

London School of Economics and Political Science

**An anthropological study of ethnicity and the  
reproduction of culture among Hong Kong Chinese  
families in Scotland**

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the London School of Economics for the degree of  
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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

This thesis is about inter-generational relationships and the reproduction of culture in the family lives of Hong Kong Chinese people in Scotland. It is based on fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork and informal interviews in family homes, Chinese language schools and community organizations in Edinburgh. A central question is that of ethnicity and how people learn to “be ethnic” while living in a Western, multicultural society.

The first part asks what Scottish-born Chinese children learn about ethnicity through growing up in families who work in the ethnic catering trade. Chapter 1 introduces the themes of ambition and achievement, and the mixed emotions associated with this sometimes-stigmatized occupation. Chapter 2 focuses on ideas about the duties of parents, drawing on life stories of three generations of Chinese Scots to describe their decisions concerning childcare and schooling.

The second section concerns the learning of specific cultural practices – language and handicrafts – in the institutional context of Chinese complementary schools. Chapters 3 and 4 show that these are important spaces where people feel part of a group with shared moral responsibility for the maintenance and transmission of culture. The question of “authenticity” in both cultural practice and interpersonal relationships is discussed.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore how Hong Kong Chinese Scots are responding to the rise of China as a global economic and cultural power. Ethnographic data from Chinese New Year celebrations in Edinburgh, and Mandarin language classes for Cantonese-speaking children suggest that people may engage in “inauthentic” cultural practices for strategic economic or political reasons. However, these articulations of ethnic identity are also important for the nurture of inter-generational relationships.

The thesis concludes with the argument that Chinese Scots take a future-orientated approach to family and community life, drawing selectively on the resources of inter-ethnic ties and language to prepare their children for a changing economic and social environment.

# Contents

<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Note on transliteration of Chinese terms .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Ethnicity, multiculturalism and groups.....	12
Cultural reproduction in families.....	18
The rise of individualism in Chinese society.....	23
Chinese people in Scotland.....	29
Census data .....	29
Studying Hong Kong Chinese people in Edinburgh.....	33
Scotland as a setting for research.....	43
<b>Part 1 Reproducing culture in families.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Getting away from the takeaway: stigma and pride in the ethnic catering trade .....</b>	<b>50</b>
Chinese caterers in the British class system .....	56
Hierarchy and class in the Edinburgh Chinese catering trade .....	59
Choosing to work in a restaurant .....	63
Chain migration and the matter of trust.....	64
Insiders and outsiders .....	68
Conclusion .....	69
<b>Chapter 2 Tiger mothers with feather dusters? Parenting choices for restaurant families .....</b>	<b>72</b>
Life stories: three generations bringing up children in the West.....	76
The moral duty of parents.....	82
A parent’s role in education.....	84
Parental control over children’s behaviour.....	85
Children’s care for their parents .....	87
Conclusion .....	90
<b>Part 2 Reproducing culture as community.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Chapter 3 The success and failure of “group-making” in Chinese community language schools.....</b>	<b>94</b>
A lesson in relationships.....	98
Forming a peer group.....	102
The role of parents in the Chinese school.....	105

Parents as teachers .....	106
Being custodians of “Chinese culture” in Scotland .....	108
Partnership with mainstream schools .....	113
Conclusion .....	115
<b>Chapter 4 The tie that binds: gender and handicrafts in the reproduction of culture .....</b>	<b>118</b>
A women’s domain of knowledge .....	123
A social space for women .....	125
Hedonized technology .....	126
Cultural authenticity and multiculturalism .....	128
Knotting as an invented tradition .....	129
Lily’s story .....	131
Adorning the home .....	134
Leisure time for men .....	137
Conclusion .....	139
<b>Part 3 Reproducing culture as Chinese overseas .....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>Chapter 5 Chinese New Year celebrations in Edinburgh: preserving tradition or celebrating integration.....</b>	<b>142</b>
Chinese New Year Celebration at the Edinburgh Festival Theatre .....	146
“Shanghai Nostalgia Extravaganza” at the Sheraton Hotel .....	153
Preserving and passing on tradition .....	157
Contingency and transience .....	158
<b>Chapter 6 Like a chicken talking to a duck: the shifting values of speaking Chinese in Scotland .....</b>	<b>163</b>
On not speaking English .....	167
Hakka – a language of the past? .....	170
Cantonese, language of family and tradition .....	171
Language and the Chinese person .....	173
Mandarin or Cantonese? .....	174
Studying Chinese as a foreign language .....	176
Conclusion .....	180
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>183</b>
Cultural orientations in time .....	184
Custodians of the past .....	188
Living in the now .....	193
Looking to the future .....	198
<b>References .....</b>	<b>200</b>

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## **Note on transliteration of Chinese terms**

Where Chinese terms are given in the text, I have used the Cantonese form used by my informants. I have romanized the Cantonese according to the Yale system.

## **Introduction**



## Introduction

In the late 1960s and 70s a stream of Hong Kong Chinese families began migrating northwards from the larger English cities to Scotland, seeking new business opportunities as the ethnic catering trade in England had started to reach saturation point. Forty years on, Chinese people now form the second largest minority ethnic group in Scotland, after Pakistanis, with a population certainly exceeding the last recorded total of 16,000 people (Scotland. Office of the Chief Statistician, 2004), and the wider Scottish population has become accustomed to their presence, not least because of the ubiquity of Chinese takeaways and restaurants in towns and villages the length and breadth of the country. At least two generations of Scottish-born Chinese children have received all their schooling in Scotland, many of them going on to university and entering the mainstream workforce in a deliberate shift away from their family's previous employment in catering. Meanwhile their immigrant parents have carved out their own, ethnically marked institutions in Scotland: community-run Chinese language schools, Chinese churches, Chinese business associations and social groups for Chinese women all exist as part of Scottish public life.

This thesis seeks to address the broad themes of cultural reproduction, family and ethnicity through an examination of the everyday lives of Hong Kong Chinese people in Scotland. In bringing up their children, immigrant parents are sometimes obliged to articulate a definition of their ethnic identity, one that is often based around moral values. These values, including attitudes to work and ideas about family relationships among others, may have been taken for granted before they emigrated, but become more salient in opposition to what they see as the different moral standards of the majority culture in Scotland. They have to work out explicitly what they want to teach their children, how they want them to behave, and they often define this as "Chinese". In the thesis I will ask what exactly people mean when they say they want their children to be "Chinese", and which values are attached to this notion of ethnic identity.

As well as rather intangible forms of culture – the beliefs, expectations and ideals which people hold in their minds and hope to pass on to their children in the course of family life – I discuss more visible or material forms of cultural practice, such as handicrafts, dance, and the written Chinese language. These visible symbols of ethnicity, I will argue, are linked to processes of "embodiment", and play a significant part in the formation and transmission of ethnic identity for overseas

Chinese. As I will explain, a growing body of literature on “embodied transnational cultural practice” (Wilcox, 2011: 316) has shown the importance for immigrants of engaging in activities which meet a basic individual need for belonging both to the place of residence, and the country or civilization of origin. I will say more about this distinction between the material and the “mental models” of culture in the next section of this introduction.

The fieldwork on which the thesis draws consisted of fifteen months of participation observation in Chinese community schools in Edinburgh, a Hong Kong Chinese women’s group, Chinese knotting class, a lunch club for Chinese elders and social gatherings of British-born Chinese (BBC) young adults. I was a regular visitor to the homes of six Edinburgh Chinese families, and conducted interviews with some thirty other adults and teenagers. My interest in the role of parents, particularly mothers, in the transmission of cultural values distinguishes this research from other recent scholarship on British Chinese families (Archer & Francis, 2007; Francis, Archer, & Mau, 2008; Parker, 1995; Song, 1999), which has looked more at the children and young people’s point of view. In addition, much of the fieldwork took place in Scottish Chinese family homes as opposed to the schools and workplaces where earlier work has been conducted, making it possible to write in more depth about the domestic lives of these families.

The setting for this research is particularly interesting because of recent changes in the political environments of both Scotland and Hong Kong, which have important implications for a study of culture and identity. The year 1997 saw both the handover of Hong Kong from British rule back to China and the devolution of certain political powers from the UK parliament to Scotland. The intervening years have seen a process of political, cultural and linguistic re-integration for Hong Kong, where for example the Mandarin language has been promoted as an official language in conjunction with Cantonese and English, as the Hong Kong people are encouraged to see themselves as part of the greater Chinese nation. Meanwhile the rise in power of the Scottish National Party, particularly since they took control of the Scottish Parliament in 2004, has led to increased attention to, and manipulation of Scotland’s cultural identity and distinctiveness from the rest of the UK. “Scottish ethnicity” is something that is quite visibly made using cultural symbols, language, arts and history which have meant that “Scottishness” is more readily identified, and claimed, than “Englishness”, for instance. I shall return to the theme of Scottish culture and

nationalism in the second part of this introduction, but raise it now as an issue which, although not always stated, underlies much of what will be said in the thesis.

In many ways this thesis follows on from Watson's work on the Man family's emigration from the New Territories of Hong Kong to the West, an unfolding story which he has continued to follow and write about in more recent work on the newer generation of overseas Man clan members (Watson, 1975, 1977, 2004). Watson's (1975) ethnography of an emigration village in the New Territories describes the period in the late 1960s when almost all the men of working age had left villages such as San Tin, Watson's field site, to take up job opportunities in Chinese restaurants in Britain. At the time of his research, most of the Hong Kong Chinese migrants were male, and left behind wives, children and elderly parents to whom they remitted money and to whom they expected to return once they had made their fortunes overseas.

The bulk of Watson's study is concentrated on the effects of this wave of migration on the social life of the emigrant village, although he also discusses the migrants' lives in London. Watson's main interest is in the role of kinship associations in the organization of emigration by clan members, and in the ways that the activities of the Man clan associations were in fact invigorated and found new expressions as they played an on-going role in both the working and personal lives of kinsmen. By the time that Watson revisited the Mans in London (Watson, 1977), many of the original male sojourners had made the decision to remain permanently in Britain and had sent for their families to join them, in order to provide labour for small, family-run takeaway shops and restaurants which were now mushrooming across Western Europe, including in Scotland.

More recent work on other overseas Chinese communities has tended to focus on "new" migrants from mainland China, often in new destinations for migration, such as Africa (e.g. Alden, Large, & Oliveira, 2008), or mainland Europe (Benton & Pieke, 1998; Christiansen, 2003; Pieke, 2002). In contrast, I concentrate on the second and third generation of Chinese living overseas in a country with longstanding colonial ties to Hong Kong in particular. Thus, I am less concerned with the theme of migration than with multiculturalism and the experience of living as a so-called ethnic minority in Scotland. In addition, unlike Watson who is interested in the formal structures of kinship, with a particularly male perspective, I will discuss the everyday family life of overseas Chinese people, and say more about the experiences and views of Scottish Chinese women.

In the remainder of this introductory section I will look at three major themes which flow throughout the chapters of the thesis: ethnicity, multiculturalism and “group-making”; cultural reproduction and parenting; and the reported increase in individualism and collapse of filial obedience in contemporary Chinese societies. In presenting these themes, I hope to indicate how my work contributes to existing literature, and in which ways this project differs from previous work on Chinese people overseas.

### **Ethnicity, multiculturalism and groups**

A recurring theme for this thesis is the self-conscious articulation or performance of cultural practices which are defined by those who engage in them as ethnically Chinese. The reproduction of “cultural values” falls under this heading. Later I will say more about both the times when Scottish Chinese people do not feel particularly different from their non-Chinese friends, and the moments where Chinese people in Scotland do feel conscious of differences between themselves and people from other ethnic groups, and how these moments of realisation contribute to the definition of an “ethnic” group or individual identity. This follows earlier work by anthropologists who have pointed out that “only in so far as cultural differences are perceived as being important, and are made socially relevant, do social relationships have an ethnic element” (Eriksen, 2010: 16).

In highlighting ethnicity, and specifying “Hong Kong Chinese families” as a central topic for my research, I am mindful of what Brubaker has described as the dangers to social scientists of “groupism”, that is, “the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogenous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of analysis” (Brubaker, 2004: 8). While fully acknowledging that “groups” and “ethnic groups” in particular, are frequently referred to as meaningful categories in everyday life, Brubaker criticizes the assumption of social scientists that such groups are constituent parts of the social world, and the consequent tendency to use them as categories of analysis. Referring to Hirschfeld’s (1996) work on the human tendency to categorize the world on a quasi-natural basis, he stresses that scholars should draw attention to but not replicate these “vernacular categories and common-sense understandings.” Brubaker’s point is that groups are what we should be trying to explain, not tools for explaining other social phenomena.

With regard to ethnicity, Brubaker has argued the merits of studying “everyday ethnicity”, which he describes as “happening” or being “embodied and expressed not only in political projects and nationalist rhetoric but in everyday encounters, practical categories, common-sense knowledge, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, interactional cues, discursive frames, organizational routines, social networks, and institutional forms” (2004: 2). For him, ethnicity, race and nation must all be seen as political, social, cultural and psychological processes. He points out that this not to deny the reality or power of race and ethnicity, but to clarify that these are social constructs and not entities.

The idea that ethnic groups, among other kinds of groups, are socially constructed is, of course, not new to anthropology. However, Brubaker’s second goal is to reinvigorate the metaphor of social construction, which he sees as having become tired and so overused as to fail to generate new critical insights. Constructivism, says Brubaker, is widely present in academic discourse and rightly draws attention to the contingent and fluctuating nature of groups, but in other areas of discussion it is still common to speak of ethnic groups as reified subjects. Brubaker suggests that this is particularly true in discussion of ethnic conflict, which he argues need not necessarily be seen as conflict between ethnic groups, even though it may be portrayed in that way by the protagonists. Participants in intra-ethnic violence, he points out, have a particular purpose for invoking ethnic categories: in so doing, they are making those differences real, and mobilizing others to fight on their side. Thus, reification is a social process and very real. Social analysts, however, should not repeat that reification in their study of it.

Brubaker urges us to go further than this, and to avoid the trap of groupism by looking not at “groups” as a basic entity, but rather at “groupness” as a “contextually fluctuating conceptual variable” (ibid: 11). “Groupness”, for Brubaker, can be treated as an event, a moment of heightened awareness of social cohesion and belonging, without implying that it is something enduring or essential. This opens up the possibility of groupness failing to occur, despite the efforts of some people to foster it. Furthermore, this understanding of groupness makes clear the correct distinction between groups and categories. People may divide the world into categories, but what is interesting then is what is done with those categories. Which categories, for example, become invested with a sense of “groupness” and which categories fail to crystallize into groups? What are the interactional processes through which individuals use categories to make sense of their social worlds, and

what kinds of stereotypes about category members come into play when others speak about or interact with them? In the first part of the thesis, I present ethnographic data to show how the categories of “ethnic Chinese”, “family” and “catering worker” overlap and often merge in the lived experience of Chinese Scots. In the second and third parts I discuss some more and less successful attempts to foster a sense of “groupness” among Chinese people in Scotland, first by the local Chinese elites who have sponsored Chinese community language schools, and then by the Scottish and Chinese governments who are encouraging the celebration of “ethnic minority” festivals and the study of Mandarin as a desirable modern foreign language.

Within the vast literature on multiculturalism which has emerged from various academic disciplines, anthropologists and sociologists have, like Brubaker challenged the way that multicultural policies are often based on a highly problematic understanding of culture as something “singular, unified and bounded” (Phillips, 2007: 53). If the politics of multiculturalism are based on such essentialist notions of culture, then supposedly liberal nations are at risk of denying, rather than promoting the equal rights of immigrants and their descendants. In a similar argument in her provocatively entitled book, *Generous betrayal: politics of culture in the new Europe*, Wikan (2002) gives powerful examples of discriminatory treatment of individuals on the grounds of “ethnic difference”. Misplaced respect for cultural difference can lead to a “conspiracy of silence” on such painful issues as forced marriages, and the waste of resources by immigrants who never have to work because they can live comfortably on social security payments.

Wikan (2002: 69) suggests that appeals to “culture” can be particularly oppressive of women and overseas-born children, whose capacity for agency is denied by a majority culture which assumes that they should behave according to supposed cultural norms, which are in fact defined by men and not always in the interests of women and the younger generation. Phillips (2007) likewise argues that the emphasis has been too much on respecting group rights, where the “group” is defined on a narrowly cultural basis, at the expense of defending the rights of the individual. From the point of view of culture theory, this denies the individual capacity for agency and choice, while falsely assuming the coercive power of a collective culture.

Both Wikan and Phillips deal with cases of violence against women, which are excused on the grounds of cultural expectations. A lesser level of violence may be the denial of young people’s ability to create their own cultures:

To say that culture refers only to traditions and values that have been transmitted from one generation to another is like bowing to ancestors at the expense of children (and adults) whose life experience is very different. In addition, it means freezing culture in time. In reality, culture is always changing, for humans learn as long as they live. Hence, Norwegian or Pakistani 'culture' must also include the children's lived experience and reflect a splendid multiplicity of views (Wikan 2002: 80-81)

Indeed, Olwig (2003) has argued that ethnic origin may be of minor importance to the children of immigrants, for whom local "sites of belonging", including places outside the home, such as schools and parks, may be more significant for their sense of identity. While intergenerational relationships are clearly important, siblings and friends play a large part in the socialization of young children. In contrast with the psychological literature on language acquisition, which assumes that the dyadic relationship between child and caregiver is the most important for language development, it has been argued that children are socialized through polyadic interactions with their peers and others outside the family (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Harris, 1999; Song, 1997). This may be particularly important in families where the children are fluent in a different language from that of their parents. Peers may be more influential than parents in a child's learning of English, but more generally, interaction with siblings and school friends will shape the child's understanding and competence within the cultural environment of school and other locations outside the home (Olwig 2003).

