husband and her two kids...and she can’t drive.

JW: And you can?

I can.

JW: And that’s important to you?

That’s very important. I came here and I can drive anywhere. I just take a map and I can go anywhere I want to.

Driving may have been a significant source of stress for women when they arrived in Vancouver, and they may be constrained by having to drive their kids from one activity to the next. But, as Jen here indicates, driving is also a significant source of independence. Cheryl planned and executed a road trip to the United States, to her (absent) husband’s disapproval. She used this example to express her sense of liberty from previous constraints:

My husband, he don’t like that I can do many things...For example, one week ago I phone him and say, ‘I am going to the USA’

JW: Are you?

Yes. I drive my daughter and pick up my friends. He said ‘Oh!’ He so angry...I don’t think he like I go anywhere. He like I stay at home. But I don’t think so. I think, ‘You not here, I’m free, I can go anywhere’.

The women not only drive out of necessity but also for pleasure. It is often a sign of their achievements in Canada (many could not drive before they came) and also, crucially, their freedom.
Creating a Stable Lifeworld:
Friendship Networks and Ethnic Community Ties

It is commonly understood that migrants frequently utilise an existing community of similar immigrants to help establish them in a new country. This was no less the case for the women in the Astronaut family. It is noteworthy that immigrant support agencies were infrequently referred to in interviews as an important source of support, although S.U.C.C.E.S.S., the Taiwanese Canadian Cultural Society and the LEAD programme were all mentioned on more than one occasion. Much more important, however, was the support offered by friends and relatives already present; the number of interviewees with relatives in Vancouver was quite striking. Anne and Lillian both have cousins; Jen has a sister and her sister’s family; Barbara has her brother-in-law; Laura has a brother; Rose has a sister-in-law; both Hannah and Kathleen have two sisters and their families. Lucy’s mother and father migrated with her, and her sister and brother have come to Vancouver since.7 Fiona’s parents-in-law migrated with her. Sarah’s sister-in-law migrated to Vancouver from Hong Kong three years before Sarah. She was the biggest source of help and support to Sarah after she landed:

She helped me with many things such as apply medical care card, and go to the school board...about driving – which one you can do and which one you can’t do. She tell me everything.

Several women had friends they knew from Hong Kong and Taiwan when they arrived and getting to know the friends of friends was a common way in which their social

7 Having relatives and friends present on arrival was slightly more common amongst Hong Kong than Taiwanese interviewees. This undoubtedly reflects the relatively larger immigration of Hong Kong Chinese to Vancouver in the early 1990s and before this.
networks were expanded. Sylvie indicated that she and her family stayed in the house of a friend for two months when she first landed in Vancouver, until she had found somewhere to live. Support was also provided by overseas visits from family members other than the husband; Sylvie's father, for example, was staying at her house at the time of the interview, visiting her for three months from Hong Kong, and her brother and sister will visit Vancouver on vacation. Lisa's mother-in-law has visited Vancouver on average two to three times a year since she came to Vancouver in 1996, and sometimes stays for several months. Lisa confessed to feeling “very happy” when she is here. In Taiwan, before Lisa migrated, her mother-in-law took charge of all the household tasks, and she resumes this role in Vancouver; “I don’t do anything!” laughed Lisa. Clearly, migration does not always mean the loss of these support networks, but their displacement. In Vancouver, the presence of relatives can be a great comfort. Far from maintaining the oppressive social structures sometimes found in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the presence of relatives proved to minimise feelings of isolation and depression.

Child Care and the Parent-Child Relationship

The parents always want to make money and [send] the children...to day-care. (Rose)

For the families with the “astronauts,” the marital relationship and parent-child relationships have been greatly disrupted. (Lam, 1994; p. 177)

In her study, Cheung (1997) reports that twenty-one percent of the “professional group” of women surveyed in Hong Kong made use of paid helpers to take care of their children. Both partners were then free to pursue a career independent of household and childcare
needs, apparently undermining traditional roles within the family and contributing towards the liberation of middle-class females. Before migration, most of the participants in my study hired a nanny and relied also on the help of the extended family to alleviate a substantial amount of parenting responsibility. They prioritised their career over the personal undertaking of many child-care tasks. After migrating to Canada, and finding themselves in the Astronaut situation, they suddenly became lone parents, taking sole responsibility for the care of their children. In Vancouver, all of the women interviewed have young children living with them (under the age of fifteen) and none of the women hire a nanny to help with childcare tasks. Lucy was the only woman interviewed to have the help of family members (her parents-in-law) on a daily basis.

It is certainly not my intention to imply that in spite of this dramatic change in the support system available, women do not find this responsibility demanding, as they most certainly do. Once again, however, I wish to draw attention to the way in which the women themselves interpret this circumstance. A considerable number of women expressed the desire to spend time with, and forge a close relationship with, their children, and migrating to Vancouver was seen as a way of facilitating the achievement of this objective. Just as a demanding career left little time for leisure and friends apart from work colleagues, it also curtailed interaction between parent and child, and the majority of participants (men included) expressed dissatisfaction with this situation. I want to suggest that rather than being perceived as a role thrust upon her, becoming a more attentive mother was therefore often an important personal decision. This poses a further challenge to the assumption that migration is necessarily an oppressive experience.
for the woman (Man, 1995; Ong, 1999; Silvey and Lawson, 1999; Halfacree and Boyle, 1999).

Before migrating to Vancouver, Claire had obligations to her family’s business that precluded spending much time with her children. It is common in these circumstances for the mother-in-law to take the role of caregiver. Claire said:

You know, in Chinese culture...if the husband has to work or something like that the wife has to help him with the business or work. So, you know, parents-in-law naturally become the ones to look after the next generation...until I realise that...I tell myself that I am ready to play the real role like mother. So this is what I decide...I really think about it and then make a decision myself.

Katharyn told me that she wanted to come to Canada so that she could spend more time with her children. In Hong Kong she worked in a bank, often until very late at night. Several women made similar statements implying that migrating to Vancouver involved a conscious – and desirable – change in their parenting responsibilities. However, this was not always a decision made in advance. In other cases, adopting a mothering role was not an explicit choice but the result of the perceived necessity of migration; a change of attitude occurred some time after. Nancy, for example, hired a housekeeper and a nanny to look after her children in Hong Kong; “I didn’t have much time with them,” she said.

We were having a very busy life in Hong Kong, particularly my husband. At that time he worked five days, but he had a lot of parties, meetings going on, and also he had to travel a lot during weekends, to South East Asia...The only thing I could wish was I have to put more attention onto my kids. And this life in Hong Kong would not allow me to do so. Since both of us were so busy, I guess either one of us had to find some way out, to give them a little more attention. So we decided that I came back here first.

Yet, in spite of the apparent intentions, when she first moved to Vancouver she continued with “the same kind of lifestyle”; she was working full time and brought her domestic
helper with her from Hong Kong to continue her same role in the domestic tasks. An important moment in her life came when she suddenly developed severe back pain and was forced to give up work. Her relationship with her children subsequently began to develop:

Since I stopped working full time, my relationship with the children is very, very good. We’re getting so close together. Every morning I prepare breakfast for them, and I walk Catherine [daughter] to school, I pick them up, and we just walk back home...It’s really nice.

The first back pain, Nancy said, “made me realise that I really had to change lifestyle and I didn’t really come back here for my children in the first couple of years...I was as busy as I was in Hong Kong.” Since coming to Canada, Sylvie has undergone a similar re-evaluation of her previous lifestyle. Her comments imply a realisation that in Hong Kong, she was not fulfilling her responsibility as a parent. She makes a distinction between providing children with a materially rich life and giving children her time. She said:

Sometimes when I talk with my friends, they have the same idea that when we are in Hong Kong we really neglected our kids...We did not know what they are thinking, what they really want, or... But when here, because I have more time to be with them, they talk more... Because you give birth to your kids then you have the responsibility to bring them up. Talk and communication...really helps them to grow... In Hong Kong they have more luxurious life; many toys and whatever they want. But, maybe the concern is less. Actually I prefer this way, to look after them closely.

In Hong Kong she worked as an accountant for a US company, and is critical of the way she was required to use her time and the repercussions of this for her relationship with her son. She said: “I have to work overtime all the time. Usually I have time off around eight o’clock...Sometimes when it’s a month’s end I have to work until eleven or twelve...When it’s a year’s end sometimes two or three...in the morning. So my elder son not really close to me.” A hired nanny helped her son eat and dress, and her husband
played with him. Now she is in Vancouver she misses aspects of her “busy” career in
Hong Kong, but says of her new life: “I treasure the time that I am with my kids because
I can see the relationship changed, and I understand more...them more.” In another
example of changing perceptions of personal roles and responsibilities, Jen conceives of
her experience in Vancouver as a different episode in her life. She worked as an
accountant in Hong Kong. Although claiming to have “nothing to do in Vancouver
except take care of my children,” subsequent questions revealed that this was not an
unhappy state of affairs for her. When I asked her how she felt about this, she replied:
“It’s fine! ‘Cos...life has so many different aspects. So in this period I have to take care
of my children. Maybe when they become teenagers or go to college I will go back to
work.” Her children are presently eight and nine years old.

Hannah describes the role the nanny played in family life when in Hong Kong. She said:
“When we had a nanny in Hong Kong she would do everything for her [the
daughter]...bring her food, get her clothing from the clothes chest, gave her the
clothing...The nanny carried her school bag.” In the previous chapter I made reference to
Lisa, who worked as an accountant in Taiwan and would send her son to a nanny for the
whole week.

You know, in Taiwan I had a job and I was busy and my son...I’d send him to
the nanny’s home all the week. Only on Saturday and Sunday I see him...and
only on weekends I bring him back. Sometimes the Saturday and Sunday I had
to work so I bring him to my mother-in-law and my mother-in-law help me to
take care of my son. (Lisa)

This relationship underwent dramatic change after migration to Vancouver, and she now
spends “all the day” with her child, who is now six years old. She described the
experience of caring for him; “we had many arguments at first...because I don’t know what he wants, and what he says because he was so small. I hadn’t taken care of him [in Taiwan].” Over time, the situation has improved. She said, with significant satisfaction: “Now we are very...we have a good relationship. He always says ‘I love you Mummy’.”

And it is not just the women who enjoy this relationship with their children. As I have indicated, the lone men experienced a very similar transformation after migration:

...[When] we are in Hong Kong I don’t have much time with Maggie so...Actually, after we move here our relationship got closer. Yeah. Because...sometimes she don’t like to talk with me because, maybe, this is what we call the generation gap. But as long as stay here, because only me and her in the house so...if she wants to talk she has to talk to me. Laughs. Not any choice. (Den.)

Den’s decision to ‘take it in turns’ with his wife running the business in Hong Kong – one-and-a-half-months there, one-and-a-half months in Vancouver – was based solely, he stressed, on his desire to maintain a close relationship with his daughter.

Reinstating Patriarchy: the Return of the Husband

When my husband is here I don’t have my freedom. (Cheryl)

Migration and the experience of the Astronaut situation can significantly transform the practical aspects of the woman’s everyday life in a way that may imply the intensification of traditional, patriarchal gender roles. This reading of the situation, however, overlooks one crucial characteristic of the phenomenon – the absence of the husband from everyday life. In this final part of the chapter, I will draw on instances relayed by the women,
which demonstrate what happens when the husband returns to Vancouver on vacation and, in a couple of cases, for good. As will become apparent, these moments in particular bring into stark relief the changes that the woman herself has undergone in his absence.

Sylvie has been in Canada for four years. Her husband returns to Hong Kong to work for half a year, spending half a year in Vancouver. They came to this arrangement in order to minimise the time he would spend away from the family; in the six months he is in Vancouver, he has no income from his employment. Sylvie explained how much she missed him the first time they separated. They would talk on the phone every day for thirty minutes and she would “long for the time when he came back”. She was, however, unprepared for the way she would react when he came to Vancouver after that first six months of separation:

And then when he came back, for the first week I found that there were many things I need to encounter. It’s different, in that my emotions is not peaceful...Many things make me feel a bit frustrated or not feeling comfortable...I had a lot of quarrels with him.

I asked her if she could explain the types of problems.

Because he had been away for six months...I became more independent actually. And then when he came back I had to do many adjustments to cope with him.

She goes on to paint a commonly articulated picture, whereby the husband, on his return, expects a level of formality in family activities that are dismissed when the wife is on her own. On two separate occasions, participants mentioned food and the formality of meals as an area where the husband demands particular standards:

When he away I used to have two dishes and one soup for my two kids and me. And then when he came back he said it should be three dishes...I have to cook a bigger meal and more dishes...For me, I would prefer less meat and more
vegetable, and then he insists that the kids, because they are growing up, need more meats...Actually this is minor, but it accumulates.

Problems arose because in his absence, Sylvie was forced to become more independent, and in so doing had adopted her own routines to deal with family life. She went on to illustrate her sense of the more general problems:

I used to be free when he’s away – I’m in charge of everything – and then when he came back I seem to be step back and he’s in charge...I’m not really adjusted, so I feel rather frustrated.

Rose suggested that when her husband returns, her workload increases, “because we have to do everything...Do anything. Always the husband first.” In the same way as Sylvie, the formality of family meals must increase; she has to “prepare dinner, prepare lunch – very formal”. “My husband comes back and I must cook four dishes maybe. But if I eat with my children and eat noodles it’s okay.”