Therefore, even if we did assume that children automatically acquired the culture of their parents, we could not safely say that this was the only cultural influence on the children. Phillips' solution is not to abandon the idea of multiculturalism, but to shift our understanding of culture from something that is a fixed and unassailable attribute of groups, to something chosen and defined by individuals. While accepting that cultural norms, values and practices can be coercive of some individuals, Phillips emphasizes that not all individuals will be coerced by culture, and that policies should respect the capacity of individuals to choose the extent to which they will participate in cultural forms.

In an essay concerning the attempts at ethnic self-definition by Chinese families in Canada, Wickberg (2007) argues that in the setting of a "Global City" such as Vancouver, which prides itself on its ethnic and racial diversity, "new immigrants must both imagine appropriate versions of Chineseness and be seen by

local Chinese and by non-Chinese to be appropriately Chinese by performing some versions of Chineseness” (2007: 178). He points out that in a city like Vancouver there may be Chinese immigrants from various places of origin, different class backgrounds and speaking different Chinese languages. Each of these groupings may have its own sponsored institutions – schools, rituals, social, cultural and business associations for adults – and individual families may choose whether or not to participate in these collective activities, and if so in which to take part. There are many ways of showing oneself to be Chinese and Wickberg’s approach is helpful in emphasizing the varying degrees and forms in which Chinese families may do this, as part of their adaptation to a new life overseas.

One specific question will be the importance for my informants of the transmission to children of values such as hard work, self-reliance and filial obedience. I am also interested in the explicit transmission of cultural practices such as “mother-tongue” language, crafts, dance, and festival celebrations. What I find interesting about these activities is that they can be – and often are – taught to anyone, regardless of their origin. Anyone can attend, and even perform at a public celebration for Chinese New Year. In the ethnographic descriptions which follow in the chapters to come I explain that there are in fact white Scots, and people from other ethnic groups who study Mandarin Chinese, Chinese knotting and Chinese classical dance alongside the Scottish-born Chinese pupils at the Edinburgh Chinese schools. Indeed, when they take any of these classes, Scottish Chinese children are acquiring skills and knowledge which they could not have learned from their parents and grandparents, who spoke Cantonese or Hakka, not Mandarin, and were not aware of the craft of Chinese knots, or of Chinese classical dance, as part of their own lived experience. I would, therefore, like to ask why it is so important for Scottish Chinese people that their children know how to speak Mandarin (which is not their own mother tongue); why their families attend a somewhat ersatz Chinese New Year festival celebration; and why the hobby of Chinese knot work assumes such emotional significance for some of the Scottish Chinese housewives I met.

Appadurai (1996: 43-44) has pointed out that there is a new problem for migrant parents, as they seek to reproduce cultural forms in their family lives. It has long been obvious that the process of enculturation becomes more complicated against the backdrop of globalization and the movement of people around the world. However, the situation becomes yet more difficult as a result of what Appadurai describes as the politicization of culture, including the most intimate aspects of life



such as the relationships between spouses and between parents and children. Many of the past assumptions and understandings of proper social behaviour are challenged when people change location, and this results in re-negotiations of shared understandings which can be quite unsettling. Appadurai writes:

It is in this atmosphere that the invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship, and other identity markers) can become slippery, as the search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication. As group pasts become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits, and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Pierre Bourdieu would have called a *habitus* (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification and representation, the latter often to multiple and spatially dislocated audiences (1996: 44).

By paying attention to activities such as language-learning (as opposed to the developmental process of first language acquisition in early childhood), and to the performance of art forms such as dance, and the craft of Chinese knotting, I am in this thesis writing more about the consciously representative forms of “culture” which Appadurai describes. I also allude to aspects of what Bourdieu (1990) would term the *habitus* of Chinese Scots: one instance of this would be the way in which the nature of work in the catering trade, as I describe it in Chapter 1, shapes the everyday practices of workers and their children. Although I do not discuss it any detail in the thesis, the consumption by Scottish Chinese families of distinctively Chinese food at home is another aspect of the *habitus* which contributes to the socialization of Scottish-born Chinese children as members of a separate ethnic group. In terms of dispositions as a facet of *habitus* I allude to the cultural value of hard work among Chinese Scots, one which is tacitly demonstrated by many parents to their children in the long hours of arduous labour which they put in to work in restaurant kitchens: this is a value which, I will argue, parents wish their children to acquire and transfer to their new occupations, whether in disciplined dedication to their studies or in their careers outside the catering industry.

Alternatively, I will ask whether it can be argued that the politics of multiculturalism in Europe over recent decades have encouraged groups to form around fixed and rather narrowly defined notions of ethnic or cultural identity: as Appadurai has it, the emphasis is less on the taken-for-granted, socially learned ways of acting which have served as markers of group identity, than on the kinds of self-conscious performances which might be suitable for display in museums or on stage.

In this project, then, I am partly considering how my informants experience “groupness” through participation in specific everyday activities, but I am also interested in the projects of individuals and institutions, whether parents, schools, politicians or others, to foster a sense of “groupness”, which is defined as Chinese ethnicity, among people through the performance of consciously chosen cultural practices.

The establishment of separate community language schools by different sectors of the Scottish Chinese population has made real the separation into ethnic subcategories (e.g. division by place of origin, religion, occupation etc.). This is similar to Brubaker’s argument about inter and intra-ethnic conflict making imagined differences into a social reality. In Chapter 6, in which I discuss language use and language ideologies, I say something about the stereotypes that Hong Kong Chinese people hold about mainland Chinese and which contribute to the construction of group boundaries between them. Yet because of the handover of Hong Kong to China, overseas Hong Kong Chinese are now more likely to identify themselves with a pan-Chinese identity and may not stress so much their local Cantonese identity. I try to untangle the ways in which Hong Kong Chinese people are able to differentiate themselves from mainlanders, while also asserting their own membership of a diasporic Chinese group, which means they may learn Mandarin as “their” language and claim the right to work as something like natives in mainland China.

Later in the introduction and in subsequent chapters on language use and festival celebrations I shall say more about the efforts of both Scottish and Chinese governments to enrol Scottish Chinese people in projects of national group-making, and in the concluding chapter I discuss more broadly the question of reproduction of minority cultures in multicultural societies such as Britain. However, I begin the ethnographic chapters with the role of parents in cultivating “groupness” within the family. First, I am interested in the cultural transmission of the moral values which are thought to be part of the self-definition of Chinese people as an ethnic group.

### **Cultural reproduction in families**

There is strong evidence for the high value placed on education almost universally by Chinese families, in both rural and urban settings, in mainland China and overseas (Chi & Rao, 2003; Hancock, 2006; Kipnis, 2001, 2011; Louie, 2004; Stafford, 1995). This is often put down to the historical Chinese view of schooling as the route to upward social mobility, originating in the imperial examination system which

recruited able scholars to civil service posts. The idea has persisted through more recent social and ideological changes. However, traditional ideas about education may be re-invented. In her ethnography of Hakka Chinese people in Calcutta, Oxfeld (1993) found that education was seen as unimportant, as a university degree would not enable a person to earn more money than he could already make in the tanning industry. A question for this thesis is to explore whether the pressure on Scottish Chinese children to succeed at school is as intense as it might be for Chinese children elsewhere in the world, now that many families have achieved economic stability and prosperity in the catering trade.

The classic sociological works on education and social mobility (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Willis, 1977) suggest that education is a means of reproducing class values, and that urban, middle-class parents are more likely to encourage their children to succeed at school, thus demonstrating their social distinction. It does seem that in the past the children of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants have struggled in British schools because their families lacked the “cultural capital” which is necessary for success in Western education, and British teachers despaired of the Chinese children’s ability to settle and integrate with their classmates (Garvey & Jackson, 1975; Taylor, 1987). However, Watson (1977: 202) pointed out that Chinese children in Britain from the 1970s showed a remarkable ability to adapt to their new surroundings, quickly learning English and helping their parents to adjust to the new social setting. Indeed, in the space of just a few decades the British Chinese overall seem to be overcoming many of the barriers of race, language and class and achieving upward social mobility (Cheng, 1996).

Recent quantitative research on the social mobility of immigrants in England and Wales (Platt, 2005) found that family background (by which she means economic capital) remained important in achieving occupational success and avoiding unemployment, but that there were differences across ethnic groups, with Black British, African, Indian and Chinese children doing well at school and entering professional and managerial jobs, while Bangladeshis and Pakistanis did less well. Although census data suggest that Chinese people are succeeding in their careers in Britain (Cheng, 1996; Great Britain. Office for National Statistics, 2002), it has been argued that they still face barriers to full integration in the British job market (Pang & Lau, 1998). It is not clear from the literature how particular sub-groups within the Chinese community, such as the children of restaurant owners, are faring by comparison with those from professional or academic families.

Louie (2004) argues that both class and race affect the educational paths of Chinese Americans; in her study of middle- and working-class Chinese American university students in New York, she found that both groups felt pressure from their parents to succeed academically, but only the middle-class parents really expected their children to reach the most prestigious professions after graduating from elite universities. The “downtown Chinese” parents, who worked in the ethnic enclave economy, aspired to a secondary tier of professions, including pharmacy and accounting, for their children; these children were more likely to enrol at the regional college. It is convenient to assume, as most of the literature suggests, that the majority of Chinese in the catering trade in Britain are from similar poor backgrounds in Hong Kong, but there are instances of what would be described sociologically as downward social mobility for graduates who have moved from professional positions in Hong Kong or China to more lucrative work in British restaurants (Shang, 1984). This suggests that Western academic definitions of “class” may fail to capture some of the meanings of education and work for non-Western immigrants (Archer & Francis, 2006).

Ogbu (1978) ascribes the variability in school achievement by minority ethnic groups less to intrinsic “cultural” differences than to differences in the group’s history in relation to the majority culture, proposing three types: autonomous, caste-like, and immigrant minorities. Immigrant children, whose families have come voluntarily to live in another country, tend to flourish at school, while those who were incorporated unwillingly into an alien culture (Ogbu’s “caste-like minorities”) do not. This model may work well for the American case, but does not account so well for the situation in Britain, perhaps because the history of race relations is different. The pessimistic surveys of the late 1970s and 80s, referred to earlier (Baker, 1977; Garvey & Jackson, 1975; Taylor, 1987), indicate that the first generation of Chinese pupils to enter British schools did not flourish, despite their “voluntary immigrant” status: the barriers of language and geographic isolation, along with the pressures of family work in catering, formed structural impediments to their learning.

Ortner has usefully developed Bourdieu’s ideas in *New Jersey Dreaming* (2003), her study of class mobility, ethnicity and gender in the career trajectories of her high school classmates, decades after their graduation. Drawing on Bourdieu to stress the dialectical relationship between structure and individual agency, she adds the factor of historical circumstances, to propose an account of how “Jewish financial

success through hard work and hard bargaining led to desires for social respectability and acceptance, especially through education” (Ortner, 2003: 196). The story of the Chinese in Britain may be very similar, if it can be shown that the present-day success of Chinese children at school is the anticipated return for decades of hard work and sacrifice by their immigrant parents.

If hard work forms part of a person’s self-identification as the member of an ethnic group, then this could be a strong motivating factor in education as ideas about ethnicity are so closely bound up with individual identity and self-worth. However, it is also useful to consider Bourdieu’s description of internalized limits, by which members of subordinate groups adjust their personal aspirations downwards because of constraints external to themselves. British Chinese children may do well at school but nevertheless take the safe option of work in the catering trade, because, rightly or not, they anticipate failure in other fields of employment (Chan, 1986). Steele and Aronson (1995) have used experimental methods to show the effects of socio-cultural stereotypes on the performance of stereotyped individuals: black students underperformed on an academic test when attention was drawn to their ethnicity (see also Dweck, 1999). This so-called “stereotype threat” can have positive effects, motivating students from stereotypically high-achieving groups to perform especially well (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). Archer and Francis found that “valuing education” was a stereotyped attribute of British Chinese pupils, expressed by both British Chinese people themselves and their teachers (Archer & Francis, 2005; Francis & Archer, 2005).

Chinese parents in Scotland cannot assume that the process of passing on cultural values will occur of its own accord, since their children are not growing up immersed in Chinese language and culture. The extra effort required for Scottish-born Chinese children to learn the Chinese language will be one example of ways in which something that might be learned almost automatically in China, cannot be so in Scotland. Perhaps even more significant may be the fact that children may not automatically acquire norms of behaviour and the moral values which their Chinese-born parents absorbed in childhood from the wider community around them.

On this question I would like to draw some comparisons with Vanessa Fong’s work on parent-child relationships in one-child families in urban China (Fong, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). Fong has shown how parents’ mental models of the “ideal” parent, and the desired behaviour of children, can conflict with what they observe and accept as the right way to act in a rapidly changing society. Fong’s study is based on the

lives of only children in families in Dalian, mainland China, a generation which she describes as “born and bred to become part of the first world, [but] frustrated by their parents’ low incomes and the scarcity of educational and professional opportunities that could enable them to obtain First World lifestyles” (Fong 2007: 179).

The difficulties for Fong’s informants arise for a variety of reasons: first, their parents are trying to instil in them moral values and behaviours that were appropriate in a previous generation, but are incompatible with the interpersonal style required to succeed in the new, reformed Chinese economy. As an example of their contradictory values, Dalian parents hope that their children will take care of them in their old age (and thereby show obedience), as filial Chinese children have been supposed to do for centuries, but independence, not submissiveness, is the quality needed for a “modern” young Chinese person. I am interested to pursue further this question of how a person’s culturally formed expectations or hopes of moral behaviour may in some way lag behind their lived experience. Do immigrant Chinese parents continue to hold expectations of their children which would have been appropriate in their earlier lives, in Hong Kong, but may be less relevant to their lives in Scotland? Alternatively, do they view migration as a positive opportunity to be liberated from past cultural constraints, or is it experienced as disorientating and problematic?

Moreover, in relation to the case of China, while the parents Fong studied are disorientated by the rapid changes in Chinese society, unsettling their assumptions about how to prepare a child for adult life, at least they are assured that what will emerge is a new kind of Chinese morality for Chinese youth. The parents I write about have an even greater shift to make, as their children are influenced by the quite alien moral culture of their Scottish friends and teachers. Their parents cannot assume that they will grow up in any way Chinese. A great deal is at stake, in terms of identity and the continuity of culture, for immigrant parents in the West.

Fong further points out the much more general problem of how very complex cultural models are transmitted between persons. The parents’ own cultural model of desirable moral behaviour is, she suggests, self-contradictory and confused: for example, they simultaneously want their children to be independent and to be obedient, self-reliant yet concerned for other people. While this is the case, however much the children may wish to follow their parents’ direction, it is consequently impossible for them to get a firm sense of what their parents expect of them. This is much more than a problem of failed communication resulting from different life

experiences; in fact, it is an inevitable difficulty arising from the nature of cultural models in the mind. As Fong shows, the models themselves are often so contradictory as to be impossible to reconcile in one's own mind; thus the task of communicating them to someone else seems doomed from the outset.

This thesis is less concerned with the transmission of such implicit mental models, than with the explicit transmission of cultural practices such as language, dance, handcrafts and the proper celebration of festivals. I ask what may be special about the embodied production of cultural forms, such as language, handcrafts, dance and music as distinctive ways of "doing ethnicity". These activities could in practice be done by anyone, so I will consider what it is that makes them especially meaningful to my informants as signs of ethnicity. The theme of language will be particularly important to the research as British Chinese communities are currently undergoing a major shift as the previous dominance of Cantonese as the language of overseas Chinese, is now being challenged by the growth in numbers of Mandarin speakers in Britain. These include both native speakers from mainland China and British learners of Mandarin as a foreign language (Li & Zhu, 2010; Pharoah, Bell, Zhang Hui, & Fan Yeung, 2009).

While this kind of cultural knowledge may seem superficial in comparison with the mental schema which Fong describes, I will ask whether they do take on additional significance for an overseas population such as the Chinese in Scotland. These apparently superficial activities may be tightly bound to deeper ideas about obedience and belonging.

### **The rise of individualism in Chinese society**

In their landmark historical study of Chinese life in Britain over the past two centuries, Benton and Gomez (2008) suggest that

The Chinese community in Britain has always been less well organized than overseas Chinese communities in other parts of the world. The reasons lie in its small size, its extreme dispersal, its heterogeneity, and the nature of its economy, which has developed along more individualistic lines than in other countries. Institutions at the national level have usually remained weak and ineffectual. Neither culture-bearing nor trade-based associations show much resilience. Although joined by a common linguistic and cultural heritage and a shared set of moral values, in most other respects the Chinese in Britain lack the attributes held to signify community. (2008: 199)

The idea of the Chinese in Britain as somewhat atomized and scattered to the point of invisibility is common in representations of this population. Concern about the welfare of Chinese immigrants led in the 1980s to a British Parliamentary Commission inquiry, the report of which (Great Britain. Home Affairs Committee, 1985) provides fascinating evidence not only of the official British perceptions of the Chinese at that time, but also of a community which was beginning to assert its own interests in a society which was becoming more conscious of its cultural diversity. From both sides there was anxiety that the social needs of the Chinese were not being met. The Home Affairs Committee identified five underlying factors at the root of the problems experienced by the Chinese in Britain:

These five factors – lack of English, ignorance of their rights, cultural differences, scattered settlement and long unsocial hours – together constitute a formidable barrier to full participation in British life. They have meant not only that the Chinese tend to be isolated from and not to understand the society in which they live, but that that society is unaware of the nature and needs of the Chinese community (Great Britain. Home Affairs Committee 1985: xiv).

If, at the broader communal level, the Chinese in Britain have been seen as disparate and disunited, in the thesis I will ask whether, at the domestic level, Scottish Chinese families have also seen a move from a collective outlook to a more individualistic approach to work and decision-making. This relates to debates in the literature on the anthropology of China concerning the so-called “crisis in filial piety” and the reported rise in individualism which goes along with it (Ikels, 2004; Yan, 2003, 2009). In his ethnography of a village in north-east China, *Private life under socialism: love, intimacy and family change in a Chinese village 1949-1999*, Yan (2003) describes the transformation of family life over fifty years, which he associates with two factors: the rise of the individual in Chinese society, and the intervention of the socialist state in domestic life. According to this argument, there have been great changes in the private lives of rural Chinese, as a result of political campaigns and policies by the Chinese Communist Party designed to reform family life; while some of the results, such as the control of fertility were planned, others such as a decline in care for the elderly, and the rise of the “uncivil” individual, were unintended consequences of this long-term process.

Yan writes that “the most obvious change in the felt flow or moral experiences among Xiajia villagers is the transformation of the domestic power structure, namely, the decline of parental power, authority, and prestige, which was



accompanied by a rise of youth autonomy and independence” (2003: 218). He goes on to describe several aspects of family life where this shift of power from old to young may be observed: spouse selection, post-marital residence, management of family property, intra-family relations and support for the elderly. These practical manifestations of the relationship between parents and children demonstrate that filial piety is not only a moral issue and example of the cultural knowledge which we suppose to be passed on between the generations; it is also the context in which such cultural reproduction could occur. If Yan is right, and the older generation have lost their authority over the young, then how can they hope to educate them?

Those who have conducted fieldwork in China itself ascribe the growing individualism of the younger generation to the rise of modernity and capitalism. Yan provides clear examples of the growing autonomy of young people in their attitude to domestic space and material possessions. Young married couples in his case study demand separate bedrooms if not homes which are physically discrete from their parents’ houses. This departure from the village tradition of inter-generational living illustrates the rise of the conjugal relationship over the extended family (Yan 2003: 128). Another change documented by Yan is that young couples demand expensive gifts of furniture and household appliances on their marriage, believing themselves entitled to all the comforts of modern living from the outset of their married life (ibid: 152). This is in sharp contrast to the older style of deferring gratification, and sacrificing present happiness for the sake of a better future.

This study of Chinese people living in a Western capitalist society tests Yan’s argument of the “individualization of Chinese society” to the extreme: while his informants may be influenced by what they see of “Western” culture from afar, Scottish-born Chinese children and young people are growing up and being educated in the capitalist West. The research was designed to gather data from members of several generations of Chinese immigrants and their British-born families, so that comparison might be made between those brought up in China and those educated in the West. Already, the circumstances of Chinese migration to Britain, and the nature of the catering trade which has obliged families to settle apart from one another, has led to couples setting up home as relatively isolated conjugal units, similar to the nuclear family households which Yan describes. A question for the thesis, then, is to show whether increasing economic prosperity and the life-choices available to young people, because of their success in the Scottish education system, necessarily lead to

a weakening of family ties and disruption of the traditional generational hierarchies of authority.

In the case of Xiajia village, the social changes which have affected rural China since the Revolution have meant that successive generations have lived through quite distinct historical or political phases, because of which the older generation are more tolerant and accepting of the different outlooks of the young. The generations of Chinese villagers are marked out by large-scale ideological movements: Yan points to the new awakening of young revolutionaries in the 1950s, compared with the idealistic youth of the 1960s and post-Cultural Revolution youth of the 1970s and the more individualistic and materialistic youth of the post-Mao era. Clearly in the revolutionary programme youth were encouraged to view such generational changes as “progressive” and so, Yan argues, young people became increasingly convinced of the superiority of their own generation, and consequently of their rights to autonomy from parental control (2003: 222).

Scottish Chinese families too have witnessed dramatic historical shifts over the past decades, although because of their diverse backgrounds it is less easy than in Yan’s case to assume a similar life experience for all members of a particular age group and there is no overarching ideology relating the unfolding of a nation’s history to the unfolding of familial generations. The changes experienced by the Hong Kong Chinese migrants are perhaps more arbitrary and contingent on unexpected events. One can say that the people who are now grandparents are of a generation which either witnessed or were born into the turmoil of Japanese invasion and the chaotic aftermath of the 1949 Revolution, in which many of them lost their former homes; the generation born in the 1950s and 60s lived through the rapid urbanization of Hong Kong, many of their families shifting from farming or fishing to factory work; the generation of the 1970s and 80s were children of migration, dividing their childhoods between the very different settings of Hong Kong and Scotland, where their family lives were dominated by the demands of the catering business. I will argue that the youngest generation, those at school in the 1990s and 2000s, are enjoying far more settled childhoods, in families who prioritize the children’s needs and happiness. Thus, the “generation gap” for both Chinese villagers and Chinese migrants to Scotland is very real in terms of life experience. Given that the external circumstances in which each generation grew up were so vastly different, it might be assumed that parents would accept that their children would not automatically reproduce the values with which they themselves were

brought up, but rather it will be accepted that there is rupture and change in both social and private family life.

In Yan's argument, there is a strongly moral aspect to the individualistic style of Chinese youth. Their experience of living autonomously, for example as migrant workers in urban settings, has led to a growing sense of their entitlement to claim certain rights, both material and moral: they expect to have their opinions heard. Young people in rural China express their claims to power within the family by taking autonomous decisions over matters such as choosing a spouse or requesting wedding gifts, tasks which would previously have been the responsibility of parents.

Children educated in the West may also have contributed to changes in emotional and power relationships within the family. Chinese families are traditionally characterized as collective in outlook, an attitude which has been said to militate against the assimilation of Chinese immigrants to the majority culture, while favouring their economic and academic success overseas (Baxter & Raw, 1988; L.-B. Chua, 2002; G. T. Haley, Haley, & Tan, 2009; Hau & Salili, 1996). Besides an orientation towards working for the benefit of the social group rather than for personal goals, this collectivist philosophy emphasizes the hierarchical relationship between the generations as well as children's obedience to their parents (Chao & Sue, 1996; Fei, Hamilton, & Wang, 1992; Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). Yet migrant parents, regardless of their place of origin are frequently disempowered by their lack of language skills and unfamiliarity with the local culture, by comparison with their children who are socialized in local norms and behaviour by attendance at schools (Harris, 1999). Parker (1995) and Song (1999) suggest that British Chinese families have experienced a similar collapse in "parental superiority". Because their parents have been too busy working to learn English, children have been obliged not only to "help out" in their restaurants or takeaways, but also to translate official letters and interpret for doctors' appointments and school parents' evenings. This phenomenon, which the Chinese have in common with other immigrant families, was criticized by British teachers as detrimental to the children's wellbeing and ability to learn (Garvey & Jackson, 1975). However, Song challenges the tendency to "pathologize" the Chinese family. Her informants expressed unequivocally their commitment to the "family work contract", and accepted the difficulties as the price for keeping their family together in Britain. For many, the mutual dependence of family members was something to be cherished as a valued element of their shared identity.

While recognizing that Parker and Song's comments regarding British Chinese families, based on their research in the early 1990s, still remain pertinent to some of the people I met over a decade later, this thesis will discuss whether restaurant families, or former restaurant families would still demonstrate such commitment to the integrity of the extended family as a collective unit. To some extent this difference may be related to life stages, as Song's informants were aged in their teens and early twenties, and still living and working with their parents, while the people I came to know had already formed separate households and none of them was working with relatives in a family-run business: indeed the majority had left the catering trade altogether. This study will explore the tensions which may arise when children choose not to remain in the family business. While work in restaurants or takeaways is lucrative, few British-born young people are prepared to accept the long and unsociable working hours. Indeed, by urging their children to excel at school and university, parents encourage them to seek careers that are more prestigious. Thus, the thesis will investigate whether the break-up of the family collective is a price accepted by immigrant parents for their children's success in seizing wider opportunities in the British education system and job markets. This would give a slightly different interpretation to Yan's argument that parents are necessarily disappointed and feel left behind and neglected when their children move into new kinds of work and new living arrangements.

Before moving directly on to an ethnographic chapter which sets out in much more detail the emotional and professional dilemmas for British Chinese young people who are deciding to leave the catering trade, I would like to pause briefly to say more about the setting for my fieldwork, and to explain how I obtained my data.

## **Chinese people in Scotland**

This thesis describes Hong Kong Chinese people who have mostly been settled in Scotland for many years and in fact rarely travel south of the border to England. I chose Edinburgh as my field site not only because I have family connections with people working there in the sector of bilingual education, who would facilitate my initial approach to the local Chinese community organizations. It would also provide a field site very different from the larger English cities where there is a higher proportion of minority ethnic people overall and there is well-established institutional support, often located in the geographic centre of a Chinatown, where commercial, professional and voluntary sector activities mix. Of the Scottish cities, Glasgow has the largest Chinese population and has its own small Chinatown, principally a commercial centre for the Chinese people in the West of Scotland. Edinburgh, by contrast, has a relatively small Chinese population and no physical centre to the Chinese community. Chinese family homes are scattered throughout the city, which means that most Chinese children attend mainstream schools where they and their siblings may be the only Chinese enrolled.

Although a small city, Edinburgh has attracted Chinese migrants from various places of origin and social backgrounds, thus providing a microcosm of the British Chinese population. In the last decades, the restaurant-owning Cantonese speakers have been joined by Mandarin-speaking Chinese who have come to the UK for education: Edinburgh's three universities have attracted students from mainland China, Singapore and Malaysia as well as Hong Kong. The city has an unusually high proportion of private schools, and these are recruiting growing numbers of school-age children from the Far East (Schofield, 2005a). There has also been an influx of economic migrants and asylum seekers from mainland China, particularly from Fujian province (Beck, 2007; Pharoah et al., 2009; Pieke, 2002) although these have virtually no contact with the Cantonese and professional mainland Chinese.

## **Census data**

The last published UK census (2001) recorded a total of 16,310 ethnic Chinese people in Scotland, out of a total Scottish population of just over five million. There were 3,532 Chinese people registered in Edinburgh. This makes the Chinese the third largest minority ethnic group (after Pakistanis at 0.6% and Indians at 0.3%) forming approximately 0.3% of the total population. The census figures are widely believed to be inaccurate by people within the Chinese community, who say that the true

Chinese population is much higher. Neoh (2005: 604) puts this under-reporting down simply to the “Chinese dislike of bureaucracy”. With this reservation in mind, in this section I will use the census data (City of Edinburgh Council, 2001; Scotland. Office of the Chief Statistician, 2004) to portray some of the diversity which exists within the Scottish Chinese population.

Scotland is far less ethnically mixed than England, one notable difference being the relatively small numbers of Scots from Black, Caribbean or African backgrounds (0.16% of the total population). I stress this point, as I believe the comparatively low proportion of minority ethnic people in Scotland has consequences for the way these people may perceive their position within Scottish society. It may also be important to remember how small Scotland is as a nation, as the whole Scottish population is less than that of London, but spread over a much wider and more varied geographical area.

Studies of Chinese people in Britain have often pointed out the difficulty of writing about them because the census category of “Chinese” encompasses such a diversity of places of origin, levels of education, occupation, language and so on. The total figure for people defining themselves as ethnically Chinese includes people born in the UK as well as various other countries, in East Asia and elsewhere. Despite the limitations, these data are relevant to the thesis in as far as they show the proportion of Chinese people born in Scotland (29.7% for Scotland, and 22.4% for Edinburgh) compared with those born overseas. It is also clear that more Chinese immigrants were born outside China itself than on the mainland, although it is not possible to say from the data how many of these were from Hong Kong, and how many from other countries in the “Far East”:

**Table 1: Country of birth for Chinese people in Scotland, 2001**

<b>Country of birth</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>
Far East (excluding China)	44.9%	44.5%
Scotland	29.7%	22.4%
China	18.0%	25.6%
England	4.0%	5%
Other	0.5%	2%
South Asia	0.5%	0.3%
Other EU Countries	0.5%	0.3%
Base	16,310	3,532

**Source:** Scotland. Office of the Chief Statistician, 2004

Responses to the census question on country of birth go a little way to explain the make-up of the Scottish Chinese population, although further statistical work would be needed to analyse the country of birth against other relevant variables such as level of education, and occupation. These data alone are not sufficient to support anecdotal evidence that, for example, migrants from northern China tend to be better-educated and less likely to work in the catering trade than people from Hong Kong. Moreover, within the group who were born in China there are vast sociological differences between people who come from different provinces.

**Table 2: Ethnic groups by age 2001**

	Chinese people		All people
	Scotland	Edinburgh	Scotland
0-4	6%	5%	5%
5-15	16%	13%	14%
16-29	32%	39%	17%
30-49	32%	30%	30%
50-pensionable age	8%	7%	15%
Pensionable age-74	4%	4%	11%
75 and over	1%	1%	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Sources: City of Edinburgh Council, 2001; Scotland. Office of the Chief Statistician, 2004

Census analysis of ethnic groups by age is helpful in understanding better the nature of the Scottish Chinese population. The proportions of Chinese people aged under 16, and between 30 and 49 are very close to that for the population as a whole. However, there are twice as many Chinese people aged 16-29 than the overall figure, reflecting the large numbers of Chinese who come to Scotland temporarily, as students or young professionals. There are relatively low numbers of Chinese aged over 50.

The census figures demonstrate that catering and the associated retail and wholesale trades continue to form the main areas of work for Chinese people in Scotland: 51% of Chinese and 45% of Bangladeshis aged 16-74 who are currently in employment work in hotels and restaurants compared with 5% of White Scots. The next largest sectors of industry for Chinese in Scotland (8% each) were the wholesale and retail trades; property; and health and social work.

Chinese people (23%) along with Pakistanis (32%) and Indians (22%) were

the ethnic groups with the highest rates of self-employment. At least 70% of Chinese and Pakistanis were working in “small” businesses, defined as those which employ less than 50 employees, and 60% of Chinese worked with fewer than eight other people, compared with 28% of White Scottish people. Again, this would conform to the historic concentration of the Scottish Chinese workers in small catering businesses, either family-run or with a small number of non-related employees.

Analysis of occupations by ethnicity shows that slightly more Chinese than White Scots were in managerial or professional occupations (29% of Chinese and 21% of White Scots). However, a much higher percentage of Chinese (45%) than White Scots (26%) were in skilled trades or elementary occupations. This confirms earlier findings by Pang and Lau (1998) that British Chinese fell into a bimodal distribution between the skilled or unskilled catering trade and the professions, with very few in occupations between these poles. My sample of Hong Kong Chinese in Edinburgh largely fell into this same distribution, with the majority working in the catering trade (or married to men who worked in catering), and the next largest number being teachers, translators, accountants or paralegal professionals. A small number were in other elementary or skilled professions such as postal or care workers.

Census figures for qualifications by ethnic group reveal a great disparity in the levels of education for Chinese people in different generations. While over a third (32%) of Chinese Scots aged 16-34 have university degrees, double the number (16%) of White Scots in this age group, a relatively high proportion of Chinese Scots aged 35 and over (55% compared with 33% of White Scots) have no qualifications at all. The figure for those aged over 55 is particularly high: 82% of them have no qualifications compared with 63% of White Scots.

The Chinese population in Scotland had the second highest percentage of full-time students aged 18 years or over (26%), exceeded only by Africans (31%). Other statistical data has shown that ethnic Chinese pupils out-perform all other ethnic groups, apart from Indians, in Scottish school examinations. (Schofield, 2005b; Scottish Government, 2009a) Such figures are frequently used to demonstrate the high academic achievement of ethnic minorities such as the Chinese in Britain, but this may be very misleading. There is a growing trend for mainland Chinese families to send their children to the UK for their final years of secondary schooling, and even more for undergraduate study, and the census figure includes these “new arrivals” as well as young people of Chinese origin who have been born and brought



up in the UK. Certainly, my informants, as “settled” British Chinese, held the view that the exceptionally high achieving Chinese pupils at British schools were generally the offspring of pushy parents from the mainland, rather than British-born Chinese.

The 2001 national census did not include questions on languages spoken. However, a Scottish government census of pupils in Scotland in 2008 (Scottish Government, 2009b) found 1,506 Scottish school children spoke Cantonese at home, and 323 spoke Mandarin. Exact figures were not given for other Chinese dialects including Hakka, Hokkien and Shanghainese which were included in a list of “other languages” spoken by relatively small numbers of children. These figures give at least a rough indication of the dominance of Cantonese-speaking families within the Scottish Chinese population, compared with the small numbers of more recently arrived Mandarin speakers.

There is a relatively high rate of home ownership among Chinese people in Britain (Scotland. Office of the Chief Statistician, 2004) and the evidence from my informants confirms that many Chinese will buy property as soon as they can afford it. Indeed, investment in property is viewed by many as a form of security for old age and several households owned, in addition to the family home, properties which they rented out for an extra income. On the other hand, not all of my informants were wealthy enough to own their home. A young couple, recently arrived from Guangdong Province with their small daughter, shared a single small room in a tenement flat also occupied by a fellow worker from the Chinese restaurant where the husband had a job as a chef. Another husband and wife, after ten years working for other people as kitchen assistants, depend on housing benefit to pay rent to the private landlord of their small house. Of course, there are different levels of home ownership. Several families, with parents now in their fifties and sixties, have bought their former council homes on the socially deprived housing estates in north Edinburgh, while those who fared better in the restaurant trade now live out of town in new-build private housing developments.