For Anne, the Astronaut situation has meant freedom from the critical gaze of her extended family. The issue of patriarchy was made explicit in Anne’s response. She told me that her husband is the President of a large family-run business. In Taiwan, Anne lived with her husband and parents-in-law; “many eyes watch you”, she told me. She is aware that society gives more status to the man; “the man can earn the money and get the important position.” When she is in Taiwan, she must adopt a subordinate status because her “whole family” affirms this view. Her husband spends only one-and-a-half months at work and then comes to Vancouver for two months. In Vancouver, he reasserts his role as the head of the family. I was told (translator):

If her husband is here then the husband is the master. So if he wants to do something then they will do it with him. And he likes to eat something then she
will [prepare it]...Her husband likes to stay at home and her children like to go out and if her husband is here then they stay here, at home.

When her husband is in Vancouver, gendered power relations within the family are conspicuous; it is he who dictates the family’s activities. The wife’s time is consequently no longer her own time. Although the majority of women interviewed had jobs before migrating, a minority were required to give up paid employment after their first child was born. Rose told me that she had had a very “boring” life in Taiwan. Her life revolved around staying at home and looking after her children. She lived under the watchful gaze of her husband’s parents, and did not even leave the house to get groceries, because her mother-in-law would insist on doing this. Rose was forced to quit a job she enjoyed, she told me, “because my husband and my mother-in-law, they always say the children is important.” Moving away from the extended family has had a significant impact on her life and especially her sense of freedom. She went on to say:

But now I am in Canada I am very happy! I can go anywhere! Laughs...I can visit my friends. When they [the children] go to school I have my free time...So I enjoy Canadian life. Laughs.

It is clear from these examples that that the “close knit support network” (consisting of the extended family in close proximity), perceived by Man (1995) as a benefit to middle-class women before they migrated to Canada, can also be a source of oppression. The presence of the mother-in-law in particular can ensure that patriarchal gender relations are upheld through ensuring that the woman is fulfilling her expected role of housewife and mother.
Women are not unsympathetic to their husbands' experience of the Astronaut arrangement. When the husband returns to Vancouver he is often tired from his stressful work load, compounded by jet lag, and wishes only to rest and confine himself to the home, with his family. “I think a lot of husbands, they come here to relax,” Rose reflected. The man also faces an unfamiliar environment; his ‘mobility’ means that he has few friends of his own present, he may not speak English well, and he is aware that his wife is capable of negotiating these strange surroundings much more easily than he is. Barbara illustrated how her daily activities change when her husband is in Vancouver:

You know, I used, when he's not here, I used to go to school, after that lunch with my friends, and then maybe play tennis. When's he's back I have to cancel the lunch appointment...because I have to keep him company...So the only thing I keep is to go to school. Other than that...all cancelled until he left.

She finds this situation “so boring” and “so irregular.” In the absence of her husband, perhaps a consequence of her localisation in Vancouver, she has built around herself a stable environment and a regular social routine that is disrupted on his return. She relayed that many of her friends are in the same position; periodically, one would ‘disappear’ for two weeks at a time. ‘Her husband must be back,’ she and her friends would joke.

Cheryl has been in Vancouver for three and a half years. She has two daughters who are now aged six and four. She migrated from Taiwan because her parents-in-law were concerned about the political relationship with China. I asked her how she felt about being in the Astronaut situation and she replied:

My husband, when he stays in Canada, he is always at home. Everything, he don’t like. He argues to me. If he stays in Taiwan, I am free. My heart is free, you know? *Laughs.*
She was emphatic in expressing her belief that the most stressful time for the lone woman in the Astronaut situation is when her husband joins her. Not only does her husband not like to go out when he is in Vancouver, but he objects also to her own social activities outside the home:

Oh, you know, sometimes I like to go out with my friends, to talk and to go out to dinner. But he don’t like! ‘You don’t go out...You can take your friends, come my house’. But I think, this is a woman to woman...so I don’t like my husband to be there!

In Cheryl’s depiction of her marital relationship, it would seem that her husband has certain expectations of how she should behave. There is a sense in which the ideal ‘Chinese wife’, as presented by Lo (1989), is required of her:

...she was very nice to his parents, liked by his mother, did not talk much, agreed to everything, and always did the things he liked her to do. She seldom went out and hardly had any friends. A wife should stay at home and be a good mother, a good wife, and a good daughter-in-law. She should not have her own opinions (Lo, 1989; p. 209).

When she told her husband over the telephone of her planned road trip to the United States, his reaction, and Cheryl’s interpretation of it, strongly implies this expectation:

He said ‘Oh!’ He so angry. He said ‘why?’ I think he don’t like I go anywhere, he like I stay at home. But I don’t think so. I think, ‘you not here, I’m free, I can go anywhere’.

As Cheryl here powerfully demonstrates, the physical absence of the husband is a fundamental way in which women are able to subvert patriarchal control and expectations. Her husband still attempts to assert his authority over the telephone, but this does not, at least for Cheryl, seem to have any affect on her chosen behaviour. In Taiwan he would be in work all day, and so Cheryl experienced the freedom to come and go as
she pleased. When he is away from Vancouver, she has this same freedom. The problems arise when he comes to visit. I asked her how often he comes to Vancouver:

Oh, too many times.

JW: Too many?

Too many here. Just sometimes goes back to Taiwan.

In fact, at the time of the interview he had been in Taiwan for three months and was arriving in Vancouver the following day. Cheryl was visibly stressed at the thought of his return. She revealed how things would change: “the men like baby, you know?” He would expect her to care for him; he would expect her to stay at home with him, and to cut out her social life. He watches over her, she told me. Cheryl felt her own experience to be representative of a more general experience of Astronaut wives:

there are too many women in Vancouver, their feelings is the same...They don’t like the husband here...Because maybe too long not together, so if the husband is not here she is okay. She can go anywhere and do anything. If the husband is here, they can’t.

In another example, Penny showed an awareness of her own independence in the absence of her husband, and is reflexive about the patriarchal structure of family life in Hong Kong. She said; “In Hong Kong my husband is my centre! But in Canada it is different...”. After two years in the Astronaut situation her husband was able to transfer his job to Vancouver. Penny has found this change in many ways difficult. She decries her loss of “freedom”. “The boss is back!” she said, “and then he controls the family”. She is aware of the power imbalance that her husband perceives between the two of them, and she invokes Chinese tradition to explain this; “In Chinese tradition, man is more powerful than woman,” although she does not want to accept this situation. She has tried
talking to him about her “independence in Canada,” but he will not listen; he continues to believe that he is better and more successful than she is, she told me. There is “no change...He does everything” – except the housework. She said: “Oh! I do that. Laughs. He says ‘the kitchen is a woman’s job, not a man’s job’.”

Emma’s husband joined her in Vancouver for good after two years of the Astronaut arrangement. She explained that when her husband worked in Hong Kong, she would combine socialising with friends and childcare. She would organise gatherings for mothers and children at her house. She was able to meet other single mothers in a similar situation to her, and found great comfort and support in this. She stressed the support of one friend in particular: “we always come together and we go out together with the children...She helps me a lot.” Like many women, Emma felt ambivalent about the absence of her husband; she missed her husband desperately; “Every time he left I feel very depressed. I cry a lot. Because in Hong Kong we had been married for over twenty years and he never left us. So I rely on him very much...” However, she went on to say; “when I get used to the new circle of friends, I find that some period of separation sometimes...is good.” I asked her to explain why she felt this to be so:

Because you can manage your own time. You can have your own social life. But when my husband settled down, all my attention had to go back to the family. I had to cut out some of the activities because of my husband. I have to consider his feelings.

This is a forceful example of the way in the absence of the husband can allow the woman the liberty to enrich her social life and expand her personal activities. Freedom is clearly equated with the ability to manage her own time.
Divergent Attitudes and the Woman's Independence

For two years Emma’s husband travelled between Vancouver and Hong Kong, watching the overseas business slowly collapse. It has been three years since he joined her in Vancouver. He has not worked since, and has not attempted to open a business, which “costs you time and energy, but with no return.” Living with her husband once again, Emma’s has faced a significant change in her life for the second time since migrating. She told me; “he is not very active… and he don’t like me to go out.” He wants her to stay at home with him, he does not himself like to go out and socialise. She reflected:

it is not easy to do… for him to build very close friends… A man and a woman, they have different demands or different needs. We are more sentimental and they are more rational. They think that they can manage everything; they don’t need friends and they don’t need others’ advice of sharing. But for me, I need friends. I need care; I need sharing with people. So, it’s different.

These examples serve to highlight the extent to which the woman’s attitudes change during her time in Vancouver, with her increased independence and in the absence of her husband. Emma stressed how much she respected her husband as “a traditional good man” but disagrees with many of his ideas. She describes him as “selfless” (“he never think about himself so he seldom think about his wife”); thinking only of the children;

The education of the children is his first priority. The most important thing… I think maybe he expects too much. Very high.

Emma’s experience illustrates an important and recurring effect of the Astronaut situation. When spouses live apart for a significant amount of time, in different cultural and social settings, the attitudes of the two begin to diverge. For Emma, this divergence centred upon her husband’s more traditional conception of parent-child relationships and the role of the wife and mother, and her altered understanding of the same issues. She is
aware that there is a difference between ‘traditional’ Chinese values and those she would now wish for her children, and yet she describes herself as a “very traditional woman”: “I would like to listen to somebody rather than make my own decision, because I don’t want to. I would prefer to be a follower for myself”. Significantly, however, her ideas have changed with regards to her children and what she perceives to be their prescribed social roles. She said: “I don’t want them to copy me. I want them to be more independent, to have their own ideas.” She said:

He find that the children are not working as hard as himself...We have different points of view in studying, in learning. I would prefer a more general or broad area for the children and let them go out and have more experience. Not only in academic things...So I just argue with him on this topic.

I want my children to be hardworking, polite, doing good at school...But on the other way we can't only look at the school report. We have to take care of the whole people...They have their own ideas, they should argue with you, they should say no to parents.

Clearly, she is less inclined to accept the Chinese tradition of filial piety, whereby children are expected to obey the parents’ wishes without question. Her daughter, who is thirteen, argues a lot with her father, she told me; she finds she is frequently caught in the middle.

Nancy showed a similar desire for her children to make their own life decisions, independent of their parents’ wishes. I asked her what future she saw for her daughters:

I don’t quite know what’s in their minds and it’s still premature to tell what their plan is...According to Anne [daughter], at the very beginning of the first year of her college she thought that she wanted to go back to Hong Kong and work, because her father insisted that...But then Anne has...been visiting Hong Kong a couple of times during these few years and she’s been telling me; ‘Mum, I really don’t want to go back to Hong Kong.’ She doesn’t want to go into
business. She is interested in childcare...She's studying business for her father only!

I asked Nancy what Anne’s father thought of his daughter’s interests. She said:

He find she’s kind of stupid! *Laughs. But then I always tell Mark [husband] that we have to let them choose...their own future, they should have their own choice...Besides supporting them, we should not tell them what to do.

Augustus Cheung, a family counsellor with S.U.C.C.E.S.S. in Richmond, provides a perspective on the cultural differences between parent-child relationships in Canada and those in a traditional Chinese family. He suggests that in Hong Kong and Taiwan, parents maintain a lot more authority over their children and the children are quick to pick up on the fact that in Canada their independence is relatively protected. He gives some insight into the role of the father:

*We emphasise a lot...the father’s role...We are, from when we are very young, taught...that the father is always there and authoritative and I’m not supposed to talk too much to him or to offend him.*

These attitudes are most clearly observed in the interviews with the lone men, whose wives work away. Simon is in this position, and has been in Canada for almost three years. His wife works in Taiwan and he looks after his two sons who are now sixteen and eighteen years old. He paints a vivid portrait of the role of the father in Taiwan society, and how he has had to adjust since migrating to Canada:

*It was a big problem, two years ago for me. Two years ago I got a bad communication with my kids and they fought against. Because in Taiwan the father has got a very good authority, is powerful within his family. But not here! So I change a lot. I improve myself to be low profile, to be very communicative with them.*
He was taught parenting skills by the Taiwanese Canadian Cultural Society (T.C.C.S.). He learned, he said, to be considerate of their feelings – what they want to do. “Don’t always say no.” In Taiwan he had quite a different relationship with them: “When they had a suggestion I just say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ first...But most of the time I say ‘no, you can’t’. I didn’t explain why.” Here are some further examples of the experiences of the lone men, which serve to underline the importance of gendered roles and identities and the migration experience:

Because in Taiwan we always think about the office or business things. We don’t think about the life or think about the valuable things. So after we went here we must accept the situation and we must talk to another person...We must force us to touch them and know about everything, because we have another...think about another thing...The house cleaning, the thing you never think about before. (Frank)

Because I’m very busy in Taiwan. Go to the work always very early – about 6.30 go to the office and late...about 8.30 get back. So I don’t have any time to do the work in the family and have no time to talk with the kids... (Gary)

JW: So when you came [to Canada] you had to change all that?

Change whole life.

Gary, himself an immigrant of five years, gives his time to the T.C.C.S. and runs a support group for lone men, whose wives work in Taiwan. He has significant insight into the man’s experience of the new cultural and social environment. He here explains the particular way in which men from Taiwan experience the new life in Canada:

They don’t want to go outside...Because they don’t...try to change their life...Come to the new country, that’s a new life. All opinions...maybe important in your country, maybe important in Taiwan...That’s not important [in Canada].

---

SUCCESS is the United Chinese Cultural Enrichment Service Society: a non-profit social service agency which serves the Chinese community in the G. V. R. D.
The men have “very high standards” and do not find it easy to take the advice of others or adopt new attitudes: “So I think, I came to the new country everything will begin from zero. That’s very important, because if you start from zero, everything you get is new.”

They still bring the old stuff here as well. ‘I was this, I want to do this and this...’ They don’t realise that it’s different – that here is different. So start from zero here.

Sometimes they still keep their old customs and ways of doing things...He says this is his family business and he doesn’t want a stranger to help.