### **Studying Hong Kong Chinese people in Edinburgh**

This thesis focuses deliberately on one sub-group of the Chinese population in Scotland, the Cantonese speakers. Because so many of these families have been in Scotland for several decades, they provide an interesting case of a community with several generations living nearby, established community associations and a

relatively long history of involvement in the British education system. This restriction also meant that I needed to study just one Chinese dialect, Cantonese. Previous research has found that because of the restrictive nature of the catering business, many of the “grandparent” generation of British Chinese have learned little or no English; their children are mostly bilingual in English and a Chinese dialect; and the grandchildren are frequently more fluent in English than Chinese (Li, 1994; Modood, 1997). I had studied Cantonese for a year at SOAS before starting fieldwork and continued with a private tutor for the duration of my project. In the course of fieldwork I found that most people aged fifty or under were comfortable speaking English with me and indeed found it quite weird that a white Scottish person should be studying Cantonese and attempting to speak it with them. In practice, most of the conversations I had during fieldwork were in a mixture of English and Cantonese. Nevertheless, Cantonese was the language used in formal settings such as teacher meetings at the Chinese school, and in informal situations such as conversations between adults at home and in the Chinese school.

In spite of their somewhat accidental arrival in Scotland, it seemed that there was a distinctive angle to the life of Hong Kong Chinese people in Edinburgh. I found that my informants were very unlikely to travel to England, except for those with relatives in Newcastle and other parts of the North East. Although most Scottish Chinese family homes subscribed to a British Chinese TV channel broadcasting from the south east of England, and most picked up free copies of Chinese newspapers, also published in or near London, they were far more likely to travel to and from Hong Kong than to visit London or connect with the so-called “national” Chinese organizations there. This parochialism even extended to a failure to connect with Chinese communities in other parts of Scotland. The Chinese population of Glasgow is much larger than that in Edinburgh and it has community groups which reach a far larger proportion of the Chinese community than is the case in Edinburgh: in Edinburgh, most people are connected to one of the Chinese schools and possibly the Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association. In Glasgow, as well as the equivalent school, there is the San Jai Project supporting parents and families, the Chinese Community Development Partnership, a Chinese Youth Group and the Ricefield Arts and Cultural Centre. Yet none of my informants engaged with any of these organizations, forty miles away. This points to a process of group making on the grounds of locality: certainly, these organizations were marked as groups for ethnically Chinese people, but they were also distinguished in targeting services to

those who had settled within a defined geographical area within Scotland. As Wickberg (2007) observes of “Chinese” institutions in Vancouver, who formed associations based on a whole variety of shared characteristics, Chinese in Scotland use their place of work or residence in Scotland as the basis for new group formation, as much as other possible criteria for common interest such as surname, country of origin, occupation or language.

Another, less tangible difference between Scotland and England for Chinese families may be the relatively quieter way of life. It has been suggested (Chan, 1986; Chan & Corner, 1987) that many Hong Kong Chinese families chose Edinburgh as a place to bring up their children precisely because they viewed it as a quiet and safe place where their children would be protected from the temptations of a larger city such as London or Manchester. None of my informants made this explicit comparison, but I often heard it said that Chinese people preferred Edinburgh to Hong Kong, partly because of the milder climate, partly because it was so much less crowded and fast moving, and partly because in Edinburgh they could afford a much more spacious home and garden. Based on his experience as a community worker in Edinburgh in the 1980s, Chan (*ibid*) reported that Chinese people in Edinburgh were more “middle class” than in London: for example, they were more likely to hire help in their restaurants in order to spend time with their families. Chinese businesses in Edinburgh were commonly open on six days a week, rather than seven days as in London, for similar reasons. He found that Chinese people were attracted to Edinburgh because they believed the schools to be better than those in English cities.

While there are higher numbers of Chinese living in particular districts of Edinburgh, and a handful of Chinese community organizations, homes and businesses clustered in the city centre area of Tollcross, there is no formal centre of the community (Bailey, Bowes, & Sim, 1994; S. Lau, 2002). Chinese businesses are visible throughout Edinburgh, particularly the restaurants and takeaway shops which are present on almost every parade of shops. At the time of my fieldwork, there were two Chinese supermarkets on the main thoroughfare of Leith Walk, and a third in Tollcross. Also in Tollcross were a Chinese travel agent and some of the Chinese medicine shops which have proliferated in British towns and cities recently, and cater to Western as well as Chinese patients.

Although there is no Chinese temple in Edinburgh, there are four main Chinese Christian congregations across the city. The oldest, a Cantonese-speaking congregation of a few dozen people, meets in Barclay Church in Tollcross and has

historically served restaurant workers. The Chinese Evangelical Church in Edinburgh is much larger and uses space at Mayfield Salisbury Church in South Edinburgh. This congregation holds services in Cantonese, Mandarin and English and includes a wider cross-section of the Chinese population: restaurant families, professional people, academics and students. Finally, the True Jesus Church has two congregations in Edinburgh, both Cantonese speaking and made up almost exclusively of people with family ties to the tiny Ap Chau Island to the west of the New Territories. The True Jesus Church is a Christian denomination established in Beijing in 1917. It attracted large numbers of converts in the New Territories, particularly Ap Chau Island from where many villagers emigrated to Scotland and the North East of England in the second half of the twentieth century (Liu, 1992, 1998; True Jesus Church, 1992).

Watson (1975) discusses the role of the lineage in the organization of emigration and settlement of Hong Kong Chinese migrants in London. He describes how the Man lineage both financed and organized the actual transport of people to London, and was involved in the management of restaurants overseas. Emigrant workers continued to play an active role in the affairs of San Tin, sharing in decisions over the use of village land and contributing to public works by sending money home. In contrast, I found no evidence of any lineage-based activities among the Chinese population of Edinburgh at the time of my fieldwork, and Bradley (1973) found thirty different surnames among the Chinese immigrants to Edinburgh in the late 1960s. She argues that the nuclear family was the most important influence in Chinese migration to Scotland, as families attempted upward social mobility through the restaurant trade. Typically, the father would first migrate as an employee of another Chinese person, later proceeding to self-employment with his own restaurant or takeaway. At this point, he would often be joined by his wife and children who would be needed to work in the family business. Later he would aspire to become an employer, hiring staff to work in the business so he could enjoy a more leisured life. Neoh supports the idea that “the notion of ‘family’ was what supported the Chinese immigrant in the chosen place of settlement” (2005: 606). The fact that Chinese lives were concentrated in family businesses had important consequences for the formation of a wider Chinese “community” as families are frequently separated from other Chinese both geographically and as competitors in the same field of business.

A further factor in the dispersal of the Chinese population in Scotland is that even among the Hong Kong Chinese there are variations in class background, occupation and reasons for migration. While the majority of my informants work in the catering trade, and both parents are Chinese, there was a sub-group of Chinese women, mainly graduates and professionals, who had come to Scotland after their marriage to white Scottish men, and had never worked in restaurants. Many of these educated Hong Kong Chinese women filled senior teaching posts in the Edinburgh Chinese School, as I describe in Chapter 3. For them, clearly, the question of cultural reproduction through family life is made complicated by the different cultural backgrounds of the two parents. In most cases, the Chinese wife had come to Edinburgh because of her husband's work or because his family lived there, and the woman had no extended family in Scotland. This often meant that the wives had no social network of their own, and because of their own education and work experience, they did not readily become part of the group of Chinese families who come to know each other through their shared occupation in the catering trade. Therefore, many of these wives of "mixed marriages" felt that their husband's Scottish friends and families had a bigger day-to-day influence on them and their children than any Chinese friends or relations. One such woman was Henny, a housewife whose biggest passions were badminton and football, and who regularly took her teenaged sons to watch Heart of Midlothian Football Club, where she claimed to be the "only Chinese female season ticket holder." Henny never spoke Cantonese with her sons and considered herself "quite Scottish now". Regrettably, I was unable to gather data on the home lives of these "mixed" families although I observed the participation of some of their children in activities such as Chinese language classes and Chinese New Year celebrations.

Significantly for my study, children of Chinese origin attend many different schools in Edinburgh: many of them find that they and their siblings are the only Chinese children in the school. Unlike some larger English cities, where there is increasing concern over the "ghettoization" of minority ethnic groups in particular streets and schools, in Edinburgh the non-white population is quite widely spread.

The dispersed nature of the Edinburgh Chinese population presented me with an obvious challenge in carrying out ethnography, although one which has been overcome by several generations of urban anthropologists (Anwar, 1979; Gardner, 2002; Shaw, 2000). Indeed, the very experience of living in relative cultural isolation raises interesting questions for research. The choice of Edinburgh as a field site

achieved a compromise between the need for ease of access to informants and the task of representing the disparate nature of the Chinese population in the UK. Because it is a small city, with good public transport links, it was relatively easy to travel around to meet people in the places where they live, work and study. To some extent, it felt as though my own process of seeking out locations to meet Chinese people gave me an insight into the experiences of the people themselves, especially new migrants who face similar difficulties in locating and spending time with other people from their place of origin.

I also realized early on that it would be impractical for me to live with a Chinese family. This was largely because of my own family commitments, but I also became aware from initial conversations with Scottish Chinese friends that living in a Chinese household might not be an efficient way to gather data, since many Scottish Chinese families actually spend little time together at home. With children out at school all day and one or both parents out at work every evening, there would be few of the face-to-face interactions between parents and children which I had hoped to observe and record. In addition to this, I quickly discovered that many potential informants were reluctant to receive a stranger into their homes, and preferred to meet me in public places such as cafés or at Chinese school.

Most Scottish Chinese parents also enrol their children in one of four Chinese Saturday schools. Although the schools advertise themselves with posters in Chinese supermarkets, for example, most of my informants said they heard about the schools through friends or family. There are four Chinese language schools in Edinburgh, which I will describe in much more detail in Chapter 3. I began my fieldwork as a participant-observer at the Edinburgh Chinese School, which has existed for over thirty years and provides classes in Chinese language (Cantonese and Mandarin) and cultural activities for children and adults every Saturday in term time. At the time of my research, there were approximately 180 children on the school roll. The head teacher, a Hong Kong Chinese woman with a background in administration of university research, welcomed me as a researcher and facilitated my work by introducing me to teachers and allowing me access to the classrooms for observation and informal conversations with pupils and teachers. In order to achieve this I had to overcome another hurdle not always faced by anthropologists working outside the UK, as in order to carry out my research in the school, I was required to apply for an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check, and also to submit a short summary of my

research proposal to the school's board of governors. I wrote this summary in broad terms, in order not to influence the outcome of future interviews or survey work.

For one term I observed language classes and attended monthly teacher meetings at the Chinese school. In the following months, I joined a Cantonese conversation class for adults which included preparing for a performance of a Cantonese song in the school's Chinese New Year show, described in Chapter 5. In the second half of my fieldwork, which fell in a new academic year, I moved to a second Chinese school, the Edinburgh Chinese Community School where I again observed language classes and participated in calligraphy and Chinese knotting classes for adults.

In order to gain access to Chinese family homes and get to know people better than was possible from weekly encounters at Chinese school, I offered my services as a volunteer tutor in English language or general homework help for children, in exchange for Cantonese language practice and help answering questions for my study of "family life of Chinese people in Scotland". Although I circulated a flyer at both Chinese schools, and to members of the Edinburgh Chinese Women Association this resulted in only two responses, both from parents of boys who had been under-performing at school. I visited these two families over four months, in one case, and for over a year in the other case, and came to know them well. I also enrolled as volunteer home tutor of English as an Additional Language in a programme run by Stevenson College Edinburgh. As a volunteer with this scheme, I was assigned to give weekly tuition to two Hong Kong Chinese women who had recently arrived in Scotland with their husbands, both of whom were restaurant chefs. I was able to recruit a further six families by word of mouth and continued to visit these households once a week for between two and fourteen months each, gathering a mixture of ethnographic and interview data from each of them. I have remained in email contact with several of the families since returning to London.

There have been various Chinese community organizations in Edinburgh which can be compared in some ways with traditional lineage-based associations and which have attempted to unite Chinese migrants from different families in pursuit of common interests, economic, social or political. Bradley refers to the Edinburgh Hong Kong Chinese Association, which was already in existence in 1971, and later in the 1970s a separate Edinburgh Chinese Association was formed because of political differences between members of the original group. Like the lineage associations, the Edinburgh groups run by elected committees, most of the members

of which were men. Bradley reports that they were quite exclusive to the restaurant-owning group: ordinary restaurant employees were not eligible for membership. Their stated aim was to represent the interests of restaurant owners although their only function in the early 1970s was to run a small clubroom where members could read Chinese newspapers and books, eat snacks and attend film shows. Football, basketball and table tennis games were organized although these were poorly attended. In Chapter 3 I will describe the role of these associations from the 1980s to the present day in the running and funding of the Chinese language schools, which may be compared with the role of lineage associations in the establishment of study halls in ancestral temples in the New Territories. Apart from their involvement in the schools, the restaurateurs' associations seemed more or less dormant by the time of my fieldwork. The clubroom no longer existed and I was told that the office bearers were merely nominally engaged in the association. In fact, even at the time of Bradley's research she argued that the associations were no more than a route to social prestige for a small group of men seeking status through their wealth. There was little else to differentiate between people in the Chinese immigrant community, so the associations were formed as a means of establishing status in relation to the outside world but with no requirement of service to the community. The office bearers were situating themselves as representatives and leaders of a supposed "Chinese community" but as Bradley points out, they failed to take any action to meet the real needs of the Chinese population, such as the need to learn English and become more fully assimilated to life in Britain.

While the business associations are more or less dormant, some of their former leaders, now retired, have directed their energies into what has become a very active community project, with established links to Scottish local government and public sector bodies. The Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association (ECESA) has since the 1980s provided care and information largely to Chinese people over the age of fifty, who refer themselves or are directed to ECESA by Scottish social services. There is provision of meals on wheels from Chinese restaurants to people who are housebound; day care for some; and a weekly luncheon club which caters for some fifty people. ECESA is closely involved with the running of Cathay Court, a residential housing complex for Chinese elders. The Edinburgh Chinese Community School runs a Cantonese language class at Cathay Court for people aged 50+ many of whom are illiterate. ECESA provides a place of contact for some younger Chinese in Edinburgh, such as the middle-aged women who often volunteer



there, helping with a lunch club for the elderly, and thus make friendships of their own.

Another meeting place for women is the voluntary Edinburgh Chinese Women Association which meets once a month at Cathay Court for talks, parties, fashion shows and other entertainment. This group began in the late 1990s with public funding as a project for mothers at the Edinburgh Chinese School, but quickly became self-sustaining and continues to be run by a committee of volunteers from within the membership. Among their activities, they raise funds for the Chinese school and other charities.

Somewhat different is the Chinese Women's Group facilitated by the Black Community Development Project. This is a publicly funded group for retired Hong Kong Chinese women, most of whom have worked in the catering trade and live in a run-down council housing estate in north Edinburgh. Unlike the ECWA which is run by a committee elected from its members, the BCDP group was at the time of my fieldwork co-ordinated by a young woman graduate from mainland China, employed by the charity. The group had ten or fifteen members, who met for activities such as a keep-fit class, reminiscence work and festival celebrations.

I conducted one-off interviews with more than thirty individuals connected with the Chinese schools, the Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association, the Edinburgh Chinese Women Association and the Black Community Development Project women's group. These people ranged from community leaders, mostly middle-class graduates, to housewives, working mothers and retired people. Six of these people spoke only Cantonese, and as I was aware that they would only grant me a single interview, I chose to make the fullest use of the time by conducting the interviews with an interpreter. These interviews felt extremely awkward and I was fully conscious of the limitations of speaking through an interpreter with people I barely knew. The artificiality of the situation only highlighted the social gap between my informants and me, and most people appeared guarded, understandably reluctant to offer personal opinions or tell me more than the most neutral biographical information about themselves and their families. Little of the data from these interviews has made its way into this thesis, but the exercise was valuable in confirming some of the impressions I had gathered from longer-term participant observation and informal conversations with other people. Some of the interviews took place in people's homes, allowing me to glimpse a little more of the physical surroundings of their everyday lives. The interviews with elderly people in particular

provided insights into the perspective of this age group, which were particularly useful when it came to writing about childcare practices in the 1970s and 80s (see Chapter 2). Here I follow anthropologists such as Brettell (2003) who have used the stories of individual migrants to show how migration (or, in my case, life as the member of a minority ethnic group) is subjectively experienced. Such stories can demonstrate the complex feelings which often arise when a person leaves one place to live in another. These data add another dimension to larger-scale analyses of the process of migration and of cultural reproduction.

After some months, I had discovered that very few British-born Chinese adults in the 18-30 age group were active in any of the Chinese community activities, and none of the parents I met had children of that age. To fill this gap in my data I placed a request for help on the message boards of the British Chinese Discussion Board. Parker and Song (2006, 2007) have analysed the emergence of this website and others like it, as virtual spaces where British Chinese young people are beginning to come together and develop a sense of shared cultural identity.

I received responses from five young British-born Chinese adults living in Edinburgh whom I subsequently met and interviewed in person. These people, all fluent English speakers, proved to be extremely thoughtful and articulate interviewees. In part they were self-selected as people who had already reflected on their experiences as children of Chinese immigrants, and thus were sufficiently interested to volunteer to participate in my research.

In April 2007 I made a short trip to Hong Kong which gave me an opportunity to visit some of the emigration villages from which families had set off for Britain over the past fifty years. Many, of course, have been swallowed up by urban development, while others are uninhabited but preserved as heritage sites. On this, my first visit to East Asia, I also formed a better understanding of the contrast between modern-day Hong Kong, and the sleepier city of Edinburgh, and saw for myself why Chinese Scots look forward so eagerly to their holidays in Hong Kong. Indeed, one of my informants, Lily, who features in various parts of thesis, was staying with relatives in the New Territories during my visit, and I had the opportunity to spend a typical day with them, wandering the shopping malls of Kowloon and Sha Tin. In this same visit I attended an evening meeting of young British-born Chinese, resident in Hong Kong. The gathering in an expensive bar in Lan Kwai Fong, was organized through the British Chinese online discussion board and intended for British-born Chinese people living and working in Hong Kong to

network, both socializing and exchanging advice on work and housing. In Chapter 6 I shall say more about some of these people, born in Britain, who choose to settle as adults in Hong Kong or mainland China.

### **Scotland as a setting for research**

With few exceptions (Chan & Corner, 1987; Hancock, 2006; Liu, 1992, 1998; Neoh, 2005; Yau, 2007), previous research on the “British” Chinese population has focused exclusively on people living in England. More recent studies of the Chinese population of Ireland (Delargy, 2007; Yau, 2007) has shown how the experience of minority ethnic people is different in a place with its own very specific dynamic of community relations. Delargy shows that, despite the sectarian tensions within Northern Irish society, Chinese immigrants ironically perceived it as a safer place for immigrants than some of the English inner cities. Similarly, I stress the Scottish setting for this thesis, in line with previous researchers who have found empirical as well as theoretical reasons to justify studies of minority groups in Scotland as opposed to “Britain” as a whole:

Other factors add to the value of a Scotland-based focus on research related to minority ethnic issues. These relate to differences in the minority ethnic population in England, where most of the research has been carried out; the minority ethnic population in Scotland is proportionately smaller than in England, and its ethnic composition and patterns of settlement dissimilar. Further, there are important differences in the legal system and in key administrative structures. It has also been argued that it is not possible to draw conclusions about Scottish political processes on the basis of events in England with respect to issues related to ‘race’ given differences in structural features and historical context.

(Netto, Arshad, Lima, Diniz, & Macewen, 2001: 2-3)

One example of the administrative differences between England and Scotland is the separate system for education. Schoolchildren in Scotland follow a national curriculum which includes Scottish literature, Scottish music and Scottish history among other subjects. As school leavers, children take Scottish exams, designed to fit with the traditional structure of higher education in Scotland, where pupils have historically entered university at an earlier age and taken four rather than three years to complete an undergraduate degree. Such details become salient at the point of taking decisions about where to apply to university, as applicants are made aware at the point of completing application forms that they do not fit in with the default

requirements of A-level qualifications. Perhaps more importantly, Scottish students at Scottish universities do not pay tuition fees, unlike their peers in England. It will be an empirical question for this thesis to discuss whether Chinese Scots are aware of these facts and take them into consideration when planning their children's education.

A second level of difference is that of national myths, the important stories which Scots tell about themselves (Geertz, 1973). Sometimes these appear to converge with Chinese cultural discourses, for example in cultural beliefs about the value of schooling. The respect for education as a route to upward social mobility in Chinese culture is well documented. The role of education is a centuries-old theme in Scottish culture which has entered the "national myth" (McCrone, 2001), along with the notion of the "lad o'pairts", the child from humble origins who works his way up through learning to prosperity (Hope, 2009). McCrone has shown that the educational opportunities for children of the skilled working class and petit bourgeoisie are better in Scotland than in England. He points out, however, that there is no evidence from the study of contemporary Scottish social structure to prove that Scotland is overall a more meritocratic, egalitarian society than the rest of the UK. Despite this, Hearn argues that "even if the actual distribution of wealth and opportunity are as unequal in Scotland as they are in England, the hegemony of the ideal of the Scottish ideal of the redistributive welfare state is palpable, and appealing to those from England and elsewhere who share that ideal." (Hearn, 2000: 153) The national myth of egalitarianism may or may not have basis in reality, but it is one philosophy which Scottish-born Chinese children are likely to encounter during their time in Scottish schools.

Political devolution since 1997 has prompted much public debate about the nature of Scottish national identity, to which issues of race and cultural diversity are integral (Audrey, 2000; Clare Cassidy, Connor, & Dorrer, 2006; Heim et al., 2004; Kiely, Bechhofer, & McCrone, 2005; Saeed, Blain, & Forbes, 1999). The proportion of ethnic minority people in Scotland is much lower than in England and Wales, and a previous (Labour) First Minister encouraged immigration to tackle the problem of population decline (Scottish Executive, 2004). During my time in the field the Scottish National Party came to power in the Scottish government elections of 2007. Soon afterwards, the First Minister Alex Salmond defined his party's policy of "multicultural nationalism" in a speech to the Pakistan Welfare Trust in June 2007:

I've said many times before that the diversity the Asian communities bring to Scotland is a great strength. The Pakistani community has brought variety and passion to Scotland. And it has also brought a hard work ethic, a strong faith - and a belief in the strength of community and family.

Different traditions do not undermine Scottish culture - they enrich and enhance it. There are many shades and strands in the Scottish tartan. (Scottish Government, 2007)

Sweeney (2005) has proposed two types of nationalism in contemporary Europe: popular ethnic nationalism, and elite civic nationalism. From Alex Salmond's approach, it seems that the concept of civic nationalism can be stretched to include a kind of "multicultural nationalism" which embraces cultural and ethnic diversity. In their exploration of the nature of multiculturalism in post-devolution Scotland, Hussain and Miller (2006) acknowledge the potential problems for multiculturalism within the particular context of sub-state nationalism:

Sub-state nationalism has more ethnic overtones than state nationalism even when it claims to be 'civic', and 'multicultural Scottish-nationalism' is, therefore, more problematic than 'multicultural British-nationalism. (Hussain and Miller 2006: 197)

However, their empirical evidence from interviews with Muslim and English people in Scotland has shown that these potential problems prove to be their own solution:

Amongst majority Scots, England has a key role in defining and encouraging Scottish nationalism. So, while Scottish nationalism does stimulate phobias, it stimulates Anglophobia but not Islamophobia. And conversely, Muslims in Scotland adopt Scottish identities, Scottish attitudes, Scottish nationalism, and even some degree of Anglophobia – consciously or unconsciously using these as tools of integration. (ibid: 198)

Hussein and Miller point out that Anglophobia has deliberately been cultivated by Scottish elites as much as by ordinary people: just as the "Tartan Army" of fans who follow the national football team pride themselves on being better-behaved than their rowdy English counterparts, so the Scottish elite has sought to project an image of deliberate inclusivity in contrast with the "Auld Enemy", England. One example is the SNP's opposition to the Iraq war in 2003, after which Scottish Muslim electoral support for the SNP and its policy of independence increased dramatically.

Asian (Chinese, Indian and Pakistani) migrants to Scotland experience significant racial discrimination in both housing and job markets but overall perceive Scotland to be a more tolerant and friendly place to live than England (Maan, 1992). This may be because the total black and ethnic minority population is smaller than in the rest of the UK, and therefore is perceived as less of a threat. It has often been pointed out that Chinese and other Asian immigrants are welcomed because they have set up their own businesses rather than competing with local people for jobs; and as a result of their work in catering or corner shops, they have built up good relationships with local residents. As Salmond's speech suggests, generally Asian immigrants are not known to commit crime and are viewed positively as motivated by spiritual or moral values which privilege hard work and duty to the family

It has further been argued that Scots use "territorial" markers such as birth place, accent, upbringing and commitment to the country as criteria for national "belonging", whereas in England, for example, family origin and cultural background are the basis for identity (Hopkins, 2004; Kiely et al., 2005). Hussein and Miller's work suggests that this sets up the difference between English immigrants and non-Western immigrants in Scotland. They point out that Scottish Muslims have less at stake in adopting a Scottish "territorial" identity, as they can do so without abandoning the religious or cultural identity which for them is primary. English immigrants, on the other hand, have much more in common culturally with white Scots, and can easily assimilate to Scottish cultural life, but still will never be accepted as Scots because of their accent and place of birth.

David Parker has suggested that Chinese people in Britain (his own data were from England) tend to "hold Chinese identity within as an inner space" as a strategy for pre-empting racism and discrimination in British society: "being Chinese is all right in private or in Chinese-only contexts" (Parker 1995: 233). I will question whether this analysis is still correct against the backdrop of more positive public image of Chinese language and culture, or whether there is evidence of Chinese Scots publicly expressing and celebrating a sense of territorial belonging to an openly multicultural Scotland, and at the same being confident to display their Chineseness. If Hussain and Miller are right, then as with Muslim Scots it should be possible for Chinese Scots to assert their Scottishness without abandoning a sense of being culturally Chinese.

The people discussed in this thesis come under the influence of two national governments who are actively manipulating culture, in various forms, as a source of

“soft power” in the world. The idea of “soft power”, originating in the field of international relations and coined by Nye (1991), is predicated on a contrast between the manipulation by governments of such intangible power resources as culture, ideology and institutions, as opposed to the “hard power” of tangible resources including armies and economic strength. One part of the Scottish Government’s efforts to promote Scotland’s position as a small nation on the global stage has been the development of “Scotland’s Strategy for Stronger Engagement with China” (Scottish Executive, 2006) and the rapid growth of educational, economic and cultural ties with China.

Meanwhile, the Chinese state is employing the tactics of soft power by promoting China’s “cultural attractiveness” in order to facilitate its growing influence around the world (Ding, 2008). Ding provides several examples of this, the most relevant to this thesis being the promotion of Mandarin as a world language, specifically through government support for the teaching of Chinese language overseas through Confucius Institutes and Confucius classrooms. During the time of my fieldwork the Confucius Institute for Scotland was established in the University of Edinburgh, and the first of several planned Confucius classrooms, for the teaching of Mandarin to Scottish secondary school pupils, was opened at St George’s School for Girls. At the same time the Chinese government, through its Consulate in Edinburgh, is actively sponsoring the Chinese community-run language schools by donating textbooks and training teachers. Such activities have a covert political purpose, as the text books are printed in the simplified Chinese characters used in the People’s Republic of China, rather than the traditional characters familiar to people from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the curriculum is tailored to present a favourable view of the PRC. Thus the state is quietly asserting its own authority as arbiter of true and authentic Chinese language and culture.

In Chapter 6, which looks at the shifting status of Chinese languages in Scotland. I shall describe in more detail how the Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong Chinese in Edinburgh are responding to the incursion of agents of the Chinese and Scottish governments on their own language teaching projects. Many of the Hong Kong Chinese overseas are people who left the country in the destructive aftermath of Cultural Revolution and who have no sympathy with the Communist government. Apart from party politics, they have a strong regional identification with Hong Kong culture and the Cantonese language – the language which has dominated in many other overseas Chinese communities over several centuries – so it is a major change

for the PRC to dictate the variety of Chinese language and culture which will be promoted overseas. It is therefore worth asking how such people respond when the PRC exercise of soft power comes to influence their daily lives in Edinburgh.



## **Part 1**

### **Reproducing culture in families**

## Chapter 1

### Getting away from the takeaway: stigma and pride in the ethnic catering trade

All our lives we've been wanting to get away from the takeaway. I used to be really ashamed that my parents owned a takeaway, I didn't want my friends to know, I would never invite my friends round. . . My friends' parents were always doctors, lawyers, and my parents owned a takeaway. I'm not ashamed of it now . . . our parents have worked so hard to get where they are now, they can get anything they want, and at the end of the day they are their own bosses. We're so proud of them.

In a lengthy conversation with me over coffee in an Edinburgh shopping mall, Lana, a British-born Chinese woman in her late twenties, spoke of her pride at her parents' success in building up their own business, which is mixed with painful memories of the shame she felt as a teenager when she compared her family to those of her white British friends, who were apparently mostly from middle class, professional households. Lana now works as a graphic designer in Edinburgh, although her sisters, still in their teens, continue to help their parents in the family business. Lana laughingly told me,

That's the joke, that Chinese people have big families so they can all help out in the takeaway. [My partner]'s got two brothers, I've got three sisters and we've all had to help out in the takeaway at some stage. I've said to my sisters: I've done my time, I've worked in the takeaway, now it's your turn and I'm not coming back any more.

When Lana speaks of her work for the family business as “doing time”, she makes it sound like a prison sentence, and many Scottish Chinese young people describe catering work as deeply unpleasant. They resent the constraint on their time and movement, being required to work in the evenings and at weekends when non-Chinese would be out socializing. Their contribution to the business is usually made with little or no immediate reward. When I asked about pay, Lana's partner, whose family had a takeaway in the next village from hers, told me that

My mum would throw an extra tenner my way, but not tell my dad. I used to get an allowance anyway from my parents,

when I was at university, but my mum would give me extra, on the side. It wasn't anything ever official, you know like, 'You'll get £30 for a shift for helping out'. You'd just get petrol money for travelling back and forth. You were just kind of expected to do it.

The catering industry has been the constant backdrop to family life for the majority of Hong Kong Chinese people in Scotland, a fact which is acknowledged with very mixed feelings by those involved. In this first part of the thesis, I explore the effects of working in restaurants and takeaway shops on family relationships and on the formation of a self-conscious British Chinese ethnic group. In the next chapter I will focus in more detail on how catering work has shaped the day-to-day choices of Chinese immigrant parents and the organization of domestic life and childcare.

This chapter begins by describing some of the emotions and meanings attached to the catering trade by those who have grown up in it, as well as those more recent migrants who have become British Chinese catering workers later in life. I will say something about the impact of catering work on the relationships between parents and children, and on relationships between siblings and members of the extended family, recognizing that kinship has been an important factor in the establishment of Chinese businesses in Britain. I am interested also in the social definition of "insiders" and "outsiders" as a part of group-making by British Chinese caterers, particularly in relation to the question of trust and how far it may extend within or beyond the immediate family circle. These issues have been written about in some detail by previous researchers on British Chinese families in the catering trade (Gomez, 2007; Gomez & Cheung, 2009; Lee, Chan, Bradby, & Green, 2002; Song, 1999). I would like to explore the wider significance of these issues for anthropology, first by considering this as a possible example of the kind of ethnic group-making which Brubaker has described.

Secondly, in the context of the anthropology of China the case of Scottish Chinese restaurant families provides a possible comparison with Yan's (2003) work on the growing generation gap in contemporary rural China. The British-born Chinese adults I introduce in this chapter are, thanks to their educational achievements and fluency in English, able to entertain ambitions for careers of which their immigrant parents could only dream. Is there evidence that this ambition and freedom of choice leads to the kind of "selfish individualism" which Yan identifies in the younger generation of Chinese villagers?

Parker (1995) and Song (1999) describe in depth the frustrations felt by British Chinese teenagers as a result of the negative effects on their social lives and school work of late nights and weekends spent helping their parents. Those people I met who had worked in family takeaways or restaurants as teenagers expressed similar feelings. In Lana's words,

It gets really, really tough. I was working, I'd have to work in the takeaway all night, then sweep up afterwards, and then you'd have to do your A level work after that. I didn't get to bed before three in the morning sometimes, and I'd have to get up early for lectures. It was really, really tough, and my mum and dad didn't want to ask us, but they had no choice. I think that kind of strained relationships a little bit, with my parents especially.

Because they could speak more English than their parents, as well as taking orders from customers the children's work would include significant responsibilities such as filing tax returns and speaking to lawyers and accountants on their family's behalf. Similarly, children often accompany their parents to medical appointments to act as interpreters, and even attend their own parent-teacher meetings at school, totally reversing the traditional relationship of parent as carer of the child. This, of course, is a common experience for many children of immigrants, such as the Vietnamese American child who is among children from various ethnic groups described by Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001: 75-76).

Interestingly, Lana expressed no guilt at having moved so far away from her parents, despite knowing how dependent they were on their children for daily transactions with the English-speaking community. She stated very assertively that she had "done her time", implying that she owed nothing further to them, especially since she had met their expectation of graduating from university. Going away to university was certainly the fulfilment of her parents' ambitions for her, an achievement which had driven their own determination to make their business succeed. At the same time, Lana sees it as her personal strategy for escaping from the heavy obligations to her family:

For me personally, that was a reason to get away from home, because I thought, if I get my grades, to get into the university I wanted, then I could move away and I wouldn't have to work for my mum and dad any more. That's why I came to uni here, because it's far enough for me not to have to go back.

All the same, for the first two years of her undergraduate degree course in Edinburgh, Lana found herself driving back to North-East England every weekend to help her parents in the shop. She says that her parents had “no choice” but to ask her to do this, as her sisters were too young to work legally; at the same time, despite her strong desire to get away to a new, independent life, she was obedient to her parents’ wishes and need. For Lana, the tie of filial obligation was not easily cut.

On 27th August 2007 Helen Tse appeared on stage at the Edinburgh Book Festival to talk about her new book, *Sweet Mandarin: the courageous true story of three generations of Chinese women and their journey from East to West* (Tse, 2007). Tse describes herself as “the first British-Chinese author”. Her book, endorsed by commendations from such best-selling writers as Amy Tan and Xinran, had been a publishing triumph, combining such fashionable elements as food writing, family memoirs, and rags-to-riches success. Indeed, Tse told her audience that “Sweet Mandarin” was not only a book, but also a brand, including a restaurant in Manchester, cookery classes and motivational speeches by herself and her two sisters. All three had had professional careers (in law, finance and engineering) but had given this up to pursue the dream of building their own business.