Gary feels, from his own experience, that it is not possible to “impose the value system and the standard of Taiwan” on the children of the family, once they are in Vancouver. “A kid goes to school and gains the Western education and the parents want them to have the Taiwan education system...not...the same language...No common points, no common ground...The distance is larger between the parents and the kids.”

Given this male perspective, it is easier to understand why, in the more usual Astronaut situation, the husband’s return to Vancouver has certain unnerving implications. Whilst the wife may have acculturated to a different parenting style and have adopted different attitudes more generally, it is unlikely that the husband will have done the same. After three years in Vancouver, Emma still argues with her husband over the best way of bringing up their children.

**Changing Personal Relationships**

As I mentioned earlier, it is difficult to draw normative conclusions about the relationship change that husband and wife undergo as a result of the Astronaut family. They may
grow apart, and their attitudes may diverge over time and distance apart, and yet the
women may also experience a sense of independence and freedom not experienced
hitherto. For some women, the time spent with their husband seems little different now
than when they were living under the same roof before migration.

‘Cos he's not with me every minute... in Hong Kong, so there's not much
difference. (Jen)

He would come back from work very late each night, missing dinner, and leave early in
the morning. Barbara echoed these sentiments. She told me:

I don’t even see him. When he come back, I'm already in bed. The sons only see
their father on Sunday. Seven o’clock he left the house and come back around
twelve o’clock... You know, in Hong Kong most businessmen are the same...

For Nancy and her husband, however, the lifestyle and attitude difference between them
after migration was too great. He had planned to work in Hong Kong a few more years to
gather savings before moving to join his family in Vancouver. He had even got a job
offer with his company in Vancouver:

But of course, he made a lot more in Hong Kong and the lifestyle in Hong Kong
suits him more, he thinks... he didn’t have much time for the family... We didn’t
have much time to communicate, so each of us is changing gradually... When he
came back here we could tell that he could hardly leave his job in Hong Kong.
Yeah, he rather to stick with his lifestyle in Hong Kong. (emphasis added)

Nancy hypothesises that the divergence in attitudes – and their failure to communicate
these differences - helped spark her husband’s extra-marital affair, and the couple’s
subsequent divorce. Claire, whose poignant story was relayed in chapter four, raises
explicitly the issue of cultural divergence – traditional Chinese culture versus post-
migration attitude change:
'Cos it happened to many Chinese family, I mean, traditional family, not like one born here [Canada]. It's different. I am talking about one like me; finish education in our country and then maybe get married there, and then come here is totally different. Different world...I ask my husband to really think about this...What do you really want? Do you want to devote whole your life to business? I think it happened to lots of Chinese men.

Whilst she feels that financial and material accumulation is no longer her goal in life, her husband continues to prioritise the business in his. I would seem to have painted a generally bleak picture of marital relations after migration, whatever the 'liberating' experience of the woman. However, it need not always be so. Sylvie and her husband were aware that something was going wrong with their relationship and were fortunately able to communicate about it before any damage occurred. She told me: “Before he came back we both longed to be together, and then when we’re together we have so many quarrels. So I just sit down and talk with my husband: ‘what happened?’ ‘Why is it like that?’ She told me that she had learned to sit back and let him resume some charge when he returned from Hong Kong whilst her husband, for his part, began to come to terms with her independence. She said:

we try to tolerate each other, not to be self-centred as we were before...Because of the first year’s experience, so for the second and third year we understand how it is going to be and what we should do...understand that there has been some adjustment.

Changes - in both a personal and practical sense - would seem to be an integral part of the migration and settlement process in Vancouver. The Astronaut arrangement – when husband and wife come intermittently together - brings these changes into stark relief.
In Summary

In the last two chapters I have covered the main aspects of the woman’s experience of the Astronaut family, indicating both instances where experiences could be considered oppressive and also significantly liberating. In this chapter, the full force of the woman’s agency has been underlined in the transformation of both her attitudes and life-world after migration. In the last of the empirical chapters – chapter six – attention will be given to what may be the ultimate fragmentation of the family for the sake of the accumulation of cultural (and economic) capital. I am going to consider the children who are left alone – Vancouver’s Satellite children.
CHAPTER SIX
TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY STRATEGIES: VANCOUVER’S SATELLITE CHILDREN

...the family is the basic social grouping uniting individuals. Family ties are permanent, and individuals owe their loyalty to the family throughout their lives...The Chinese consider the family as the primary focus of their loyalty (Wong, 1985; p. 16).

In her critique of the contemporary middle-class Chinese family, Aihwa Ong (1999) highlights the importance of examining the experiences of family members other than the “valorised” male head (see also Ong and Nonini, 1997). Her work has drawn attention to the existence of differential power relations within the household unit, challenging established representations of a somewhat revered ‘Chinese family,’ which have generally centred on two key conceptions. The affective model (Tai, 1989) is based on an uncritical assumption that the ‘good of the family’ is always prioritised over individual concerns. This representation has recently combined with a pervasive image of a powerful, wealthy and undifferentiated Chinese middle-class in socio-cultural analyses of globalisation and the ‘hypermobile’ migrant (Skeldon, 1997; Mitchell, 1997; Olds, 1998; Ley, 1999, 2000) (see chapter two). Both representations, however, exclude the possibility that some persons within the family may have relatively little power to control events (such as migration). They may have little personal wealth and/or recognised skills. And they may experience a considerably restricted individual freedom for the apparent ‘good of the family’.
Although lacking in empirical detail, Ong’s work is attentive to the implications of these ‘flexible’ family strategies for both the women and the children of the household. In *Flexible Citizenship: the Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999), she considers theoretically the migration practices of a Hong Kong business class:

In some cases, the flexible logic deprives children of both parents…Familial regimes of dispersal and localization…discipline family members to make do with very little emotional support; disrupted parental responsibility, strained marital relations, and abandoned children are such common circumstances that they have special terms. When the flexible imperative in family life and citizenship requires a form of isolation and disciplining of women and children that is both critiqued and resisted, claims that the ‘Confucian affective model’ is at the heart of Chinese economic success are challenged (p. 128)

Through the empirical accounts of the women of Astronaut families in Vancouver, we have seen already some of the substantive implications of the “Familial regimes of dispersal and localization” that Ong describes. In this chapter, I will consider the way in which the “flexible logic” of the contemporary Chinese family in some cases “deprives children of both parents” (Ong, 1999; p. 128), directing attention to the experiences of a different set of family members - the so-called ‘Satellite kids’.

As the quotation by Ong implies, the Satellite and Astronaut phenomena are in many ways analogous, requiring a similar set of explanatory theoretical tools. The political and economic structures prompting recent Chinese migration around the Pacific Rim, the changes in Canadian immigration policy, and the attractions of Vancouver as a destination apply in both cases. The migrant families involved are generally the same example of the ‘new rich’ from the Asian Tigers, detailed in chapter two, and the reasons motivating migration are likely to be very similar to those outlined in chapter three. The
Satellite phenomenon is distinguished, however, by the absence of both the father and the mother from the new family home. Whilst both adult members spend the majority of their time working in the country of origin, the children must adjust to daily life without parental supervision, in addition to facing the ongoing challenges posed by a new and in many ways unfamiliar environment. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews with the Satellite children provide an important insight into the experiences of these particularly understudied family members.

In an attempt to combine a theoretical perspective with an accurate reflection and consolidation of the issues raised most frequently by participants, this chapter is broadly structured around two key questions encompassing two wider themes. Firstly, the concept of ‘cultural capital’ (Ong, 1999) is evaluated in light of the Satellite phenomenon. How effective, I will ask, is this particular strategy of ‘family dispersal,’ for the accumulation of specific forms of cultural capital? A second theme addresses the social limits to this ‘flexible family’ arrangement, examining the supposition that “disrupted parental responsibility” (Ong, 1999) is a feature of contemporary middle-class Chinese migration. The various, indisputably negative, implications for the displaced children are considered in response to the question: What are the practical and emotional implications of this strategy for the children of the family?

Existing Research on the Satellite Children

There is a conspicuous dearth of scholarly work specifically addressing the Satellite phenomenon – both in terms of detailed empirical accounts and of theoretical application. Ho et al. (1997) have attempted to establish some numerical measure of the ‘parachute
children’ for New Zealand, using data derived from the 1991 New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings.¹ But they give no details of the crucial everyday context, and neglect the experiences of the children themselves. Other scholars have made reference to Satellite children, but again without significant empirical work or theoretical development (Man, 1995; Skeldon, 1995; Ong, 1999; Anderson, 2000).

Pe-Pua et al. examine “the socio-cultural, economic and political implications” of “astronaut families and parachute children” in a study undertaken by the Centre for Multicultural Studies at the University of Wollongong in 1994 – 1995. Published in 1996 and summarised in chapter form in 1998, this represents the most detailed empirical account available to date on this type of transnational migration strategy. Distinctive features of this research to note include the Australian context, the time period in which the study was undertaken (1994 – 1995), and the focus on specifically Hong Kong migrants.² Their data derive from interviews with members of ‘Astronaut families’, in which they include children left in Australia without either parent present (‘parachute children’). However, the children left without either parent are, in their view, “extreme cases,” and form only a minor part of their overall conclusions, which focus more generally on the Astronaut family. I will quote from the summary chapter, presenting the conclusions drawn from their research about the ‘parachute children’:

¹ Focussing specifically on Hong Kong immigrants to New Zealand between 1986 and 1991, Ho et al. conclude that the majority of children (0-19 years old) lived with their parents. Less than 300 children were found to be not living with their parents. Only 9 children were found to be living completely on their own (with no friends or relatives). Their study includes a questionnaire survey of all Astronaut family members. Like Pe-Pua et al (1998) they define ‘parachute children’ as “children being left with one or no parent”.
² Many authors have drawn comparisons between characteristics of immigration in Australia and Canada. The similar immigration histories, contemporary immigration policies, and current patterns of Pacific Rim migration give legitimacy to such comparative undertakings.
The children of astronaut families, or the ‘parachute children’, are affected by the astronaut practice. Although the study did not reveal a general pattern of young people becoming involved in undesirable activities, there are quite extreme cases of children left on their own to fend for themselves, although there is occasional contact with their parents. This phenomenon has the potential of either strengthening or breaking up relationships between parents and children, and between siblings. At the same time it could also build up a sense of independence and responsibility among children, it could also bring a loss of control brought about by the sudden freedom from familial restrictions, possession of material resources in excess of what they were used to, and a lack of social control provided by an extended kinship system in Hong Kong. Furthermore, as children get acculturated to Australia, they begin to accept Australian values and norms which may challenge the traditional Chinese values of their parents...

It could lead to a feeling of isolation, longing for a parent figure, lack of discipline, breakdown of the parent-child relationship, or juvenile delinquency in the extreme. On the other hand, it could lead to the development of independence and maturity, and to a flowering of a close relationship among the members left in Australia. There is also the factor of whether it is just one parent or both parents who are away. It would seem that as long as there is one parent around, there should not be much of a negative effect on the child or children (p. 292–293, emphasis added).

Unfortunately, they do not clearly distinguish those cases where one parent is present from those where there is none, except to imply that in the latter case the possibility for ‘negative effects’ is greater.³ I suggest that for Vancouver, lone children are more common than they seem to imply for Australia. However, they do outline here a number of potential outcomes for the migrant children that may have significant theoretical implications. In particular – and I will return to this point below – the “loss of control brought about by the sudden freedom from familial restrictions” challenges some central assumptions about the Chinese family and its success in the deployment of particular strategies of accumulation. What does “loss of control” say about patriarchal control over the family unit? What does it say also about the potential for success of a strategy that

³ Ho et al. (1997) similarly define ‘parachute kids’ as “the children left with one or no parent” (p. 20, emphasis added).
aims to achieve very particular goals through the geographic dispersal of family members?

The definition of Satellite children to which I adhere is specific, concerned only with the situation where, for the majority of the time, both parents are absent. Detailed empirical examination of this particular situation is conspicuously lacking (Matthews and Limb, 1999). The most abundant source of information comes in fact from journalistic reports in the Chinese press.\(^4\) The majority of reports highlight various concerns raised by schools. Wang (1998), for example, observes: “The satellite kids’ poor language skill put them in a habit of skipping classes and failing the courses as a result. Some of them even hang out with gangsters.” There are concerns that lonely children will be targets for extortion, and may become gang members: “Most of these rich young gangsters are lost souls, they are from loveless families or Astronaut families. Their parents fulfil their material needs but deprive them of their psychological wants…”\(^5\) Several school boards within the G.V.R.D. have expressed concern over the number of Satellite children living in the district. A discussion around the possibility of charging a “baby sitting fee” for Satellite children has occurred; it is felt that teachers have to provide significant additional guidance and support to these children.\(^6\)

---


Research Sample and Method

Interviews were conducted with fifteen students residing in the G.V.R.D., between September 1999 and February 2000, who have recently immigrated from Hong Kong or Taiwan. One participant was from China. Two main methods of contacting participants were used: a snowball sample technique, and a survey questionnaire followed by visits to schools. Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. All the students were interviewed individually, in English; twelve interviews were taped and transcribed in full. The sample was selected on the basis of certain criteria: the student was classified as an immigrant to Canada (with 'landed-immigrant' status, or has recently obtained citizenship) having migrated to Vancouver with their parents. They were financially dependent on their parents, who lived for the majority of time away from Vancouver (usually in the country of origin). Most of the students have had some experience of living without their parents before they had turned eighteen: ten of the fifteen are now eighteen years or slightly older, the remaining five are younger than eighteen. The youngest participant was thirteen years old and the oldest was twenty-two years old. In addition, interviews were conducted with two family counsellors from S.U.C.C.E.S.S. (both experienced in counselling Satellite children); the Placement Director of a Vancouver-based Homestay Agency; the Vice-Principal of a Richmond High School; the Principal of an International High School in Vancouver; and the school

---

7 Additional group interviews were conducted with young international students from East Asia offering information not directly relevant to this thesis but providing an interesting comparative perspective.