It was three months after Helen Tse’s Book Festival event that I met and interviewed Lana. She had been in the audience at Helen Tse’s talk with her British-Chinese partner Jason and her sister, and she described to me the strong emotional reaction she felt to Tse’s presentation:

when she was standing up there talking about her family and her life, and how she’s opened a restaurant there in Manchester, we were nodding her heads and totally agreeing with everything she was saying, and in fact it was kind of odd seeing stood her up there getting so much attention, it sounds terrible to say it, but to see her getting so much attention from everyone around her saying ‘Isn’t she brave’ and ‘That’s so interesting’, I just thought, part of me was a little bit disappointed that she was just saying what *our* life is like, that’s totally normal to us, you know what I mean.

Before we went, I was expecting there would be so many BBCs [British-born Chinese] in the audience, but there weren’t, there was just me, [Jason] and my sister, the only Chinese faces there, and, when she was asking if anyone had any questions, people were just putting their hands up and saying ‘Helen, that was so interesting, but could you say more about . . .’ and I had this thought going round in my head, and I thought, should I say it, but I just put my hand up, and she came up and there was the mike, and I said, ‘What

would you say to people who said that you are just perpetuating a stereotype of what Chinese people are doing?' because this lady was a lawyer, and she worked for PriceWaterhouseCoopers, she's worked all over the world, earning loads, doing a Western job and she gave it all up to go back to opening a Chinese restaurant.

That's what me and Jason have been struggling with as well, because when we've, whenever someone's made a point of pointing out our racial difference, shouting something in the street like 'chicken chow mein', that kind of thing, they make references to food and takeaways, because they think that's all Chinese people know, all we're good for, so why on earth would someone go back into that? That's what we struggle with. On the one hand, we're really proud of what our parents have achieved, on the other hand we're tied to that identity of caterers, that's all we can do, and that's why I asked. I was actually quite frightened to ask the question.

Lana's fear at asking the question may be put down to nervousness at speaking up in front of a large audience, or to the sensitivity she felt about being one of a visible minority in a room full of non-Chinese. It can also be interpreted as a signal of the importance of the issue for her personally and the way that Tse's story touched on an inner struggle which Lana and her partner faced as they decided the future direction of their lives. It appears paradoxical that Lana simultaneously recognized Helen Tse's story to be true to her (Lana's) own life experience, and yet accused Tse of misleading people by presenting a mere stereotype of British Chinese life. Lana's narrative raises questions about how an individual relates to her own life story and her quest to find a direction in life. Many British-born Chinese young people long to break free from the limitations of catering work to embrace the range of opportunity which was denied to their parents but available to them because of their education and English language skills. However, their upbringing and knowledge of catering is undeniably part of their lives and some find ways to accept that and find new and creative ways to engage with the British Chinese "tradition".

Lana's cousin, also British-born, decided to go to college and started a computing course but found it did not suit him. He felt more comfortable in catering, and argued that he could make money that way so there was no point in studying IT. Lana commented that,

I wouldn't say it's an easy option, in the sense that the work is very difficult, very demanding, but for someone who isn't focused, who doesn't know what their options are, hasn't

heard of apprenticeships and that kind of thing, it can be a fall-back option.

Lana and her partner were also in the throes of deciding whether to persist in their chosen, “Western” careers, or to capitalize on their specialist knowledge and experience gained from working with their parents and open a restaurant of their own. Jason was working for the Lothian and Borders Police in a job which he enjoyed, although he was already becoming weary of the regularity of low-level racist remarks from his colleagues, who were all middle-aged, white Scots. Lana too felt disillusioned by her work as a designer, and particularly the constraints of working for somebody else:

I've been back to uni, I've got all these further qualifications, and I've been in the job I'm doing now for a couple of years now, but I'm just not happy. I'm not earning much, and I sometimes think it's just so not worth it.

Money was one factor in Lana's decision-making, and the realisation that they could earn a lot more from catering than from their graduate jobs. Independence and the freedom of self-employment was also highly attractive for them, especially as they dreamed of opening a new, “funky” kind of Chinese restaurant which would provide an outlet for their own entrepreneurship and creativity. This, in fact, was the very route which Helen Tse had taken. I asked Lana how Tse had responded to her question from the floor:

The way she answered the question, it was kind of the way we would go about it if we were to go back into the catering business. She said that Chinese people are very closed off, very private but in her restaurant it's very open, they get schoolchildren in to learn to cook Chinese food, they get cameras in to look around, walk around, and they talk about Chinese culture. She's very, very open about what she's up to, and trying to make ties with the community. And also she wants things to be a little bit different, you get these quite cheesy, traditional Chinese restaurant interiors but she's gone for something quite modern, funky and there's this kind of picture on the website with a walkaround, a computerized image of the restaurant, and she says, just look at it, it doesn't look like a Chinese restaurant, it's just a nice, contemporary restaurant, it could be anything.

That's what I'm aiming for, breaking down the stereotypes of what Chinese food should be like, what a Chinese restaurant should be like, and what a restaurant owner should be like, because she spoke with a perfect English accent, she went to

school in England, with the best education money could buy . . . I really should email her and tell her that she was inspirational, really.

In her reflection on Helen Tse's talk, Lana refers to the theme of food which often arose in racist taunts which she had experienced as a child. Song (1999) and Parker (1995) also discuss the racist abuse which many young British Chinese people endured while "helping out" in family businesses. I was surprised that racism was rarely raised directly as an issue by my informants. A recent report by the campaign organization Min Quan (Adamson, Smith, & Chan, 2009) has drawn attention to the high incidence of racism against British Chinese people, much of which goes unreported. There was a tragic case in Edinburgh in 2010 when a Chinese takeaway delivery driver, Simon San, was killed when a group of youths attacked him outside the shop, late at night. The police initially failed to investigate this incident as a racially motivated attack, and only a year later, in August 2011 issued an apology to the San family for mistakes in their handling of the case. Such incidents not only highlight the vulnerability of takeaway workers to abuse by the public, as their shops and restaurants remain open late in the evening but also show why many British Chinese do not call the police when they are attacked. The Min Quan report showed that many catering workers had little faith in the police to respond quickly to reported incidents. There are real and painful reasons why British Chinese people should wish to get away from an occupation which can make them so vulnerable in a very literal sense. However, while noting these extreme events, I would stress that there are more long-term social and cultural factors which influence the decision to leave catering.

### **Chinese caterers in the British class system**

Lana described her discomfort at comparing her parents' occupation as takeaway owners, with her friends' background in the professional classes. As Lana saw it, her family background made it difficult for her ever to feel socially equal with her peers, and Kelly, another young British-born Chinese woman also spoke of feeling stigmatized because of the English name which her parents had chosen for her, which she perceived to be identifiably "working-class". Kelly attended a private secondary school, and recalled, "I was the only Kelly in a class of Sophies and Claires". This is an area where the situation of Chinese people in Britain may differ substantially from that of Asian Americans in the US, where the national myth of the



“American dream” arguably offers the potential for upward social mobility to anyone prepared to work hard enough to achieve it (Zhou & Portes, 1992).

Many of my informants felt that, as the children of immigrants, specifically Hong Kong Chinese immigrants, they occupied an anomalous position within the British class system. Catering is considered a low-prestige occupation, in contrast with professions such as medicine, law and accountancy. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the British class system is its apparent rigidity and the perception that those born into a certain class are irrevocably identified with it. Furthermore, Chun (1996) has argued that Hong Kong itself, as a free-market port under its previous colonial government, itself became a class-based society:

The dualistic nature of Hong Kong’s colonial society was, then, a function of the way in which the British demarcated the public and private spheres. There was a strict separation between official culture, which was carried out in the medium of English, and indigenous culture, which was rooted in Chinese tradition. Social intercourse was segregated along ethnic lines, and the government did little to cultivate among the populace any sense of national affinity to Britain. (Chun 1996: 120)

Many of my younger informants struggled with the perception that catering was the only thing which Chinese people were capable of doing. This was a perception held by many of their parents, who spoke no English and told me that, as immigrants, they had “no choice” but to work in takeaways or restaurants. On several occasions I was asked rhetorically, “What else could we do?” On the other hand, their children realise that they are capable of more, but sometimes feel constrained by the negative assumptions of non-Chinese people. In recent years British-born Chinese people have challenged the stereotype of Chinese people as cooks and waiters, both publicly – as in the 2003 Radio 4 series “Beyond the takeaway” which highlighted the diversity of achievement and aspiration of this group – and privately, through their success in education and entering professional and skilled employment.

Wai Wing is a university lecturer in Edinburgh, now in his forties with two school-aged children of his own. Because of his age and his profession, I was somewhat surprised when he told me that he, like so many others, came from a “restaurant” family. All of the “restaurant children” I had met previously, and who had gone on to professional careers, were aged under thirty; people in Wai Wing’s generation usually migrated too late in their school careers to learn good English and make a successful adjustment to the Scottish education system.

Wai Wing was already in his teens when the family migrated to Scotland, and he had been very happy at his Hong Kong high school, where he excelled in Chinese language and literature. Once the family were in Scotland, he was enrolled in a Scottish school but found himself floundering because of his poor English. At the same time, both he and his four siblings were expected to help their parents in the takeaway after school, which left them very little time to study. Wai Wing quickly decided that he would have to abandon his dream of studying Chinese literature at university, as it would be poorly taught so far from China, and thought hard about how he could make the best of his situation in Scotland.

He recalls that when he started at high school in Glasgow, the head teacher put him into a low-ability class studying physiology. Wai Wing wanted to study more general science subjects but the head teacher disagreed on the grounds that he was a very recent migrant who could not be expected to cope with the demands of such a course. So, Wai Wing went to knock on the door of the head's office. He explained to the head teacher that the general physiology course would not lead to the qualifications he required for university entrance. He spoke for about an hour with the head teacher, whom Wai Wing remembers as a formidable-looking gentleman who was somewhat surprised by this Chinese boy coming to see him. In the end, he persuaded the head to let him "demote" to a junior class, in order to pursue his own choice of subjects. Wai Wing went on to achieve straight As in his O-grades and Highers, and took a university degree in electronics. His brother also graduated from university, but their sisters remained in the catering trade.

Wai Wing's story illustrates the feeling that many British-born Chinese have of being forced to confront the low expectations of other people – both parents and teachers – whom they perceive as standing in the way of their aspirations. Wai Wing says that he took matters into his own hands by challenging his head teacher, and persuading him that despite having an inadequate command of English and little experience of the British education system, he was capable of hard work and success in exams. Archer and Francis's more recent work on Chinese pupils in British schools (Archer & Francis, 2005, 2007) has shown that teachers' expectations of these children's success has changed dramatically in the decades since Wai Wing went to school, but this only underlines the fact that the narrative of British Chinese school success applies mainly to the present generation of school-age children.

It may also be useful to consider Bourdieu's (1986) description of internalized limits, by which members of subordinate groups adjust their personal

aspirations downwards because of constraints which are really external to themselves. British Chinese children may do well at school but nevertheless take the safe option of work in the catering trade, because, rightly or not, they anticipate failure in other fields of employment (Chan, 1986).

On the other hand, the return of some British-born Chinese to the catering industry can be read as a statement of pride: if you say we are only good for serving food, then let us show you just how good we can be. Already there are examples in Edinburgh of young British-born Chinese going into catering on their own terms, building on the experience gained from working with their parents, with the additional skills of fluent English and sometimes degrees or professional qualifications in business administration. On 26 June 2010 the *Edinburgh Evening News* reported that Michael Yip, the son of a highly successful restaurateur and owner of several businesses throughout the city and East Lothian, was opening his latest venture, an iPad noodle bar in Newington, where customers would be invited to try out the latest computer technology (manufactured, of course, in China) while eating a quick bowl of modern Chinese food (Edinburgh Evening News, 2010). It is not a takeaway, but an independent venture of which the young owner is clearly very proud.

### **Hierarchy and class in the Edinburgh Chinese catering trade**

In this second section, I offer an outline sketch of the Chinese catering market in Edinburgh today, to show the economic context in which many of my informants work, and to show that there is no single kind of Chinese catering business. Certainly, my informants usually described catering work as something to escape from, and many Chinese Scottish parents will say that they have urged their children to work hard at school so that they can choose alternative careers. Yet, as previous researchers have observed, there are also positive aspects to such stigmatized work. The closed world of ethnic businesses have served as stepping stones for immigrant families in the US as well as Britain, a means to accumulate economic capital quickly, thus enabling the second generation to achieve quite rapid upward social mobility with moves into the mainstream job market (Zhou & Portes, 1992). I will show that recently arrived migrants from Hong Kong are continuing to work their way up the ladder of the catering industry itself, with the aim of establishing a secure financial base for their children to pursue other work. This is a well-documented strategy for Chinese immigrant families (Louie, 2004; Pieke, 1991). More than

simply confirming that Chinese migrants to Scotland have followed a similar path to those in the Netherlands, US and elsewhere, I would like to draw attention to the subjective experience of progressing through a “career path” in catering, especially for adults who have migrated relatively recently. I will argue that this group, who have far less contact with British society than the British-born Chinese I discussed in the first part of the chapter, still feel they have potential to realise dreams and fulfil ambitions within the catering trade.

As is probably true of most industries, there is a hierarchy within the Chinese catering trade and this allows for a degree of mobility for those who work in it. It is relatively cheap and easy for a married couple, or even a single person to raise the money, perhaps by borrowing from a richer relative, to open their own takeaway shop in a residential area. The smallest takeaway shops are no more than a kitchen with a counter in front, and two or three chairs for customers waiting to collect their food. In the past, these would be run entirely by members of a single family: usually the parents would prepare food in the kitchen, and the teenage children, with better knowledge of English, would take orders over the phone and at the counter, and after hours help to clean, prepare stock and deal with paperwork. Larger shops might combine a takeaway service with a small restaurant of six or eight tables for customers to sit and eat in, and employ extra people to wait at tables and pour drinks at the bar. A family might run such a business for a few years before selling on the lease to another Chinese family, often by placing an advert in a local Chinese newspaper or, more often in Edinburgh, a card in a Chinese supermarket window. If they fail to make money, it is simple to close down the business and perhaps take paid work for another family for a while, until they have saved up enough to try again with an independent business.

On main roads into the city centre are the larger restaurants, many of which are owned by Hong Kong Chinese families who have lived in Scotland for several decades. In most cases, the male head of the household will have emigrated from Hong Kong’s New Territories in the 1950s or 60s and worked as an employee of a kinsman before saving enough to open his own business, at which point he would send for his wife and children to work in it. The more successful of these families, or those who happened to arrive early, and before the Chinese restaurant market became saturated, were later able to own one or more larger restaurants. These include places such as the forty-year-old Lee On in Tollcross, a restaurant considered to serve more authentic Cantonese dishes and a favourite venue for Chinese weddings, birthdays

and other celebrations. The Lee On can seat 100 guests and despite its popularity remains quite basic in its décor and furnishings.

In central Edinburgh there are several newer Chinese restaurants which attract non-Chinese customers by serving high quality food with wine, often experimenting with original ways of cooking. One of these is the Kweilin restaurant which specializes in Cantonese cuisine using local Scottish seafood. The owner of the Kweilin also runs what he claims to be Edinburgh's only "Chinese wine shop".

Associated with the restaurants and takeaways are their food suppliers which are scattered throughout the city as Edinburgh has no specific "Chinatown". There are three Chinese supermarkets which act as meeting places and information providers, as their windows display not only job advertisements but also news of flats and commercial properties to rent, cheap deals on phone calls to East Asia, and flyers for social events run by the local Chinese community organizations. There is a Chinese fishmonger who supplies some of the grander restaurants, but most of the small business owners buy stock from one or other of the large cash-and-carry stores on the edge of town.

Within this varied scale of businesses, there are also clear hierarchies in the workforce. Timothy Mo characterizes this social pyramid to comic effect in his novel of the Hong Kong Chinese catering trade in London, *Sour sweet* (Mo, 1982), and the organization of labour appeared little changed according to the accounts of my informants in Edinburgh. Catering staff are strictly divided between kitchen and waiting staff. Within the kitchen there is a hierarchy of experienced chefs (always male) who are more highly respected and earn better wages than the kitchen assistants and dish-washers (who may be female).

When Hong Kong Chinese migrants first arrived in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s many men became chefs with no prior experience of catering work, but in 2006-8 two out of the three new arrivals I met in Edinburgh had been trained as chefs in Hong Kong, and one had considerable experience and skill as a *dim sum* chef from an expensive restaurant in Hong Kong. Li Hom, a man in his late twenties emigrated with his wife and three-year-old child, sponsored by relatives of hers who had been living in Edinburgh for a decade and now run their own business, having plastic bags and other promotional material for Chinese takeaways printed in mainland China and importing them to the UK. Li Hom started work immediately in an expensive Chinese wine bar in the centre of Edinburgh. Mr Kwok, an older man, arrived about the same time. He had worked as a painter-decorator in Kowloon, but became a chef

in a restaurant belonging to a relative of his wife in Scotland. This was a less prestigious restaurant, in a former mining village outside Edinburgh. Mr Kwok's wife, who, like him spoke little English, was employed as a kitchen assistant, preparing vegetables and cleaning up after the chefs.

It was considered essential that all kitchen staff should speak Chinese, because the pressure of working very fast and in hot, uncomfortable physical conditions left no room for miscommunication. Usually this means speaking Cantonese. Over the years, Hong Kong Chinese have worked with Vietnamese Chinese, who also speak Cantonese. More recent migrants from other parts of China have had to acquire basic Cantonese as the *lingua franca* of restaurants. Kitchen staff clearly have differing levels of skill and experience (and it is now possible for them to acquire further training in cooking, food hygiene etc. from British further education providers) but there was an unspoken assumption that they must be Chinese, and not only for reasons of communication. From a business perspective, it is important that the chefs in particular should be trained in China because the value of the food is its authenticity and business owners must protect the distinctiveness of their product by employing only fellow Chinese. This may be seen as an example of the "commodification" of ethnic group culture described by Comaroff and Comaroff in their book, *Ethnicity Inc.* (J. L. Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). The Comaroffs argue that such "branding" of ethnicity may be both empowering and impoverishing to members of the self-defining ethnic groups; empowering as they find themselves owners of a marketable asset, able to profit in the present consumer economy, but impoverishing as culture is often reduced to a mere commodity, and people find themselves confined to "ethnic" groups rather than engaging more creatively with other people on the basis of other commonalities such as class or gender.

Waiting staff (counter staff in takeaways) usually have more formal education and of course must speak some English. Both men and women may be employed in these roles, but there is a preference for attractive young women to work as waitresses.

I have briefly sketched out this diversity in Chinese catering businesses because it is important in understanding why there should be such mixed feelings about the industry, which represents huge effort with little reward for some, but can lead to considerable wealth and social prestige for the owners of larger restaurants and supermarkets.

## **Choosing to work in a restaurant**

From an individual perspective, there are some positive aspects to work in restaurants and takeaways. This seemed particularly true of more recently arrived migrants from Hong Kong and China. The working hours are long and physically demanding but workers, especially waitresses and counter staff, have time to chat and laugh together, everyday social interactions which compensate for the loneliness of living in a foreign country with few other Chinese nearby.

Jenny, a 21-year-old woman from Guangdong Province who became the second wife of a Chinese Scottish man in his late fifties, was very bored when she first came to live with him in Scotland in 2007. There were no other Chinese people on the housing estate where they lived, and she knew nobody in Edinburgh except her husband's two grown-up children, who both worked full time, one in a restaurant and the other as a hospital administrator. Jenny's husband Bruce had retired from catering work because of ill health but left the house most days to play golf with other members of the Edinburgh Chinese Golfers Association. For two years Jenny's immigration status was only temporary, and she had to renew her visa annually, at considerable expense and irritation to the couple who understood that the Immigration Service was casting doubt on the truth of their marriage and required them to prove that they were genuinely living together as husband and wife. Meanwhile, Jenny was not allowed to work. When she was finally granted permanent residence in the UK, she immediately got a job behind the bar of a Japanese restaurant owned by Chinese friends of her husband. There was no economic need for Jenny to work as Bruce had made enough money in his working life, including income from investment in property, to support them both. However, she was delighted to have something to do and the chance to get out and socialize with her colleagues, who were Chinese people of her own age. She came home with funny stories about customers, like the man who was staring in through the windows with his friends, then finally came in to ask staff what the mystery objects on the restaurant tables were (they were chopstick rests). While she was still improving her English, Jenny was pleased to be shown by her fellow workers how to catch a night bus home, finally becoming able to travel about the city independently after months during which she had relied on her husband to drive her to places from their home on the outskirts of Edinburgh.

Jenny had been working as a hostess in a karaoke bar in Guangzhou when Bruce met her during a golfing holiday in China. Having left her family's village at

the age of fifteen and lived independently in the city for several years, she missed that freedom and the social life, until her restaurant job gave her a small window into Edinburgh's comparatively quiet nightlife.

### **Chain migration and the matter of trust**

There are advantages for both parties when established Chinese business owners bring their relatives from Hong Kong or China as employees. Families who have recently arrived from Hong Kong are unlikely to possess either the capital or knowledge of the local economy necessary to start their own business, so generally begin by working for other people. From the business owners' point of view, family members may be a cheap and reliable form of labour for restaurants and takeaways. It is not easy to recruit workers from within the UK, as British-born Chinese young people no longer want to work in catering. The alternative options could be to hire non-Chinese, or new migrants from mainland China who are coming to Britain but often have no friends or relations here. The first option is unappealing for various reasons. One is that, as described above, over the decades in which Chinese migrants have developed their catering industry, social structures and habits have developed within restaurants in which the restaurant people see no place for non-Chinese.

Another element in the preference for employing other Chinese was one of trust. I encountered this issue directly when, in order to gain access to the takeaways where so many Scottish Chinese spent much of their waking hours, I looked for a job as a counter assistant. At first, I simply walked into some local restaurants and asked if they had a vacancy: I was told that there was no vacancy, or else that it was essential to speak fluent Cantonese in order to communicate with the kitchen workers. Chinese friends told me that the language requirement was untrue, since many takeaways computerize their orders or simply use numbers as shorthand for the dishes ordered. Later I looked for job ads in the Chinese supermarket and rang to apply, but was told that they would not hire a student, since they had proved unreliable in the past. Eventually a friend who worked in a restaurant persuaded her boss to let me simply sit in the kitchen once a week, not to work but just observe and listen. The boss at first agreed, but later withdrew the invitation on the grounds that they were too busy. Several Chinese friends said later, only half in jest, that the restaurant owners were all worried about who I might be, an unknown white woman who might be a spy for the authorities checking on their employment practices or tax payment. One had even heard a story of a white employee who had worked in a



takeaway for several months before being unmasked as a tax inspector. Calum, a Scottish-born Chinese man now working in the financial sector in Hong Kong, had spent his teenage years “helping” his parents in their small takeaway in Edinburgh. This “help” included speaking to lawyers and accountants from a young age, and even filing the family’s tax returns. Calum suggested that few such small businesses could make any money if they did not evade tax to some extent. Occasionally somebody would be caught and fined, but mostly they would get by. Whatever the reason, I was not trusted to enter a Chinese business so I must rely on my informants’ accounts for details of this part of their lives.

Some spoke of bad experiences of employing strangers, such as the time when Jason’s family hired a local woman to work at the counter of their takeaway in a small village. She quit unexpectedly and they later found £50 missing from the till: after that they took on a Filipina mother and her teenage daughter, who continued working for them for more than a decade. Lana agreed that her parents would “never put a notice in the window saying, “We want staff”, never. I think the main thing was, the family really have an issue with trust, so unless it’s someone they know and can trust, they won’t take staff on.” Some employers do advertise for staff, for example on the email list of members of the Edinburgh Chinese Students and Scholars Association, or by posting handwritten cards in the window of the Chinese supermarket. However, most often vacancies are filled by word of mouth. Not only the children of business owners, but also adults who work for friends describe their work as “helping out”, thus underlining the social obligation and trust relationship which underlies their work together. The “helper” may or may not be paid, but work can be seen as a favour to the employer, because of the mutual respect which is shown in taking someone on.

The ideal “helper” is still a member of the family, however distantly related. New arrivals from Hong Kong and China require a work permit from a British employer, and are thus legally obliged to remain with this employer for a fixed period of time. This has obvious advantages to the employer who gains a worker for that time, and if the worker is a relative he or she may well accept a lower than average rate of pay. The employer-kinsmen will probably also arrange accommodation for the new arrival, and if necessary find school places for the children, further binding the relatives to them in a relationship of mutual obligation. The problem with this in practice is that newly arrived families do not always want to remain in their relatives’ employment once they have become settled in the UK, and

conversely they sometimes find that family members are less than supportive of them after they have arrived.

Ying and her husband, who arrived in Edinburgh with their small son in 2004, were almost entirely dependent on his father for their livelihood, and even their ability to live together as a family. Ying was born in mainland China, and worked as a sales assistant in Shenzhen before she was introduced to her husband, a Hong Kong-born chef who had gone to mainland China specifically in search of a wife. After they married, Ying could not obtain the legal permissions to join her husband in Hong Kong, and continued living apart from him in Shenzhen. She feels that her husband's family looked down on her, as a mainlander, and they never even met until after she gave birth to their first son. At that point, her father-in-law decided to pay for the young family to emigrate to Scotland where his grandson would have the chance of a better education and the opportunity to learn English. Ying's sister-in-law was already married and living in Edinburgh and she would arrange jobs and housing for them.

At first, both couples lived together in the sister-in-law's house. Ying's husband worked for his sister in her takeaway, and Ying cooked and kept house for them all. She describes this as a very tense and lonely time in her life. Hinting at the difficulties of adjusting to married life, in a new country and with a husband she had never shared a home with before, she said, "It's hard for two people to get along in the same house but for two families it's very difficult." After two years of saving most of his wages Ying, her husband and son moved out to their own flat, shortly before the sister-in-law gave birth to her own child, an event which Ying felt sure would cause even more friction between them. The competition between them continued in small ways: in autumn 2007 Ying and her husband bought a second car, a new Honda estate for Ying to drive while her husband used their old car to travel to and from work. She told me with some satisfaction that her sister-in-law had bought just the same model the day before, but Ying and her husband had obtained a better deal from the garage, which included a discounted MOT and a sunroof for the same price.

For a short time, Ying had a part-time job as an office cleaner, which she enjoyed as it reminded of her independent life as a single, wage-earning woman in Shenzhen. Although she gave this up on the birth of her second child, with her husband's wages alone they were able rapidly to achieve a yet more comfortable lifestyle. Her older son was in his second year of primary school and rapidly

becoming fluent of English. Once I asked Ying if she thought they would ever return to Hong Kong or China to live and she said she was sure she would stay until her younger son left school, as this was the whole purpose of their move to Scotland. When that goal was achieved, she might think again. By the time I met Ying in 2006, her husband had switched jobs to a restaurant owned by someone outside the family, and they were planning to move house again, from a small two-bedroom flat to a semi-detached house with a garden. When they moved at the end of 2007 Ying told me “I think that my life is getting much better now.” She and her husband were starting to think about the next stage in his career. They dreamed of renting their own commercial property and opening a Chinese restaurant of their own.

Ying and her husband did not stay long as employees of the relatives who had sponsored their migration. It is not only the new arrivals who can prove unreliable to their kin. More settled immigrants can ruthlessly exploit their relatives. Another couple, Vicky and David came to Scotland from Hong Kong with their then seven-year-old daughter in 1997. Vicky’s brother was here already and his wife helped them to rent a flat and arranged a place for their daughter at a state primary school which she knew to have a good academic record, as well as providing particularly strong support for children with English as an additional language. Before they came, Vicky and David had saved up a lot of money in Hong Kong, and used this to pay a deposit on a takeaway business which they opened, renting from a Scottish landlord in Leith. Seven months later the landlord sold the lease to a new (Chinese) landlord but didn’t return the deposit to them. They had to close the takeaway, because they could not continue under the new landlord without the deposit. For years they pursued the original landlord with help from a solicitor; the case did not go to court and in 2008 he finally returned their deposit.

Meanwhile Vicky’s brother opened a new takeaway in David’s name, but without his knowledge. The brother failed to pay business tax, but he was found out and the council sent David a bill for £15,000. He was deeply upset by this betrayal of trust as well as by the immediate problem of the debt. The financial situation was resolved but they have now fallen out with the brother and Vicky finds it extremely difficult. She cannot discuss the quarrel with her relatives in Hong Kong, because it would upset them to know what her brother had done, and she would be ashamed to discuss it with other Chinese people in Edinburgh.

Thus depending on relatives to be supportive can be a risky strategy, and increase the tendency of families to aim for autonomy as nuclear households, running

their own businesses, rather than exposing themselves to the danger of mistreatment by an employer, even one who as kin might be expected to treat the employee well.

### **Insiders and outsiders**

In December 2007 an ordinary evening of business at the restaurant where Jenny was working was interrupted by the arrival of officers from the UK Border Agency, acting on an anonymous tip-off to search for illegal workers. In the raid five of Jenny's colleagues were arrested, and four of them, all Malaysian Chinese men, were eventually deported as illegal immigrants (Edinburgh Evening News, 2008). The current government policy of cracking down on illegal migrant workers has introduced a new reason for Chinese restaurateurs to be cautious about whom they employ. One solution to the problem of shortage of labour in restaurants is to employ new migrants from mainland China, who may be prepared to accept lower wages than other workers, and have the advantage of native expertise in cooking Chinese food and, depending on their region of origin, knowledge of Cantonese. However not all of these migrants have entered the UK legally, and there are heavy financial penalties for employers who hire illegal workers. Ah Mei, a kitchen assistant in one of the longest-established and most expensive restaurants in Edinburgh, told me that there are also personal or cultural reasons why employers dislike new migrant workers from mainland China, saying that they do not know how to behave in this country. For example, she says that they smoke in the kitchen which is against the rules. Generally, the bosses prefer to employ Hong Kong Chinese or Vietnamese, as the mainlanders are *hou mahfan*, "too much trouble".

As I found, White Scottish people also attract suspicion and few are employed in Chinese businesses. To some extent, this appeared to be based on a racial stereotype that no Scottish person could be a reliable employee. On several occasions, people told me about former Scottish employees who had left the job after only a few days or weeks because they could not keep up with the pace of work. It was widely believed that Chinese people were simply more capable of hard work. The only exceptions that I came across were a few Polish women who were hired as waitresses; Polish migrants to Britain also have the reputation of working extremely hard. With the ethnic catering industry at saturation point, it certainly seemed true that people had to work very hard to remain competitive and make money.

These are some of the tensions, fears and suspicions which underlie employment in the catering trade, creating a climate where at times it seems as

though no one can really be trusted. There can be great solidarity in working alongside fellow immigrants, as Jenny found when she sought a job in a restaurant in order to meet Chinese-speaking friends. At the same time, the immigration raids are a reminder to those workers of their still precarious status as migrants within a wider political context. It would be wrong to portray the restaurants as cultural islands divorced from British life.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown that while the Scottish Chinese population is increasingly diverse, and by no means all Scottish Chinese people have worked in restaurants or takeaways, still this industry is central to the social, economic and family life of many migrants from Hong Kong and China. Many Chinese university students, temporarily resident in Scotland, take part-time jobs in catering businesses. I found that even new migrants who come to Scotland for other reasons, such as professional work or marriage to a white British person, are likely to make friends whose lives are dominated by work in catering: if they join any of the community organizations such as the Edinburgh Chinese Women Association or one of the Chinese community schools they will meet people who work in restaurants. Indeed, these community activities are organized around the needs of catering workers: for example, the women's group meets once a month on Mondays, a day when the majority of Chinese catering businesses are closed after the busy weekend trading.

I have described the structures of the Chinese catering trade in Edinburgh today, and how new migrants in particular find space in which to achieve a sense of upward social mobility. This demonstrates an attitude of hope for a better future, and the first generation of immigrants has consciously chosen to work very hard to establish catering businesses, in the anticipation of their children enjoying a more comfortable future life. British-born Chinese young people are fully aware of the wider possibilities in British society, and may be painfully aware of their own potential exclusion from opportunities because of their class and ethnic background. I have suggested, following Chun (1996) that this expectation of social exclusion may be a legacy of ethnic segregation, and the devaluing of Chinese culture in colonial Hong Kong. My data suggest that some British-born Chinese, like their parents, express a belief that they have fewer choices, and less possibility of entering the British professional classes, because of their Chinese background.

Many perceive catering work as low in social status and undesirable as anything other than a short-term occupation. This was already the case in the early 1980s, when Chan (1986) argued from his experience as a Hong Kong Chinese social worker in Edinburgh that most families were intent on preparing their children for careers outside catering, and preferably in the *sam si* (three professions) of law, accountancy or medicine. However, the stories of people who are working now in catering demonstrate that there is a complex social hierarchy within that industry, and it cannot be reduced to a single, shameful experience. Certainly most British-born Chinese would prefer to get away from the takeaway, to use their British education and fluent English to make their own choices from all the options available to them as young people in Britain. However, for some British Chinese people catering continues to be an attractive environment in which to pursue their individual goals.

In discussing the importance of trusting one's employees and colleagues, I have argued that there are strong commercial reasons for making a group based around ethnicity. Not only are other Chinese desirable as co-workers because of the ease of communication in the kitchen, and their prior expertise in cooking Chinese food; they are also in the shared, somewhat vulnerable position of needing to establish themselves on a stable financial basis, and they also experience the same fear of losing that stability. The example of raids on Chinese restaurants by immigration officers shows that this fear can be based in reality.

At the same time, I have shown that the assumption that one can trust fellow group members – whether that group is defined by kinship or ethnicity – may be misplaced. Vicky's story of betrayal by a brother is just one example of the breakdown of trust. In subsequent chapters I will return to the idea that individualism – or at least the withdrawal from reliance on a wider collective into the security of the nuclear family – is a fairly common phenomenon among the families in this study. Self-reliance was the virtue most admired in their restaurant-owning families by British-born Chinese young people like Lana, and she expressed the view that relying on one's own ability and business acumen was a more secure, not to mention lucrative, option than risking one's fortune and personal happiness in the wider job market. British employers, and colleagues could be just as unreliable as other Chinese, in appearing welcoming but turning out to be racist or merely unsupportive. For some British Chinese people at least it is preferable to enjoy the security and stability of a respectable income through self-employment in the catering trade.

Later in the thesis I will explore further whether my informants always believe it is better to maintain a good life in the present, or take risks and make sacrifices in the hope of a better future. In the next chapter I will step back a few years in the story of British Chinese families, to look at the choices which immigrant parents have made for the care of their young children. This focus on domestic lives will provide another angle on the discussion of individualization in Chinese societies, and give another example of the everyday practices through which the reproduction of culture, and specifically the reproduction and transformation of ideas about ethnicity, take place.

## Chapter 2

### Tiger mothers with feather dusters? Parenting choices for restaurant families

It is late summer in 2006, and the Lee On restaurant in Tollcross is packed with Chinese families who have come out for their regular Sunday lunch, a weekly ritual on a day when everyone is free: there is no school and most takeaway shops remain closed until the evening, so families make time to be together. Earlier in the week there was excitement throughout Scotland as school pupils received the results of their Standard and Higher Grade exams. Now it would become clear who would succeed and who would be disappointed in their hopes to attend a preferred university or college, and younger students would make important choices for the remainder of their school careers, deciding whether to remain at school for further academic study or to transfer to college for a vocational course. Other sixteen-year-olds would opt to leave full-time education altogether.