8 There were various barriers in gaining access to the youngest Satellite children. Schools were especially protective of those who they felt to be most vulnerable and were careful that I was not allowed to interview anyone who may be upset talking about the absence of their parents. It is therefore unfortunate but inevitable that those children who suffer the most from the Satellite circumstance will have been omitted
counsellor of a West Vancouver High School, who deals specifically with issues relating to students with absent parents. The Principal of four high schools in the G.V.R.D. (three of them public schools) returned related questionnaires, as did a representative of the Vancouver School Board. Telephone interviews were conducted with representatives from the BC Ministry of Children and Families and the BC Ministry of Education. When possible, interviews were taped and transcribed in full.

The Circumstances of the Satellite Child

Before implementing a more theoretical analysis of the empirical material, it is helpful to begin with a few short examples, painting a picture of the everyday situation of the Satellite child in Vancouver. Eva and Paul, aged twenty-two and seventeen, are brother and sister and live in a very large house in an affluent area on the westside of Vancouver. The house was bought for them by their parents two years ago, and from that time on the parents have worked in Hong Kong, visiting their children in Vancouver twice a year, and speaking on the telephone once a week. In the absence of their parents, Eva must pay the household bills, using her mother’s bank account. She is also responsible for transporting both herself and her brother to school and around the city by car. Both children are required to keep the house tidy, and so they therefore confine themselves to only the kitchen and their bedrooms, avoiding other parts of the house in order to minimise the need to vacuum and clean. I asked Eva what she does for food:

At the beginning we cook, but after three months...You see, it’s all white, but now changed. (Gestures towards the dirty cooker tops.) Mum’s so mad about it!...So we don’t like to cook ourselves because we have to clean up.

JW: So you eat out?

from this research. Anecdotal accounts from school staff leave little doubt of the severity of the problem in terms of the child’s suffering in the worst scenarios.
Mostly everyday.

They would prefer to live in an apartment, they told me; the house is far too big and neither feels safe living there. In the last three months the house has been broken into, and items stolen, on two occasions. On the first occasion Paul was alone and in the house when this happened. Although the house has been on sale for over a year, no buyers have yet come forward.

At the time of the first interview with Vince, he had been on his own, in his parents’ house, for just one week. For two years preceding this a friend had lived with him, acting as his guardian, and taking full responsibility for the household chores, whilst his parents ran their business in Hong Kong. When he turned eighteen the guardian immediately moved out, and his mother came back from Hong Kong for one week, to give him an intensive instructional course on the basics of running the home. In addition to the housekeeping he is learning to be a landlord; he now lives on the ground floor of the house and rents the upstairs to university students. He is not confident in undertaking all this responsibility, he told me. He anticipates problems, especially in dealing with all the finances.

Dawn and her brother have been in Vancouver without their parents for eight years. She was twelve and her brother thirteen years old when her parents returned to Hong Kong. The children moved into the basement of their guardian’s house, and the guardian lived above them. Once a week their aunt, who also lives in Vancouver, would visit them and
pay their bills. They would speak to their parents roughly four times a week on the telephone. Now Dawn is nineteen she lives on her own in an apartment, and her brother has returned to Hong Kong. She has frequent contact with her parents on the telephone, and they send her an allowance of $150 every week. She is contemplating returning to Hong Kong, however, after finishing her education. She misses her family greatly.

Mary has been in Vancouver for less than a year. She is thirteen years old and lives in an apartment with two other people – friends of her parents. She is not sure how old they are ("twenty something"), but she said she is happy because, she told me: “they let me do anything I want.” She had never met her housemates before coming to Vancouver; they were at the airport when she arrived and took her to the apartment where she would live. She is not sure how long she will stay in Vancouver and she had not had much warning that she was going to come. Her parents told her that she was going to migrate to Canada only one week before she left Hong Kong.

As a final example - Edward lives in a house in Vancouver with his younger sister. They immigrated in 1993 aged fifteen and eleven, and their mother stayed with them, although she spent significant periods in Hong Kong with their father, who had remained behind to work. At the time of the interview the mother had been in Hong Kong for four months ("this time it’s much longer"). Usually she would be away for roughly two months at a time, and has done this “six...seven times” since they came to Vancouver. Edward reflects that his mother is extremely unhappy in Vancouver, and for that reason does not like to spend much time here; she does not know many people and finds it “boring.” He
felt that he had been unprepared for the time spent without his mother. I asked him “What instructions did she give you about living on your own?” He replied: “Nothing...She just left the money...and then said, ‘Okay, then now I go back to Hong Kong...You just go to buy food or whatever’.” She leaves them cheques to pay the bills and buy what they need. Like the vast majority of participants in this sample, there is no sense that Edward was deprived financially or materially and was, in fact, very well provided for. All who were old enough to drive had a car available to them. In several cases, participants indicated that if they needed more money they had only to ask their parents and it would be provided.

Reasons for the Phenomenon:
‘Cultural Capital’ and the Transnational Strategizing of the Chinese Family

It is a cultural logic of many ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia to organize their families according to strategies of time and space so that over time, the family is distributed over a longer distance or wider expanse of space. These strategies of accumulation, dispersal and relocation...are most recently and dramatically displayed by emigrants from Hong Kong (Ong, 1999; pp. 93 – 94).

Before addressing the empirical data more directly, I want to outline briefly some of the more useful theoretical approaches to understanding the Satellite phenomenon. Evidently, those ideas that helped elucidate the Astronaut family in previous chapters are applicable here also. The Satellite children can be conceived as another manifestation of a wider “cultural logic of many ethnic Chinese...” (ibid.); a deliberate strategizing on the part of certain middle-class Chinese families that involves the distribution of family members “...over a longer distance or wider expanse of space” (ibid.) The search for particular ‘cultural capital’ is one important objective of this. Writes Aihwa Ong: “For many ethnic
Chinese in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia...strategies of accumulation begin with the acquisition of a Western education...” (1999, p. 95), in addition to particular “cultural knowledge, skills and credentials that enable the transposition of social status from one country to another” (p. 90).

After migration, the family head is able to maintain control over family members through the mobilisation of existing patriarchal structures, and the perpetuation of notions of filial piety. This apparently ensures that children act according to parental wishes:

Thus, the masculine subjectivity of this elite diasporan community is defined primarily in terms of the individual’s role as a father or a son, that is, his role in maintaining the paternal/filial structure that both nurtures and expands family wealth (Ong, 1999, p. 126; see also Mitchell, 1995, and Olds, 1998).

Ultimately, the desire to increase family wealth and influence lies at the heart of both the Satellite and Astronaut phenomena. Migration to Canada is conceived as a way of obtaining two vital forms of cultural capital: the English language on the one hand, and a Western educational certificate on the other. The maintenance of economic ties with Hong Kong or Taiwan ensures that financial capital is maximised, also.

Turning to the data provided by the interviews, I want to begin by examining the motivations underlying the Satellite situation, as articulated by the children themselves. Why have both parents decided to remain for the majority of time in the country of origin? In a few cases, participants suggested that at least one of their parents would have stayed in Vancouver with them, but barriers to employment or financial constraints prevented this option from materialising. Dawn, for example, came to Canada with her
parents in 1990 when she was ten years old. Her parents intended to stay, but: “They can’t find any jobs here.” Language was apparently a significant obstacle: “They speak Chinese and they don’t know how to speak English.” Two years later, still unsuccessful in their search for suitable employment, they both decided to return to Hong Kong, leaving Dawn and her brother behind in Vancouver to become Satellite children. She said: “I was only twelve...But I realised that they had to work, to earn money for us. Just for us. So I didn’t blame anything.” Richie’s parents also attempted to start a business in Canada, but, he told me, they found it “boring” and “uncomfortable” because they spoke no English. After four years in Vancouver, they have gone back to Hong Kong, and are attempting to reopen their business there. Paul’s parents did not look for work in Vancouver, but he implied that, if it were possible, they would have preferred to stay. Financial constraints made working in Hong Kong a necessity. He said: “after they retire they want to come here to like stay and relax. They love to do that...But they have no choice right now because they have to work and gain money so that they can pay for our school and stuff.” In another example, Frank’s mother spends around four months a year in Vancouver with her son, but the family business demands that she stay in Taiwan for most of the year. Frank explained:

Because in Chinese society...when there’s a business, usually the Dad and Mums work together. Because it’s not really a big business – at that time it’s only like a small business – so if you can have one more person that can help the business. And then you don’t have to pay them money and then that will be better for the business. So my parents will be running the same business, taking care of the same business.

Clearly, financial reasons have kept the parents from seeking residence and employment in Canada (perhaps this could be conceived as a way of maximising financial and cultural
capital accumulation). In one unusual case, it was the child who actually requested to be left on her own. Angel lived for several years with her mother in the Astronaut situation, and her father worked in Hong Kong. She said:

I just find it very annoying at the beginning when me and her [the mother] had lots of conflicts going on...Before...when I was in Hong Kong school finishes about one and they don’t come home until six o’clock, so I had five hours pretty much free to do what I want...Watching TV while doing homework...But, like...she’ll be like there every time...I guess, in a way I felt watched over.

I just wanted her to go back...It’s just that I know that I will get more time for my work than actually talking to her and all that...There was this one term when I had to, like, come home and do my homework until, like, ten or eleven o’clock at night. And it comes to a point when I just have no...communication at all...So I thought that wouldn’t really work.

Her mother “isn’t a very good socialising person...” “She didn’t work after she came here. She was at home all of the time...I’m starting to feel that I don’t have enough time to spend with my Mum.” Her mother was lonely and missed her father, and so Angel suggested that her mother return to Hong Kong, “so that, you know, they can be happy and I...I feel more comfortable because I can concentrate on my work.” In this example, we can see the burden that an unhappy Astronaut arrangement can place on the child.

Yet the important question still remains as to why migration was sought in the first place. To what extent is the desire for “cultural capital” apparent in the students’ understanding of their migration to Canada? The reasons motivating immigration were easily discernible. On one occasion, a participant stressed his parents’ concern over the political uncertainty in Taiwan. Frank first came to Vancouver in 1992 on a student visa, as a young international student. He was fourteen at that time, and his parents remained behind in Taiwan. Two years later his parents decided to that it was necessary to seek
immigration to Canada; they were concerned that their son would face mandatory military service in Taiwan after graduating, and so sought a Canadian passport as a way of removing this requirement. After entering Canada as landed immigrants, his family bought a house in Vancouver and his father returned to Taiwan to work. Frank’s mother would travel back and forth between Taiwan and Vancouver: “she comes back every two or three months and then stays around one month or more and then goes back again [to Taiwan].” Frank has therefore spent, and continues to spend, a significant amount of time without either parent. As usual, financial considerations ensured the maintenance of strong economic ties with Taiwan.

One consideration, however, surpassed all others in the decision to migrate, and was mentioned consistently in all the interviews. “Education” was the reason given most frequently by participants when asked to consider their primary reason for being in Canada. Claire came to Vancouver with her mother and her brother: “When we immigrate here we know that after we get Canadian passport...my parents move back to Hong Kong...I knew that a long time ago.” She stayed in Canada, however, “for the education.” This was the wish of her parents. Edward gave the exact same response when asked why he had migrated (“for the education”): “this was my parents’ decision,” he said, indicating that he had had little control over the circumstances. Gavin already had citizenship; he was born in Canada and stayed until he was seven when he moved to Hong Kong. He came again to Canada when he was seventeen years old because, he said, “it’s cheaper to take university here. Also the education is better.”
Most of the students expressed only a vague idea of why an education in Canada was regarded so highly: “it’s better” was the usual, simple response. Rod was able to articulate this more fully:

**The first is because of the education. We believe that in Canada there’s a better education programme than Taiwan...[In Taiwan] teachers don’t care about what kind of talent you have. They just want you to study and then get into university.**

Certain subjects (e.g. languages and mathematics) are favoured in Taiwan, undervaluing children who do not excel in these specific areas:

**They don’t care for sports, music...some people, they really have a talent in that but they don’t really care. Even though you are good in PE or very good in music, they don’t care. They think you cannot get any good job after that...People will treat you like useless people in Taiwan.**

Rod’s conception of a Canadian education reflects similar ideas asserted by many parents, and presented in chapter three. The freedom to think creatively and the possibility of studying a wider range of subjects are frequently desired over a more rigid Hong Kong or Taiwan system.

**Limits to the Theory of Cultural Capital:**

**Alternative Conceptions of ‘Education’**

The relevance of the theory of cultural capital as proposed by Ong (1999) is clearly indicated in the responses of the participants. “Education” – a crucial form of cultural capital - overwhelms all other motives in the decision to migrate to Canada. Yet there are clear limits to the explanatory power of the theory also, and it is these limitations – the contrary empirical evidence – that the next few pages of text will address. For one, several participants intimated that migration to Vancouver was necessary because of the
barriers to education faced in Hong Kong and Taiwan.\(^9\) Students talked of the higher standards and stiff competition for high school and university places in their home country. Before migration had been considered as an option, several children had either failed the required exams to allow them to continue in their education, or indicated that their parents had feared that they would be likely to do so. As Ke (1998)\(^10\) observed in an article published in the *Ming Pao Daily News*: “in Hong Kong or Taiwan…youngsters may not be allowed to graduate if their results are poor. Here in Canada, as long as one goes to school, one will sooner or later graduate.” The assumption that a specifically “Western” education is sought through migration to Canada is therefore undermined in these responses, suggesting that in many cases, an education in Canada is sought simply because it is easier to achieve.

Before migrating, Rod had been aware that, in Canada, success was not so stringently dependent on the passing of examinations: “I’d heard about, like, you don’t have to have any provincial tests or something to get into high school.” This was certainly the reason behind Paul’s migration; “it’s really common, like, once they can’t get into Hong Kong, like, grade eleven or whatever, they just come here…It’s like a way to solve a problem or whatever”. Paul found himself in this same position:

\(\text{I wasn’t doing too well in Hong Kong in grade nine…So I can’t get in grade ten ‘cos Hong Kong has a different system than here. You have to pass an exam to get in grade ten…I can’t get into grade ten so my Mum decide to send me to Canada. Vancouver, right? Because it’s easier. It’s not like bad education, but it’s easier to get in university and more opportunity and stuff.}\)

He perceives “more opportunity” in the diversity of subjects available to the student:

\(^9\) The adults interviewed in the Astronaut situation also made this point. See chapter three.
\(^{10}\) Translated from the Chinese by Priscilla Wei.
And there’s stuff I want to study that you can only study in Vancouver. Can’t study in Hong Kong… I want to do drama and music… I’m not going into science or whatever… I want to go to Emily Carr.¹¹

Under the Canadian system, students have more opportunity to follow an alternative path from sciences, languages or commerce – the favourite subjects, Paul told me, of Chinese parents for their children. He said:

When I first came here and I first decided that I want to take, like, drama, music or design, she’s [Paul’s mother] kind of, like, against it, right? Because in Chinese culture the parents always want their children to take, like, science or like business or… to have a good career. They don’t like their children to take, like, art, to become an artist or whatever.

I think, most of my Hong Kong friends, they’ll all be studying science, doctor, business. Actually I don’t think that’s what they want to take. I don’t think that’s what they’re in to, ‘cos I talk to lots of my friends: ‘I take it because my parents want me to take it.’ Like, they’ll probably get a good job but it’s not what they want to do.

In contrast, he has observed that his “Caucasian friends” “do what they want”: “I think that is the difference between them. Different attitude.” He has openly adopted this latter attitude, and his parents are gradually realising that their son may not become the businessman or scientist that they hoped for when they sent him to Canada. Reflecting on what success means to him, Paul said: “I think if I can find a job that I enjoy, the pay is not, like, a really big thing… Well, I care, of course, but it’s not the main issue. I want to have a job I like… I want to be happy, right?”

The physical distance that this migration strategy places between family members significantly diminishes the amount of control that parents can command over the lives of their children. This has a rather ironic implication. In some cases, and in spite of the

¹¹ Emily Carr is an Institute of Art and Design.
importance given to education by the parents, in their absence the student may feel no
compulsion to study hard, or even to attend school. Absenteeism is one of the greatest
concerns of teachers when referring to the Satellite phenomenon. Dawn provides a good
example of when the strategy of cultural accumulation clearly fails:

JW: Why do you think you are here?

They told us that it's because good for study. Yeah, right, because they want us
to learn English instead of staying in Hong Kong.

Yet Dawn was asked to leave her school because she was too frequently absent. She
explained how this situation came to pass:

Like, you skip one class and then after that there's homework that you can't
catch up, and then after you catch up then you want to skip again and then
there's a bunch of homework that you can't really catch up. So you don't want
to come again.

The situation may have been different if her parents had been present. In their absence,
however, and the sense that they abandoned her, Dawn feels no obligation to the wishes
of her parents. She said:

They won't force me to do anything, because they're not here. They know that
they can't be responsible for me anymore...They won't force us to do anything
because they know that they left us here.

In accounts of the Chinese family invoking notions of filial piety, diaspora, guanxi and
familial ties, the geographic separation of family members in no way precludes the
successful maintenance of social relations. Ong (1999) is highly critical of the way in

12 The notion of 'social networks' has become a popular way of explaining transnational social relations
(e.g. Rogers and Vertovec, 1995) What is often lacking is a detailed empirical examination of how these
networks actually function on the ground. In the examples presented by the Astronaut families and Satellite
children, they seem not to work too well.
which these relations have been depicted, suggesting that they are maintained not through some romantic ideal as suggested by Tai's (1989) affective model of the Chinese family, but in fact through the violent disciplining of certain family members, and the enactment of patriarchal control. Yet the empirical data gathered for this research, however, tells yet a different story. The evidence has emphatically shown that the physical separation of family members has significant implications for the functioning of the family unit. Control over, and disciplining of family members by the household head is not maintained, as Ong would suggest. As we have seen in the case of the Astronaut wives, the physical absence of the husband in many ways frees the woman from patriarchal domination (chapter five). In the same way, the physical absence of the parents in the case of the Satellite children inevitably reduces parental control over both the child and his or her experiences. I have already suggested the implications of parental absence for the child’s education. In the next stage of the argument, the assumptions surrounding the power and control of the flexible Chinese family are challenged further. Pe-Pua et al. here suggest an additional implication of parental absence:

Furthermore, as children get acculturated to Australia, they begin to accept Australian values and norms which may challenge the traditional Chinese values of their parents... (1998, pp. 292 - 293).

The culture ‘accumulated’ by the Satellite children through migration does not stop at particular forms of desirable cultural attributes, or at the simple acquisition of a Western school certificate. The impact of local cultures may in fact impede the acquisition of desired cultural traits and/or result in the development of radically different attitudes - based around a newly found and preferred ‘Vancouver’ lifestyle and not necessarily conducive to the cultivation of a high-flying business or professional persona.
The Place of Vancouver and Cultural Acquisition

The impact of local cultures has not disappeared in a global era of cosmopolitanism and hypermobility. As Mitchell (1997a) here suggests, the cultural “nuances of a particular locale” (p. 228) are a significant factor to be faced by the new immigrant:

In terms of the global integration of people as well as places, “simple homogenisation” is...inconceivable, despite various state rhetorics of melting pots and cultural mosaics. Although immigrants become legal citizens through a prescribed, state-regulated path, immigrants become cultural citizens only through a reflexive set of formative and locally constructed processes. (ibid.)

Migration to Vancouver for the strategic acquisition of particular ‘cultural capital’ is clearly complicated by such local cultural nuances. The multiculturalism entrenched in Canada’s constitution, for example, has a reality in Vancouver’s diverse ethnic population. This, in turn, has implications for the notion that ‘Western’ states promote a specific, monolithic type of culture desirable to a Chinese business elite (Ong, 1999). The difficulties articulated by one immigrant woman in particular, who found that she was unable to integrate sufficiently with the Anglo-Canadian population, were observed in chapter four. She explicitly blamed Vancouver’s large Chinese population and its insular nature for the perpetuation of this perceived cultural barrier.13 The interviews with the Satellite children similarly indicated the impact of the large resident Chinese population within the G.V.R.D. Angel described how Vancouver has changed since she immigrated, seven years ago:

13 The Province, Wednesday February 18, 1998, A10, “Census question asked for skin colour.” This figure illustrates the ethnic composition of the G. V. R. D.: The City of Vancouver, 27% Chinese population; Richmond (Vancouver suburb), 32.6% Chinese population; West Vancouver, 9.1% Chinese. Interviews for this research were carried out in these 3 areas of the G.V.R.D.
It has changed a whole lot... Especially in terms of Asian lifestyles... I don't know if you've been down to Richmond... There are lots of so-called Bubble Tea Houses... lots of places open very late... Asian teenagers hang out there a lot.

Paul considered whether Canada had matched his expectations before migration. He said:

The big surprise is that I go to Richmond and it's like, it's more Hong Kong. There are lots of Chinese there. It's like, you don't have to speak English there. Yeah, I think my big surprise is that I find Canada is a really multicultural country.

Paul was, however, unusual amongst those interviewed in his diversity of 'friendship groups.' He explained:

I have, like, two groups of friends; the Chinese group and the Caucasian group... Chinese are two groups – Taiwan and Hong Kong.

In the Taiwan group, like, we usually just go out for a drink... But the Hong Kong people usually would be, like, shopping round Richmond... And Caucasian side would be, like, this is the party group. We have like parties and drinking sometimes.

The fluency with which all students participated in the interview (in English) was an emphatic demonstration that migration to Canada has certainly not hindered their acquisition of the English language, a specific and highly desirable type of 'cultural capital'. Yet it is certainly not the case that these participants speak English all or even most of the time. Paul, perhaps the most cosmopolitan of all participants, described how the language he speaks is dependent on the group of friends he is with:

With the Taiwan people I usually speak English to them, because I understand Mandarin but I can't speak Mandarin, so they might speak Mandarin and I will speak English back... The other group is the Hong Kong people. They will speak Cantonese, like, of course... But sometimes we might speak English too. It depends, like, because some Hong Kong people came here for, like, four years but they can't speak English as well as me. Some of my friends came here for,
like, ten years, so they are more like CBC\textsuperscript{14} or like Canadian so...kind of mix...two languages.

With the Hong Kong friends we go to Richmond 'cos, like, all the Hong Kong things happen right?...Talk about Hong Kong and stuff...

At home with his sister, and when he is with his friends, Edward declared that he speaks only Cantonese. Amongst those students questioned, English is rarely spoken outside the classroom. Two participants from Hong Kong remarked that their Mandarin\textsuperscript{15} skills have improved since moving to Vancouver, indicating that they have several Taiwanese friends with whom they converse regularly. And it is not just the issues of language and friends that complicate the rendering of a straightforward relationship between 'cultural acquisition' and migration to the West. Migration to Canada has enforced a change in \textit{lifestyle}, akin to that experienced by the Astronaut wives (see chapter five). Rod here describes the differences he perceives between Canada and Taiwan:

\textit{Taiwan and Canada, there is a big difference. Canada is pretty slow. Everything is very slow...relaxed and slow. But in Taiwan every second is like war...You have to fight for every second...If you do something too slow, probably other people might take your job away.}

This notion of 'slowness' vis-à-vis the fast pace of Taiwan and Hong Kong was pervasive in interviews with parents and children alike. And the appeal of the Vancouver lifestyle was expressed on several occasions. Frank here compares Taiwan with Canada:

\textit{If I can stay here that will be good...I'm already used to the lifestyle here, but my parents don't like me that way.}

\textit{JW: Why?}

\textsuperscript{14} CBC means Chinese Born Canadian
\textsuperscript{15} Mandarin is the common Chinese dialect of Taiwan (and the official language of the People's Republic of China), whereas Cantonese is the language spoken by migrants from Hong Kong.
They think I am too slow.

JW: Too slow?

It’s like...it’s like, outside of Canada, you know, everything is like...for example, outside of Canada everything is like a Pentium 3. To be here is like a Pentium 1.

JW: And you like that?

...for the retired people this is a really wonderful place. I think it’s a wonderful place. But for young people, I would say probably too slow.

Frank’s parents are aware, it would seem, that their son’s cultural “education” in Vancouver extends beyond the acquisition of the desired Western certificate, to the cultivation of a somewhat ‘laid back’ attitude to life and work.

Personal Freedom and the Challenge to Patriarchal Control

Claire expressed how she has felt since her mother returned to Hong Kong, leaving her and her brother alone in Vancouver: “Just makes me feel so free! Laughs.” As suggested in the conclusions drawn by Pe-Pua et al. (1998), children are faced with significant freedom conferred by a lack of adult disciplining, in addition to access to significant material and financial resources. As stated by Angel:

If I want to turn bad or do anything that they don’t want me to it’s so easy for me...especially with my situation. I can just lie to them, right?...So, yeah, they trust me totally.

This notion of “trust” seems somehow different from the ‘disciplining of family members’ asserted by Ong. As Angel implies, participants were fully aware that their
parents have *lost* a significant degree of control over their behaviour. Paul compares his life without his parents in Vancouver to his life when he was in Hong Kong:

*I have to study in Hong Kong. I don't get to go out as much as here. Because here I've got freedom, so I can go out any time I want, but like in Hong Kong I had to stay home on weekdays so every week night I'd be seeing them...Every Sunday is a family day. So the whole day I'd probably see them. Saturday night I'd probably go out, but I have to be back like ten or eleven. That's my curfew.*

He is very aware of the implications of his absent parents:

*I have a lot of freedom so it's really, like, depends on yourself. If you want to...turn bad it's really easy...If I choose to do the bad stuff I can do it, like, really easily because...I can do whatever I want...But...since I was born my parents were really strict...they taught me a lot, so I know, like, which is good and which is bad.

They always ask me, like, don't smoke or don't do bad stuff...It's really rely on yourself, because you can lie to your parents, right?...They won't know or anything...Actually, like, to be honest I try a lot of stuff. I try smoking, I try drugs – weed, like. Just for...my curiosity.*

With freedom, however, comes also an awareness of self-discipline and responsibility:

*In Hong Kong it is sort of different. I have a maid in Hong Kong. People always do in Hong Kong. So I don't have to do anything. I don't have to cook, I don't have to clean the house, I don't have to fix the bed, I don't have to wash the clothes, or whatever. Here like, well...comparing me now to back two years, then I change a lot. I'm more...independent and more mature to manage over myself. Back then I was dependent on my parents for everything. But now I can, like, live by myself pretty much now.*

**The Localisation and Disciplining of Family Members:**

**Everyday Lives and the Negative Implications of Absent Parents**

I have presented above some of the implications of migration and the Satellite phenomenon, suggesting the ways in which children may escape the characteristic "disciplining" of family members, as described by Ong (1999; p. 128). The objective of this second section is to suggest the other side to this story, so to speak. Providing a
detailed explication of the social limits to the flexible strategizing of the Chinese family, the often gloomy practical and emotional implications of the Satellite circumstance for the children who experience it are disclosed.

The theoretical assumptions of powerlessness and localisation (Ong, 1999; Silvey and Lawson, 1999) invoked to describe the situation of the lone woman in the Astronaut family may also bring a useful perspective to the experiences of the children. For one, the children clearly exercise little power in either the decision to migrate, or the circumstances in which they find themselves after migration. Often, migration to Canada is forced upon them against their will.\textsuperscript{16} Eva, who has an elder brother who is studying in Toronto, explained why she cannot go back to Hong Kong, despite the fact that she desperately wants to:

\begin{quote}
They [her parents] won't allow me to do that. They say I'm too childish...They say if you don't finish your degree here you can't come back because...you have your future.

I cried and I cried and I begged for her [the mother] to send me back. I don't want to be here. And she say, 'you just not used to being here. You miss your friends only.' But after two years I still want to go back. Not just I miss my friends...I don't want to stay here.
\end{quote}

Dawn wants to go back to Hong Kong but her parents have different ideas for her:

\begin{quote}
They told us that it's because good for study...because they want us to learn English instead of staying in Hong Kong.

I just want to graduate and go back [to Hong Kong]...My Mum wants me to stay and get better education...

JW: Why do you want to go back?

To live with them!...My whole family are there.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} Only on one occasion did a student indicate that it was her decision to migrate to Canada.
Thirteen-year-old Mary was told she was coming to Vancouver only one week before she migrated. Claire maintains that she had no choice in the matter because no one told her in advance. She had previously been sent to Singapore, after Singapore to Cuba. Her parents had deceived her, having told her that she was only going on a one-week trip. She described her feelings about migration:

So hard to...to learn a new place for when I am here by myself...I already learn a new place, and then a year later I need to go to Canada and learn a new thing again. It's very difficult...Always change, change, change.

The circumstances of the Satellite children after migration to Canada in many ways invoke a sense of powerlessness. Several participants felt ill prepared to cope with domestic and other responsibilities in the absence of their parents. Eva displayed significant anger towards her parents. I asked:

JW: How did they [parents] prepare you to stay on your own? What did they tell you?

Nothing, nothing. Just nothing...They just rent us a house, and we don’t know how to drive...They do nothing about it. We just learn by ourselves.

Participants were remarkably honest about their sense of their own vulnerability. Rod reflected on the difficulties he has faced since being on his own, without his parents:

The biggest problem? Lonely...First of all I feel like I have nobody to trust...And then, it’s kind of hard to find new friends. Because parents should be the ones that you trust the most and they betrayed you totally, and then who can you trust?...Friends cannot be always...be always with you, like, 24 hours. And even though you have some kind of problem that you really want to find someone to talk about it, they cannot always be there to listen...The worst part is very lonely.

Eva expressed similar, disturbing sentiments:
I don’t want to be alone here just, like, helpless here...But my Mum don’t understand this.

I don’t like it [Vancouver], because I feel so lonely here. I can’t get any help. Our parents are not around us. I want to be back.

On several occasions, it was apparent that students found it hard to reconcile their apparent freedom with their sense of aloneness. In a brief but revealing interview with 13 year old Mary at her school in Richmond, such ambivalence was clearly discernible. She displayed a sense of pride in the fact that her parents trusted her to be responsible. And as for her guardians: “They let me do anything I want.” When asked how she felt about the situation, she described it as “good.” Yet she then went on to say:

...But sometimes I think ‘how come no one cares about me?’ Yeah.

Her teacher, who spoke with me after the interview, expressed grave reservations about a situation where students as young as thirteen years old, like Mary, are left in Vancouver with no parental guidance. The situation frequently indicates a profound loneliness on the part of these children.

In another example, Paul, aged seventeen, has been in Vancouver for two and a half years. His sister lives with him. The most outgoing and outwardly confident of all the participants, he described how he felt about the absence of his parents:

Well, the first year I don’t really miss my parents because I have a lot of freedom, right? So I quite enjoy it. Cos when I was in Hong Kong my parents were really strict...The last five months I spent by myself I quite miss them now. All of my friends is like, ‘Oh! You’re so lucky! You have a big house and you’re by yourself.’ But I also think it’s not that lucky when you, like, when it actually happen to you...If your parents and your family are away from you it’s not that great. Really lonely and sad. If you want to talk to someone you can’t. No one support you or anything.
He had his first experience of living completely alone when his sister visited Hong Kong for several months. At the time of the first interview, she had just recently returned to Vancouver. He considered his feelings during this period of her absence:

For the last five months I was by myself in this house. I was pretty alone and scared for the first half month...I usually go out...with my friends, and then I just come back and then go right in my room.

His fear was substantiated, it would seem. Whilst his sister was in Hong Kong, his house was broken in to:

I was by myself and I was in the bedroom and I was sleeping...and they came in the basement and they took the computer and they were gone. Luckily they didn’t, like, harm me or anything.

On the second occasion, Eva came home to find the result of the break in. They called the police, but were not attended to until the next day. The door to the house had been broken: “we slept together in my Mum’s bedroom because the master bedroom’s got a lock.” She was visibly shaken by this incident, and concerned that the absence of her parents makes the house more vulnerable to burglary:

The police say this...this is a target house for the thief...I think they know there’s just...there’s just me and my brother in here. Maybe they just keep looking at us for a long time, so they know when we are out. So they just came...and they know where the alarm system is.

There are no immediate neighbours to watch over them, as the house next door has been empty for two years, since the owners returned to Hong Kong. She feels very alone in the house, on several occasions invoking ‘fear’ to describe her feelings.
Normal disagreements between siblings can be exaggerated in the Satellite situation. Siblings find themselves spending significant amounts of time together when sharing domestic responsibilities, but without parental mediation. Dawn described the biggest problem faced in the absence of her parents as: "Fighting with my brother...that's a very big problem...No one to stop us, like, and we always fight and no one can help. I've got no one to talk to." Several participants alluded to a sense that they had no one with whom to discuss emotional issues. There is often a reluctance to reveal personal vulnerability to friends, as Paul indicated:

    Actually I don't really talk to anyone...I don't express my sad feelings or anything...Even though I'm sad I won't express it. I'll just pretend I'm happy: to my parents, to everyone.

After the first break-in, he had been very upset, yet he hid his feelings from his mother: "I never told her. I don't want her to be, like, worried. So, like, whenever I am sad or scared, any problem, I never tell her...I rather she should be happy in Hong Kong." He discussed how he had felt after the second break-in:

    I never talk to anyone about, like, really sad stuff. Yeah. I talk to my friends but I never talk about sad stuff...last Friday I just got broken in, right? The house. So, actually it's not a big thing, but I'm thinking it's so unfair. It's happened to me twice already. And I'm really sad and I think of all the sad stuff like happened since I come to Canada and stuff. Like, I was really sad last Friday. I was really, really sad...And then I called my friends to talk to them...But I can't! Laughs.

In the absence of their parents, children often have no one with whom to share emotional concerns and everyday worries. As Paul here indicates, children can often be protective of their parents and withhold their true feelings. There is another sense, however, in which children feel sometimes restricted from talking about concerns related to their
circumstances, and I will return to this important issue below. As I will show, parents are often implicated in maintaining a worrying silence around the Satellite status.

Practical Responsibilities and Domestic Life

In addition to the emotional impact of absent parents, Satellite life signals a whole new terrain of domestic and sometimes social responsibility for the children, although the practical living arrangements of the participants varied. Some students lived totally alone, although it was usual for a sibling to be present; slightly more of those interviewed lived in a house than in an apartment. Some students have experienced living with a ‘home-stay’ family, although this was not the present circumstance for any of those interviewed, and four have experienced living with a guardian. Seven out of fifteen presently live with a sibling. Vince found it especially difficult to adjust to living with another family in Vancouver. He is an only child and admits that he received all of his parents’ attention in Hong Kong:

---

17 Ho et al. 1997 made this general observation for their research.
18 A ‘homestay family’ is a family who agrees to let a young student live with them in their house for a fee. This can include family, friends, or placement through an agency. A reputable insider informed me that the homestay circumstance is common for children living without parents in Vancouver. In fact, in the Vancouver region an industry has grown up around the need to find homes for young parent-less children with sufficient financial resources. There are six so-called ‘home-stay agencies’ in the area, whose role is to provide families for young international students and also (to a lesser extent) Satellite children. I interviewed Liane Gebauer, Director of Placement for Canada Vancouver International Homestay Ltd. The agency has dealt with Satellite children. Sometimes the agency is phoned for advice when parents leave a child in Vancouver with another family member or friend and that person wishes to pass on the responsibility. Several Vancouver schools use this and other agencies in order to place children too young to be on their own. The agency runs substantial checks on the volunteer families and attempts to match a child with a family according to mutual interests. They place children for up to two years. Of significant interest is the fact that this particular agency offers a ‘guardianship service’ for younger students. For a fee, they will become the child’s legal guardian and be “responsible for their housing, education, allowance and airline ticket home. We work with an immigration lawyer and a bank to take care of everything. An account is set up for the child as a trust and a transfer is made into the account every month.” The youngest child they have taken on is fourteen years old, although requests have been made for the placement of younger children.
It was really tough because...my own parents, like, spoiled me...and then, when I come...umm...The auntie got her own daughter and own son...and so it was pretty tough on me.

For several years after coming to Vancouver, Dawn and her brother lived below their guardian in a basement apartment. Her guardian, she told me, paid them little attention and had no interest in their lives. The feeling was mutual: “We just ignored them...They cooked for us...That’s it.” For the children who live alone - without a guardian or homestay family – almost every aspect of the day-to-day running of their lives is in their charge. In some cases they are responsible for undertaking all the domestic chores themselves, in several cases a part-time cleaner would attend to the house once a week. Claire gets help from the housekeeper with washing her clothes, and a gardener tends to the lawn. Although Vince is responsible for paying the bills on time, his domestic chores are greatly reduced by a hired help, who also cooks for him. He said:

My Mum has paid for a woman to come every Monday and then she gives me three meals and cleans up all the house...Only three, so it’s three days of meals. Four days I need to go out... If there is a meal in my fridge then I will have my meal, if not then I’ll go and find someone to go and eat with me.

Paul does not spend much time preparing his meals. He said: “I cook a lot, but it’s all like...instant food! Laughs”... “I usually eat out with my friends or cook a microwave dinner.” The majority of participants eat out on a regular, sometimes daily basis.

Managing Finances

The management of money was consistently mentioned as a ‘problem’ during interviews.

---

19 Vancouver School Board, in a questionnaire response, expressed a concern that many guardianships are “paper guardianships” only, by which they mean that the guardian takes little interest in the day-to-day activities of the child in his/her care.

20 Schools have indicated concern over the nutritional content of the diets of these children.
Vince was just starting out on his own. I asked him:

JW: Are you confident?

No...I feel like I will have financial problems after a couple of months. I won’t be able to handle a thousand dollars of doing...paying things. I wouldn’t know how much to have for myself and then how much to have for the bills.

Participants mentioned incidents of ‘overspending’ on several occasions. Frank found that he overspent by a couple of hundred dollars every month for the first few months on his own. In the four months that Richie has been in charge of the household bills, he has been “off budget every month.” His parents send him money, he has to allocate it, and anything left over from the domestic expenditures is for him. Paul’s first experience of handling the finances came when his sister left for a trip to Hong Kong.

She [sister] used to manage all the money and stuff. Just gave me a certain amount every single week, like forty bucks per week and stuff, but...then she left, last five months she left for Hong Kong, so I had to manage by myself and...For the start I thought, like, ‘Oooo! I have tonnes of money’, right? And then spent a lot on clothes and stuff and then...Yeah, I just spent it, and then I have like, Ahhh! No money for food! Laughs...I had to eat, like, canned food and noodles every single meal!

He also spent the money his parents had left him in reserve for emergencies.

Claire’s job was easier: she has only to fax bills to her parents as they arrive, and they handle the rest. Every week her mother will write her a cheque for her allowance. In every case except one, the parents provided all of the money required for household and personal expenditures.

In one exceptional case, the Satellite circumstance had placed the participant in a situation of financial, as well as extreme emotional vulnerability. The story of Rod was partly relayed in chapter four. Before his mother left Vancouver, and whilst his father
was working in Taiwan, there was a period when his father stopped sending money to his family. Subsequently, his mother left him and his sister to live in an apartment in Vancouver, and consistent financial support for the two children disappeared. Rod was forced to drop out of school in order to earn money to live. He told me:

Since they divorced they don’t really give me any support at all, like money support. No.

JW: How do you cope then?

I have to work.

JW: You’re not in school?

I was in school for two years after I graduate from high school and then now I start...to go back to school, just the beginning of this year. ‘Cos I have to make enough money to support at least the rental for the apartment and then some of the money I have to use for food and phone bill and stuff like that...Now I find that I have some money in the bank and then I think it’s time to start...to study. To go back to school...

JW: So your parents don’t send you any money now?

No, actually, sometimes. Not very often. Probably like once a year. It depends, like, because right now the economy in Taiwan is not good, so sometimes they are having their own problems, have to deal with their own things too...So sometimes $1000 once or twice...Just to support school a little bit.

For a short while he was able to go to school and work. Now he has been forced to quit his job because of the amount of homework he is receiving from his course. The course costs a lot of money and he admits he has had to ask for help: “I have some problems. I have to pay those fees and I still have to pay the rental so...Usually I don’t do that, but I called my grandparents for a little bit of support.”

The interviews with the children have provided an important insight into the life of the Satellite child. A vital additional perspective, however, is provided by schools, which in
many cases act as substitute parents, taking on additional, and unrecognised, responsibilities. Combining interview data from children and school staff, I want to consider evidence indicating that the Satellite circumstance is a social problem.

A Social Problem?

A School’s Perspective on the Satellite Children

During one survey conducted for this research, a Richmond high school was estimated to contain around thirty students with absent parents for the majority of the time. A school in West Vancouver estimated up to ten students in this situation. The questionnaire and interview responses from a small random selection of Vancouver schools indicate considerable awareness of the Satellite phenomenon. Yet schools are faced with a difficult, sometimes a moral dilemma. The position of the Vancouver School Board conforms to the ‘Home Memorandum’, which states that: “students whose parents are not ‘principally resident’ in Vancouver do not have the right to have their kids in Vancouver schools.” If it comes to the Board’s attention that parents are not resident, I was informed, students should then be asked to leave the school. In practice, however, such a policy is not so easy to implement. For one, schools often have no way of knowing whether parents are or are not present, aside from asking the children themselves.

21 Legally, in terms of the protection of the children, under the age of eighteen there must be a guardian present. During this research I uncovered no examples of children found without guardians, although several school staff members and a representative from Vancouver School Board highlighted concerns about ‘paper guardianship’, indicating that guardians often took no real responsibility for the children. There are other legal implications to this situation, however, even if a guardian has been appointed. All the children interviewed for this research entered Canada as ‘landed immigrants’. Under the age of nineteen they are unable to apply for immigration themselves; it is therefore highly likely that one of the parents will have applied for the visa, and the child will have entered Canada as a dependent. However, in order to maintain the landed immigrant visa, the principal applicant must be resident within Canada for at least 183 out of 365 days in the year. When both parents are absent for more that 183 days in the year, their absences conflict with their legal immigration status. This illegality contributes to the substantial silence around the issue of Satellite children in Vancouver.
Children are frequently very protective of such information. And even if members of the school staff become aware of a case of a Satellite child, there are many reasons why they would be reluctant to remove the child from the school. I will examine this issue in some detail below. I want to quote extensively from an informative interview with the Vice-Principal of a public school in Richmond\(^2\) who has experienced many cases of Astronaut families and an estimated thirty cases of Satellite children presently in the school. The Astronaut families, however, are not a concern:

It's the students with no parent that we are most concerned about. There are quite a number and it is difficult to determine how many there are as they really only come to light when there is a difficulty and we are trying to make contact with the home.

Most of the students discovered without parents are between fifteen and seventeen years old, and from Hong Kong or Taiwan. She explained the types of related problems the school encounters:

Well, any kind of disciplinary problem in the school — either not coming at all or...missing some of the classes. Sometimes when we look at the student's marks and see that they are doing poorly, so we request a parent conference, and there is no parent...Sometimes the students are reluctant to tell us that the parent has left...Sometimes the student is the eldest person in the home. Usually they will have someone coming to check in on them and in some cases they will have a relative living with them. But in some cases they are on their own and will have the added responsibility of caring for younger siblings.

In addition to indicating the burdens of responsibility faced by many children in the Satellite circumstance, she highlights an issue of significant importance, with potentially

\(^2\) This information was gained through a postal questionnaire response by a representative of Vancouver School Board.
\(^2\) The City of Richmond is a suburb of Vancouver with the highest percentage of Chinese origin residents of all municipalities within the G.V.R.D.
serious implications for the vulnerability of the lone-child. There is, it would seem, a deliberate *silence* surrounding the Satellite phenomenon:

*Students are sometimes reluctant to reveal that their parents are in Hong Kong because they are concerned about what that may mean for their continued school enrolment...Sometimes because they don’t want their parents to hear that they are not doing particularly well.*

*It has come to our attention that some parents are gone for the whole year...In order for students to register at our school they need a parent physically present with them. But after the student is registered, sometimes the parents just disappear...*

Children may be implicated in the deployment of various tactics of concealment:

*I have had, in the last two years, two fake parents, because I have been insistent upon making contact with a parent...*

*I had a student this month who insisted that his parents were here, and even when I made calls at ten o’clock in the evening there was no parent: ‘Oh, he's just stepped out...’ He turned up the following day with a man that he claimed was his father and I asked the man, ‘are you his father?’ and the man said ‘yes’ he was, and started talking about the boy and what the concerns were...While I was talking his cell phone rang, and I said, ‘that’s surprising because every time I’ve tried your cell number it says that the customer is not available.’ I asked him for some identification and at that point he said, ‘I’m not really his father’...When the boy finally did admit that his parents were out of the country, and gave a number for his Mum, and I spoke with the Mum...The man that the boy had brought was a family friend.*

*And last year I had a similar situation where a boy was missing a great deal and he brought a woman in who he said was his mother. And she looked familiar. I asked her if she had been in before and she said that she had, with another student...She let the cat out of the bag there! And it turned out that she was the housekeeper for another student, because he didn’t want to acknowledge that his parents weren’t here.*

The Vice-Principal expressed concern about the pressure that some children appear to be put under, by their parents, not to reveal the fact that they are out of the country. She relayed one case, with which she has dealt, where there was a need for “intervention” by the Ministry of Children and Families. She said: “When we did speak to the Mum...she
was very angry with us and very angry with the...boy who finally revealed that she wasn’t here. To the point that...we felt that there may be some physical abuse when she returned to the country...”

In my interviews with participants, I also found evidence of parents attempting to conceal the Satellite circumstance. Children are sometimes told explicitly by the parents not to reveal their status to anyone. Facing problems at school, Angel was forced to admit to a teacher that her parents were not in Vancouver. She told me:

I’d been pretty much an ‘A’ student, right? And suddenly my grades were falling, right? And she [the teacher] kind of know that something was wrong...I was crying and all that ‘cos I did really bad on my test...She gave me a little talk, and I told her about this...She was being very nice about it and I was, like, ‘Can you please not tell anybody about this’...The school is small and teachers do gossip, you know...

Divulging this information had, however, been against the clear wishes of her parents:

When my parents first left we kind of had this...It’s not really an agreement but, you know, we agreed that we should keep it a secret for my own sake...Not to (quiet voice) let people know that I’m alone and all that.”

JW: Did your friends know at that time?

No...Now I’m letting some people know – my really close friends.

JW: But the ones you invite home, I suppose, would realise...

No they don’t...I’m a good liar Laughs.

For Paul and his sister Eva, concealing their solitary circumstance may have had more serious implications. The day before the first of the interviews, their house had experienced a second break-in in three months. The first time a break-in occurred, the incident did not get reported to the police. Paul told me:
We didn’t call the police. I asked my Mum…Of course, they’re in Hong Kong and they’re not supposed to be in Hong Kong because of their immigration in Canada, right? They have to stay here. So my Mum is scared if they call the police they will find out they’re in Hong Kong and stuff so they didn’t call the police.

Two of Paul’s teachers are aware of his situation, he told me, but he generally keeps the absence of his parents quiet. In fact, the school does not even know his home address; he was forced to use a different address when applying to the school of his parents’ choice.

He said:

I can’t use this address to apply for the school in Delta, right, so I use my Mum’s friend’s address in Delta…So whenever the school have, like, any letter or news or anything…I have to tell my Mum…None of the teachers have any contact with my Mum’s friend or my Mum.

Returning to the comments of the Vice-Principal, it would seem that school staff are aware of the pressure that children are put under by their parents, and herein lies the moral dilemma. Can the children be punished for the ultimate consequences of their parents’ actions?

I think that they have really conflicting feelings about it…On the one hand…they want to protect their parents. On the other I think that they sense from me and from other people here that we think that it’s wrong that their parents have left them. So they’re struggling with that.

She continues: “they are just kids and they have so much to cope with. Not just normal teenage stuff; they’ve got home responsibilities and then no parental support for guidance. It’s difficult.”

In addition to the concealment perpetuated by the parents and the students themselves, additional circumstances make it difficult to force recognition of the Satellite “problem”
from provincial government. As the Vice-Principal explains: "We find that most of the students that are left without parents are left with quite extensive resources. A bit of money, usually a nice car, cell phone, usually a nice house." When the school contacts the Ministry, these are the questions that are asked. When it is established that the child is well housed, sufficiently fed and clothed, concern is consequently often not registered. Yet she strongly believes that these material circumstances belie the seriousness of the issue, and prevent it getting the appropriate recognition as a serious social problem.

In Summary

This chapter has sought to examine the experiences of the so-called ‘Satellite children’ in Vancouver, considering the proposition that this particular migration arrangement represents another manifestation of the flexible strategising of the contemporary middle-class Chinese family. There were clearly limits to the explanatory power of the theory of ‘cultural capital’ in terms of understanding the experiences of the lone students (Mitchell, 1997; Olds, 1998; Ong, 1999). Like the women represented in chapter five, these children displayed significant agency; the conception that filial piety and patriarchal control can operate effectively when family members are geographically dispersed is clearly challenged (Mitchell, 1997; Hsing, 1997). In addition, the social limits to the ‘flexible family’ were starkly represented, as children undoubtedly suffered a variety of negative emotional and psychological impacts from this situation. Now turning to the final chapter, I hope to bring together the empirical findings represented throughout the thesis.

24 A representative of the BC Ministry for Children and Families confirmed this stance. Their only policy with regards to Satellite children concerns issues of neglect.
I will consider the way in which my research contributes to previous literatures and sheds new light on the Astronaut and Satellite phenomena.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS: THE FLEXIBLE FAMILY?
UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES OF THE ASTRONAUT AND SATELLITE MIGRATION PHENOMENA

This thesis began with two apparently contradictory representations of the contemporary middle-class Chinese immigrant family, each suggesting a different explanation for the emergence of the Astronaut phenomenon in Vancouver. In the first, the Astronaut situation is indicative of the vulnerability of an apparently wealthy and privileged immigrant cohort. Families from Hong Kong and Taiwan were made “reluctant exiles” to Canada, anticipating political instability in their countries of origin and fearing for their future safety (Skeldon, 1994). They failed, however, to foresee the significant institutional barriers to successful employment in Canada, resulting in widespread business failure, unemployment and underemployment among immigrant entrepreneurs and professionals (Smart, 1994; Boyer, 1996; Ley, 1999, 2000). The Astronaut arrangement can be conceived as a direct consequence of financial vulnerability after immigration to Canada; the head of the family has no choice but to return to the country of origin to earn a living, and support his wife and children in Vancouver.1

In the second, perhaps more prevalent portrayal, contemporary Chinese immigrants to Canada are assumed to be part of a larger “hypermobile” cosmopolitan elite (Skeldon, 1994, 1997). Comprising the “new rich” of East Asia (Robison and Goodman, 1996),

1 Of course, it should be remembered that this immigrant group experiences material privilege relative to many other groups within Vancouver.
these transnational middle-class families are highly strategic in their decision to migrate. Their intention is to consolidate the family’s power and prestige; sharply attuned to the nuances of global cultural and financial resources, they will migrate accordingly. The calculated positioning of different family members at different geographic sites is therefore directly related to the desire to maximise the accumulation of both financial and cultural capital (Mitchell, 1997; Ong and Nonini, 1997; Ong, 1999). The Astronaut and Satellite arrangements epitomise this migration strategy; the English language and a Western education for their children (an investment in the family’s future) are achieved at the same time that the financial prosperity offered in Hong Kong and Taiwan is maintained.

Turning to the empirical data, the first objective of the analysis was to establish the motivations behind the Astronaut arrangement. Which of the two portrayals do they best reflect? Through interviews with members of Astronaut families in Vancouver, I was able to establish quite emphatically that for most households this transnational situation had been planned in advance of migration. Rather than reflecting a circumstance into which families had been forced after failed attempts to find work in Canada, the majority of participants had in fact been aware that their spouse would not be joining them in the near future. There had been no intention of relinquishing business or professional careers in the country of origin. Moreover, the reasons motivating migration in the first place were not, in the majority of cases, solely political. Political concerns were certainly an impetus to seek an alternative passport. Overwhelmingly, however, the education of the children was the primary motivation behind immigration. On the surface, participant
responses indicated the flexibility of their family unit, the strategy underlying migration, and their continued financial accumulation in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The utility of Aihwa Ong’s (1999) application of the notion of ‘cultural capital’ was clearly implicit in these findings. Did these families also display the features of traditional Chinese values, such as familism and Confucianist ethics, which have been so explicitly linked with financial success in East Asia (see Wong, 1985; Tai, 1989; Mitchell, 1995; Hsing, 1997)?

Certainly, in the Astronaut arrangement, different family members appeared to fulfil distinctive roles (for ‘the good of the family’). Children were expected to work hard and be successful at school, women generally undertook domestic and childcare tasks, whilst the men were the ‘bread-winners,’ maintaining the family’s financial status and business or professional prestige. This would seem to represent a transnational family arrangement par excellence, mirroring in a contemporary setting the traditional Chinese spatial practices of diaspora, guanxi, and extended family ties.

A second objective concerned the explication of how individual family members experienced this arrangement. Hitherto, there has been little empirical examination of the experiences of members within this unit, although recent theoretical analyses have referred to the “regime” of the Chinese family, emphasising the existence of profoundly unequal power relations (Nonini and Ong, 1997; Ong, 1999). In feminist literature more generally, the household unit is conceived as a source of female oppression (Lawson, 1998; Silvey and Lawson, 1999). At the same time, research on gender and the migration process suggests that family immigration is often a negative experience for the female, with particular regards to her employment status (Bonney and Love, 1991; Halfacree,
Has the woman's experience of daily life changed through migration to Vancouver and the Astronaut situation and, if so, how?

Migration has traditionally been conceived as the movement of people from a less developed to a more developed societal context. In the case of migrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan, however, the places of origin have recently undergone dramatic modernisation (e.g. Castells, 1996). Various indicators suggest that middle-class women in Hong Kong experience relative equality with their male counterparts; there is, for example, a high achievement of post-secondary education, a high rate of employment, and a common use of paid helpers for domestic and childcare chores amongst the women of middle-class families (Cheung, 1997). Although particular notions of Chinese tradition are perceived to endure within contemporary Hong Kong and Taiwan society, these qualities have been valorised in recent analyses, understood to work alongside (and even facilitate) modernisation, and to promote economic success (Wong, 1985; Tai, 1989; Mitchell, 1995; Hsing, 1997). There is little critical analysis that would suggest the existence of widespread patriarchal oppression of middle-class women in these societies (cf. Salaff, 1981).

On one level, this picture of female liberation from traditional gender roles was recreated in the interviews. I was able to establish that the majority of woman had worked in well-paid and high status jobs, had hired housekeepers and nannies, and therefore did not obviously enact the traditional role of the housewife in the pre-migratory setting. Had these circumstances changed through migration and the subsequent adoption of the
Astronaut arrangement? Guida Man (1995) suggests that middle-class Hong Kong-Chinese women, through immigration to Canada, "experience an escalation of traditional gender roles, unequal distribution of household labor, gender and sexual oppression both at work and in the home" (p. 320). Could this be established with respect to my findings? And what about "a loss of economic power through unemployment or underemployment" (ibid.)? It has been noted that migration "often acts to frustrate the development of a woman's career" (Halfacree, 1995; p. 159). I therefore sought evidence in support or rejection of the notion that patriarchal relations were reinstated through migration, in the context of Vancouver and the Astronaut arrangement.

Practically, there were several indications of the effects of migration on the lone spouse in terms of the subsequent adoption of gendered social roles. In Vancouver, the majority of women did all the housework themselves. Only two participants were in paid employment, the rest were completely economically dependent on their husbands. Migration had not only 'frustrated' the development of the woman's career, therefore, but, in effect, ended that career. In addition, women generally suffered the loss of extensive support networks within and outside the home (from friends and the extended family) and a loss of the practical and emotional support of their husbands. In some cases, the emotional effects of the Astronaut arrangement were significant. Women reported boredom, loneliness and fear. Some admitted having confined themselves to the home. The marital relationship frequently experienced communication difficulties and, in two sad cases, women told of their husbands' extra-marital affairs in Hong Kong and
Taiwan. There were clearly significant negative effects that could be linked to migration and the Astronaut situation.

The image of the lone female, 'localised' in Vancouver, and in the home, vis-à-vis her mobile husband, is a powerful one, and challenges many academic and media assumptions regarding recent Chinese immigrant families to Vancouver (cf. Ley, 1999). The Astronaut circumstance would seem to reveal the contradictions of late modernity.

Powerful, privileged migrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan - representatives of a new rich and hypermobile class of people - are able to pursue objectives of economic and cultural accumulation transnationally, adapting to the highly contemporary circumstances of globalisation with their flexible families. Yet at the same time, this family arrangement serves to reinstate traditional gender roles. In opposition to assumptions of liberation and equality, after migration the man 'goes out' to work, and the woman finds herself placed back in the home, alone, and in a situation of insecurity and emotional vulnerability. The 'good of the family' is prioritised - the good of the individual woman is clearly not.

This would be a forceful conclusion on which to end, but the reality is of course far more complex. The lone female is not simply the passive victim of these circumstances, but has demonstrated significant agency. I suggested that the Astronaut family could be a liberating experience for the woman, apparently contradicting my earlier findings. Given the facts regarding the practical changes that the woman’s life undergoes after migration, not to mention the emotional difficulties uncovered, in what ways can this claim to emancipation be justified? A crucial difference between female roles in the traditional
sense, and those experienced by the Astronaut wives, lies in the transnational arrangement of this family form – the geographical distance that separates husbands and wives for the majority of the time is fundamental to the freedom of women from patriarchal control. At first, this experience of separation was unnerving, and participants felt literally stranded in new and unfamiliar surroundings. Over time, however, they were able to create around themselves a stable environment, which was also significantly liberating.

Despite the apparent social opportunities available to middle-class women in their countries of origin – their careers, their economic independence, and the freedom from most domestic chores - the daily life experienced by participants was, they implied, often relatively oppressive. Participants frequently lived with extended family members or in close proximity to them. Several women indicated that they felt ‘watched’ by both their husband and their mother-in-law when in the home. A demanding career was not (at least in retrospect) a satisfying experience. Several women indicated that they wanted to immigrate to Canada in order to escape the social expectations imposed upon them (the ‘high flying’ careerist and the ‘good wife’) in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In contrast, Vancouver offered freedom in several respects: freedom from the critical surveillance of family members, freedom from a stressful workload, freedom from the daily demands of the husband. Through migration, and the Astronaut situation, she gained a significant increase in personal time, and the ability to manage that time as she desired. Different opportunities became apparent to her; to learn other things, take up new hobbies, and socialise with friends. Her attitudes also changed – she valued the time spent with her
children (the fact that not one participant hired a nanny was a conscious choice not often based upon economic restraints). Material possessions seemed to assume less importance in Vancouver than they had previously, perhaps negating her 'loss of purchasing power' (Lam, 1994; Man, 1995). Theories of the reproduction of labour in the contemporary economic climate emphasise the “re-gendering” of household responsibilities, stressing that women continue to be primarily responsible for the man’s needs within the home (Peck, 1996). In her own analysis, Guida Man suggests that the immigrant man in Canada finds release from the tensions of paid work in the family home, and the woman is expected to give him both physical and emotional support. In the Astronaut situation, however, for the majority of the time the man is absent from the family home. As one participant expressed with regards to her husband and the stresses of his work: “he can’t share anything with me by the phone.” The immigrant woman in the Astronaut situation does not, therefore, experience a form of oppression based on meeting her husband’s daily needs (see Silvey and Lawson, 1999; Creese et al., 1999; Ong, 1999). As for the ‘localisation’ (Ong, 1999) of the woman in Vancouver, this notion implies that she experiences a sense of relatively immobility, vis-à-vis her Astronaut partner, and that she is consequently helpless to enact change. I argued that it was this immobility that, in fact, facilitated her active creation of a stable environment, consisting largely of local networks of friends and the ‘routinization’ of daily life (cf. Berger and Kellner, 1964; see Giddens, 1984). Significant disruption of her daily routines occurred when the husband returned to Vancouver. During his presence, as he often attempted to reinstate his control over the family, the liberating experience of his absence was suddenly and surprisingly realised.

2 I have indicated elsewhere that the attitudes of the lone-men also underwent similar changes.
Children in Satellite households presented an equally complex picture of the reality of experience. On one level, there were several indications that these children had also escaped aspects of patriarchal control through migration and the absence of their parents, subverting in many ways the notion of ‘filial piety’. In the accumulation of cultural capital through ‘education’, for example, it was unclear if the Satellite circumstance was in fact cultivating the type of cosmopolitan businessperson or professional persona that the parents so desired. Children undoubtedly benefited from improved English-language abilities, and would almost certainly succeed in the acquisition of a Western educational certificate, yet in addition to these, Vancouver seemed to promote a certain ‘laid back’ attitude amongst participants. Several children indicated that they had felt a great amount of pressure to succeed in Hong Kong or Taiwan, and admitted that this pressure was significantly diminished now they were in Vancouver, and in the absence of their parents. Rod, for example, had noticed: “Taiwan and Canada, there is a big difference. Canada is pretty slow. Everything is very slow...relaxed and slow.” Frank exemplified this attitude:

I’m already used to the lifestyle here, but my parents don’t like me that way.

JW: Why?

They think I am too slow...It’s like, outside of Canada, you know, everything is like...for example, outside of Canada everything is like a Pentium 3. To be here is like a Pentium 1...For the retired people this is a really wonderful place.

Theoretical notions concerning the cultural accumulation strategies of a cosmopolitan elite make several overlapping assumptions that prove untenable in light of these empirical data. The assumption that culture can, in fact, be accumulated strategically and unproblematically for one; secondly, that there is perfect knowledge of what ‘cultural
capital' is available at different geographic locations; and thirdly, that it is possible to exercise control over its acquisition. The crucial significance of local cultures, which not only exist within these places but can also transform the attitudes and outlook of the immigrant in important and unexpected ways, is overlooked in many such theoretical accounts (e.g. Olds, 1998; Ong, 1999). Perhaps the best illustration of the dysfunction of the strategy of ‘cultural accumulation’, however, is observed in the frequency with which Satellite children miss classes, or are absent from school altogether. One participant was absent so often that she was requested by a school counsellor to leave the school. Yet, as she told me, she felt no obligation to the wishes of her parents: “they won’t force me to do anything because they’re not here” (Dawn).

At the same time that we observe something of the agency of the children in the absence of their parents, we see also the significance of the concept of ‘localisation,’ and the powerlessness this notion invokes. This research points unequivocally to the conclusion that the Satellite arrangement – “disrupted parental responsibility” as Ong (1999) refers to it – has a negative impact on the social and emotional well-being of the children involved. One participant attempted suicide because he felt unable to deal with the trauma that the geographical separation of his family had effected in his daily life. He found he had no one to whom he could turn, in the absence of his parents: “Friends cannot be always...be always with you, like, twenty-four hours. And even though you have some kind of problem that you really want to find someone to talk about it, they cannot always be there to listen...The worst part is very lonely”. Children frequently felt
abandoned, unable to reconcile what their friends perceived as their ‘freedom’ with what they experienced as profound loneliness and uncertainty:

All of my friends is like, ‘oh, you are so lucky! You have a big house and you’re by yourself.” But I also think it’s not that lucky when you, like, when it actually happen to you...If your parents and your family are away from you it’s not that great. Really lonely and sad. If you want to talk to someone you can’t. No one support you or anything. (Paul)

Between the experiences of women and children, some meaningful similarities can be observed. In the literature, representations of the contemporary Chinese family stress the importance of familial emotional bonds. Writes Wong (1985): “the family is the basic social grouping uniting individuals. Family ties are permanent, and individuals owe their loyalty to the family throughout their lives” (p. 16). Guanxi is another concept emphasising personal social bonds, in business transactions (Cohen, 1997; Hsing, 1997; Olds and Yeung, 1999). Together: “Family and guanxi relations among diaspora Chinese represent a long-standing habitus whose very flexibilities have now been placed in the service of accumulation strategies under the novel conditions of late capitalism...” (Ong and Nonini, 1997). Within the family, it is assumed that control is maintained through the enduring acceptance of paternalistic relationships, and that these social relations can operate effectively over significant geographic distances. Business success is based upon personal and spatially extended family connections; “the painstaking establishment and maintenance of long-term, extended family ties remains a critical ingredient in the contemporary circulation of finance capital overseas” (Mitchell, 1995; p. 369). The Astronaut and Satellite arrangements thereby reflect “a desire to extend family networks spatially” by a powerful and privileged population (Mitchell, 1993; p. 269). Crucially, the
successful exercise of patriarchal control over geographically dispersed family members is often unproblematically assumed in these analyses (see Olds, 1998, Ong, 1999).

The empirical data have, however, significantly challenged some of these basic theoretical assumptions. Women were observed to successfully manage their own time independent of their husbands. Children have exercised their own agency independent of their parents’ wishes (and knowledge) in various ways. The geographical separation of the patriarchal head from other family members has profoundly affected his ability to know the daily lives of his family members, never mind his ability to exercise control over these lives:

I think he don’t like I go anywhere, he like I stay at home. But I don’t think so. I think, ‘you not here, I’m free, I can go anywhere.’ (Cheryl; Lone wife)

If I want to turn bad or do anything that they don’t want me to it’s so easy for me...especially with my situation. I can just lie to them, right? (Angel; Satellite child)

Assumptions regarding the ‘flexibility’ of the Chinese family as an “affective” unit have also been challenged (Tai, 1989; Ong, 1999). Through geographical separation, close interpersonal relationships between family members were difficult to sustain; evidence of emotional trauma attests to the social limits of the flexible family arrangement. In addition, Vancouver was seen to impact the lives of both the women and the children, particularly in the way in which a transformation of attitudes was perceived to occur after migration. The assumed power of a Chinese transnational middle-class to accumulate specific cultural capital from a particular place, as so desired, was significantly undermined. I suggest that these examples demonstrate the important and enduring
relationship between spatial distance and social relations, even in a significantly transnational and 'deteriorialized' era (Hannerz, 1996). They also indicate the important impact of place on a migrant's experience. The traditional concerns of social geography appear to retain some value, therefore, in explaining the present experiences of the Astronaut and Satellite phenomena.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BOURDIEU, P. 1984 *Distinction; a social critique of the judgement of taste*, Harvard University Press.

1 Articles in *World Journal Daily News* and *Ming Pao Daily News* have been translated from Chinese by Priscilla Wei.


CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION CANADA:  http://cicnet-ci.gc.ca


FINCHER, R. 2000: Workshop Presentation: Multicultural Sites/Sights, Peter Wall Institute, University of British Columbia, 26th, 27th and 28th June.


LO, M. 1989 “The relationship of grassroots women to the community” in M. Jaschok (ed.) How History Becomes Nature: An inquiry into our history as women in Hong Kong, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Council of Women.


---1997 “Women’s work is never done: social organization of work and the experience of women in middle-class Hong Kong Chinese immigrant families in Canada” Advances in Gender Research, 2: 183 – 226.


MITCHELL, K. 1993 “Multiculturalism, or the united colors of capitalism” Antipode 25: 263 – 94.


PATTEN, C. 1998, East and West: the last Governor of Hong Kong on power, freedom and the Future. McCelland and Stewart Inc.


South China Morning Post, “The emigration ‘Astronauts,’” 20th March 1989


The Province, “Census question asked for skin colour,” 18th February 1998: A10


211