Diana is eating lunch with her mother and father, and although they were thrilled by her exam results – she has a clutch of Highers with top marks – they are not talking about it, but quietly enjoying the food. Theirs is one of the smallest tables as Diana is an only child and they have no relatives in Edinburgh. At other tables three generations are seated together and chatting noisily in Cantonese. Diana recognizes most of the people in the room as acquaintances of her parents, whom they often see on occasions such as this. Others she knows from Chinese school, which Diana attends every Saturday and where her mother is a Cantonese language teacher. As they are eating, Diana notices several people including Mei Mei, one of the other Chinese school teachers who have risen from their seats and are going from table to table, asking each family with teenagers how they fared in the school exams. Young people are staring at their hands, embarrassed. Diana and her parents exchange amused glances, and Diana comments “What is going on here?” Recounting this episode to me later, Diana laughs ironically at Mei Mei’s behaviour, “It’s not as though *her* son did all that well in his exams.” Mei Mei’s son had struggled at his state secondary school, and so his parents moved him to a private school hoping that he would meet a “better”, more hard-working group of friends. The boy’s grades did not improve as a result of the change of school, and a year later Mei Mei told me that he had decided to train as a car mechanic, rather than go to



university. In public she was sanguine about this decision, telling me she wanted him to do what would make him happy, and there was no point pushing him to take a university degree which he would dislike, and probably abandon half way through.

Having come to know both Diana and her mother over several months, I can say that their behaviour on the occasion she described was typical of them, and demonstrates the way her parents have brought Diana up. Not only is she a high-achieving, ambitious young woman, but she also displays excellent moral virtues of modesty and devotion to her parents. This, they believe, is the result of conscious decisions with regard to parenting style and the organization of family life. In this chapter I discuss the academic success of Scottish-Chinese children in relation to their family lives and in particular to their parents' strategies for bringing up children. I will look in particular at two aspects of parent-child relationships: firstly the ways in which Scottish Chinese families have organized their work and living arrangements in relation to their children's education, and secondly their understanding of the moral role of parents in guiding their children's emotional and social development. By presenting the life stories of three generations of Chinese migrants to Scotland, I will suggest that there has been an increasing desire of parents to keep their children physically close to them, and to spend more time together, just as the children have become progressively more culturally distant from them, both in their schooling and use of language.

The description which opened the chapter was intended to show that questions of parenting, and the results of parents' investment in their children, are a very public and social concern. I will argue that the issue of childcare and relationships between the generations is central to the way Scottish Chinese people view themselves, as well as the way they are perceived by non-Chinese people. These intimate, domestic practices are very important to the definition of a cultural or ethnic minority, as they are contrasted or compared favourably with the supposed "norms" of the British majority population. Chinese families have made their homes in Scotland for many years, occupy the same spaces and use many of the same services as other residents, and yet the prevailing discourse on ethnic minorities and multiculturalism continues to highlight the differences between them and white Scots. In multicultural Britain distinctive moral/ethical codes are often cited as examples of the differences between minority and majority ethnic groups. At the heart of multiculturalism is respect for, even deference to minority values. As was discussed in the introduction to the thesis, anthropologists such as Wikan (2002)

have argued that this principle can in fact do more harm than good to individual immigrants and their children, not least by stereotyping and making simplistic assumptions about the ethical behaviour of individuals based on generalizations about “cultural norms”.

British Chinese are often considered a “model ethnic minority” because of their stereotypical moral values – the positive virtues of hard work, self-reliance and strong loyalty to the family. When asked to reflect self-consciously on their own identity, in contrast to the white Scottish majority, British Chinese people will themselves refer to these stereotypical ethical principles. Attempting to explain this to me one day, a British-born Chinese woman in her thirties remarked casually that “here you just leave your old people in homes, but we wouldn’t do that, we really respect old people.” Other value-based definitions of ethnicity revolved around the behaviour of white Scottish young people, as my Chinese informants frequently expressed their concern about the corrupting influence on their children of white Scottish friends who drank alcohol, smoked and generally displayed lazy attitudes to work and study, in implicit contrast to the more abstemious and hard-working habits of many Chinese migrant adults.

There has been a great deal of recent attention to Chinese parenting style and educational achievement of Chinese children, both in the academic literature and in the popular press. The situation of Chinese children in the West is surprising in the context of discourses on multiculturalism, especially in the field of education, which often assume that minority ethnic groups are disadvantaged and in need of remedial help (Gillborn, 1997; Great Britain. Department for Education and Skills, 2005). A large body of literature in the anthropology and sociology of education and childhood has looked at the position of immigrant families in Western societies, where education was viewed as integral to their assimilation (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Jacob & Jordan, 1993; Ogbu, 1978). Many of these studies rest on the assumption that children from minority groups experience problems in Western schools because of a conflict between the language, behaviour and cultural norms of their home environment, and the majority cultural styles which dominate in school. It is frequently observed that Chinese children behave differently from their peers in British classrooms, being quiet and reluctant to ask questions or to challenge the teacher’s authority. This behaviour is ascribed to Chinese cultural values, contrasted with the child-centred, expressive ethos of the Western school system and blamed by teachers for the failure of Chinese children to integrate fully into the life of the

school (Archer & Francis, 2005; Baker, 1977; Garvey & Jackson, 1975; Ran, 2001; Taylor, 1987; Woodrow & Sham, 2001). Arguing to the contrary, some scholars have concluded that the high academic performance of children from “Confucian heritage” families can be attributed to desirable cultural values of obedience, discipline and hard work which are said to be inculcated in children from a young age (DeVos, 1973; Flynn, 1991; Hau & Salili, 1996; Louie, 2004). Differences have been found between Asian people, who assume that individual effort secures success, and Westerners who believe in innate academic ability (Cassidy et al., 2006; Stevenson & Lee, 1990). These attitudes are increasingly viewed as something to be admired and indeed emulated by non-Chinese students, for example in a recent policy briefing paper entitled “What more can we take away from the Chinese community?” (Daothong, 2010).

Parental control of children’s behaviour is another cross-cultural variable of interest to anthropologists, a phenomenon which casts light on cultural ideas about the nature of the person and the relation of the individual to the community. Chao and Sue (1996) build on work by Baumrind (1967) who identified parenting styles predictive of school success. Of three possible parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative and permissive) authoritative parenting, characterized by high parental control, combined with warmth, usually produces academically successful children in Western societies. However, American studies have generally found Chinese parents to be not authoritative but authoritarian, demanding obedience and showing little support. This apparent paradox fails to explain the success of Chinese American children in school. Chao (1994) argues that Baumrind’s concept of authoritarianism is Eurocentric and fails to capture the Chinese style, which is in fact more about organizing than dominating children. While Chinese American parents have little interaction with their children’s teachers and school environment, at home they are actively involved in training their children for learning, focusing them from an early age on schoolwork.

The image of the domineering and ambitious Chinese “tiger mother” has recently entered the public arena, both through media debate of individual cases such as the American Chinese mother Amy Chua, author of *Battle hymn of the tiger mother* (A. Chua, 2011) and in policy documents (Daothong, 2010; Modood, 2004) which hold up Asian parents in general as models of successful parenting. My Scottish-Chinese informants recognized the stereotypes but generally did not

consider that they themselves – or indeed anyone they knew personally – behaved as “tiger mothers.” One Edinburgh Chinese mother wrote to me in an email (2011):

The UK version of Amy Chua would be Vanessa Mae’s mother, the famous violinist. She was on a TV programme, telling about her tyrant mother and her childhood. I suppose it all depends on individual mother – how much does she want their child to be successful and famous. For me, the most important is: the children will be able to get a decent job and that they are happy with it.

While most of the people I met denied that they – or their own parents – would push their children to extraordinary success, many of the British-born generation spoke about forms of discipline at home which they considered “old-fashioned Chinese” and contrasted with Western treatment of children. Often they would mention grandparents in particular punishing disobedient children by hitting them with a feather duster or a stick. I will return to the issue of discipline in the second part of the chapter, after describing the larger picture of family decision-making in connection with childcare and education.

### **Life stories: three generations bringing up children in the West**

The education-related decisions taken by migrant families include the choice of carers for children. Rogoff (2003) has noted that the contemporary Western preference for parents, usually mothers, to be primary and often sole carers of young children is not a cultural universal. In many societies, children receive daily care from members of the extended family, including siblings or other children, or indeed non-related adults may be employed as carers. Ethnographies of migration have drawn attention to the practice of “transnational parenthood” in families separated by labour migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Schmalzbauer, 2005). For the first-generation migrant restaurant workers described by Watson (1975) the demands of work made it difficult for parents to bring their children to Britain, and many remained in the New Territories with their grandparents. A British parliamentary committee expressed concern about the practice of sending children back to Hong Kong (Great Britain. Home Affairs Committee, 1985) and Garvey and Jackson (1975) argued that children were deeply unhappy on their reunion with their parents in Britain, as a result of the early separation.

This section presents the stories of three families, arriving in Scotland from Hong Kong at different times, who took different decisions concerning the care of

their children. As I discuss the choices made by individual families with regard to child care and schooling, I also consider the various factors which affect these choices: the particular constraints of parents working long hours in catering; the geographical separation of many households from their extended families; their hopes and aspirations for the children's formal education; and the parents' willingness to trust other people to care for their children. This relates to people's sense of security and belonging in British society: often parents would express negative emotions such as fear over their children's physical safety as well as their harmful influence of British values on their moral development. They also anticipated condemnation of their parenting choices by non-Chinese neighbours, demonstrating a view of "British" and "Chinese" practices and values as contrasting and often conflicting.

### **1970s: grandparent socialization**

Mrs Shek moved to Scotland from Hong Kong as a young bride in the 1960s: her husband and his five siblings all came and opened small takeaway shops in Edinburgh and the surrounding area. Everybody was needed to work the long hours to establish the family business, so when Mrs Shek's babies were born she took them back to Hong Kong to be cared for by her parents until they reached school age. Watson described this as the usual practice for childcare when he started his fieldwork in an emigrant village in the New Territories there in the late sixties. He refers to a "crisis of discipline" among children left in the village, where grandparents would over-indulge them, to the despair of the village schoolteachers (Watson 1975: 192-5).

From another point of view, British educationalists in the 1970s condemned Chinese immigrant parents for sending their children away (Garvey and Jackson 1975). At that time children of Chinese origin were seen to struggle and under-achieve in British schools, and British teachers put much of this down to what they saw as the traumatic experience of having been separated from their parents during the early years, then brought to the UK at the age of five or six to live with parents whom they barely remembered. From a Western perspective, it seemed harmful for a child to be separated from his parents, and this reflects the established norm of the nuclear family. From a Chinese point of view, perhaps, these children were not experiencing a huge disruption because they were still being cared for by members of the extended family.

Mrs Shek justifies her own decision to send the children away not simply as an economic necessity, but also a rational and purposeful strategy to keep the family together. She says that other Chinese families in Britain in the 1960s chose British private foster carers to look after their children for up to six days a week, including overnight. This practice was not dissimilar to childcare arrangements in Hong Kong (D. Martin, 1997) where factory workers often arranged for their children to stay with paid foster carers for much of the time. According to Martin's analysis, the need of parents, and especially mothers, to pursue a career took precedence over any belief that a small child should remain with its mother as principal carer. When Chinese children were fostered in Scotland, their parents would see them once a week, but this was not enough to prevent the children rapidly becoming more fluent in English than Cantonese, and over time forming stronger emotional attachments to the foster carers than to their own parents. There was one case in Edinburgh which I heard about indirectly from three or four different people, where the courts had to intervene to decide custody arrangements for a Chinese child who no longer wanted to return to his parents' home because he felt more secure with his white Scottish foster carers. All of the Chinese parents who told me about that case thought it was shameful that the child's parents should have allowed the situation to reach that point. It was to avoid that extreme scenario of family breakdown that Mrs Shek decided her children should be brought up by their grandparents in Hong Kong.

When her children reached school age, Mrs Shek brought them to live with her in Scotland. Since she and her husband were still very busy at work, and spoke poor English, they realised that they could not help their children with their schoolwork. In common with many of their contemporaries, they decided to send their children to private schools, assuming that the teachers would have the time and resources to give the children the direction they required. An Edinburgh-born Chinese man describes this ironically as a "typically Cantonese approach: if you have a problem, just throw money at it." The cost could represent a significant financial sacrifice for the parents, as Mrs Shek told me: "For years we lived in a tiny flat, and I drove a very old and ordinary car. All our money went on my son's school fees." She also boasts that although she was working in a takeaway and had very little time to spend with her son, she used their time together for the maximum benefit: as she drove him to school every morning she would question him about his lessons and ask whether he had any problems or difficulties understanding the teacher.

### **1980s: Children “under the cooker”**

By the 1980s, more Chinese parents were choosing to keep their children with them in Scotland. Tommy, the father of two young sons, had no option in the matter as his own parents had also moved to Britain and they were busy running their own restaurant in another city. His wife’s parents lived in mainland China and could not take care of the grandchildren. Tommy describes how his wife would carry her sons on her back as she worked at the hot wok in their takeaway shop, constantly aware of the physical danger of the working environment but having no other option but keep them there. When the boys were older, they spent evenings playing among the sacks of rice in a storeroom at the back of the shop. It would have been more interesting for them to watch TV by the counter, but their parents knew that the customers might not like to see children there. They were afraid of being reported to the authorities for child cruelty.

Similarly, Lily, who was born in Glasgow in the 1970s, recalled as a young teenager being left alone at home with her brother while their parents were at work, leaving strict instructions not to open the curtains in case the neighbours saw. In fact, the children would often sneak out of the house to meet their Chinese friends, whose parents were also out working in their restaurants until late in the evening. Brothers and sisters would collude with each other to answer the phone when their parents called to check that everyone was safe at home.

Although it seems to be less common now, my informants told me that there are still British-Chinese families, especially young couples running their own takeaway shops with no outside help, who keep their small children “under the cooker”, as Tommy put it, and leave their teenagers unsupervised rather than pay a stranger to take care of them. Many have no option as it would be hard to find a childcare provider who would look after children during the evening or overnight, and the cost would be prohibitive.

If we are to ask how children learn about ethics and good behaviour, then these examples may show how the children of immigrants first acquire a sense of stigma and moral condemnation surrounding their parents’ choices and daily practices. Intertwined with the family’s sense of their own difference, and derived from their distinctive work in the ethnic catering industry, is the knowledge that their family life is considered abnormal and even pathological by wider society: my informants were constantly aware of their parents’ fear of condemnation by

neighbours or customers who might accuse them of neglecting their children. British Chinese people themselves, including Mrs Shek who cited the case of a boy taken from his parents by law, take the view that the consequence of all this is broken trust between the generations, and the loss of respect by children for their parents.

### **2000s. Child-centred families.**

Lily, who has unhappy memories of a lonely childhood with her parents usually absent from the family home, decided when she got married that she would not have children until she and her husband could take care of them themselves, i.e. without the help of grandparents or anyone else. In fact, her husband earns a good income from his restaurant, so it has been possible for Lily to stay at home with their two children. She spends much of her time driving her son and daughter to swimming lessons, karate club and children's birthday parties, as well as to learn Mandarin at Chinese school on Saturdays. Her children's busy lives, which are barely distinguishable from those of their white Scottish classmates, differ enormously from Lily's own experience of isolation and boredom as a child in Glasgow twenty years ago.

This change in circumstances is also associated with British Chinese people choosing to leave the catering industry and seek other kinds of work. Tommy, who previously ran a takeaway shop with his wife, keeping their small boys hidden from the customers, sold the business when their first son started high school. Tommy took a job as a postman, which he describes to me as the best decision of his life. Meanwhile his wife became a care assistant. He gives two reasons for the move: first, it allowed them to support the boys' education by being at home in the evenings, but secondly, it made it possible for the parents to take days off, and take annual holidays, something they could never do when they were running their own business.

Parents such as Lily and Tommy contrast their lives favourably with those of relatives still living in Hong Kong. They speak of the huge pressure on their Chinese nieces and nephews to perform well at school, and of the physical harm done to children by reading too much and carrying very heavy book bags to school each day. In contrast, they were proud that in Scotland it was possible for their sons and daughters to enjoy a more leisured childhood, and because they had all grown accustomed to a gentler and less competitive pace of life, neither the first-generation migrants nor the British-born children I spoke to were keen to move to Hong Kong



or China to live. This preference for a more relaxed lifestyle was interesting, considering the prevailing stereotype in Britain of all Chinese parents as driven and determined for their children to work extremely hard.

The present desire of Edinburgh's Chinese families to live as a nuclear unit under one roof, and for children to attend school for the longest time possible, represents a notable shift from the parents' own experience of childhood. Whether "indigenous" people from the farming and fishing villages of the New Territories, or urban Chinese from Kowloon and Hong Kong, the majority of Chinese adults now living in Edinburgh describe their own childhoods as severely disrupted by historical events and by earlier migrations. Many of the now elderly restaurateurs in Mrs Shek's generation grew up in villages of the New Territories which were badly affected by the Japanese invasion (1938-41). In one interview Mr Leung, now aged seventy, recalled this dangerous time. His parents were killed in the occupation and Mr Leung, as a young boy, was taken in by relatives in southern China. Here they became caught up in the Red Army's guerrilla campaign against the Kuomintang. At the age of eight Mr Leung was working as a spy for the Red Army, running with messages between villages at night. In a later conversation he laughs as he tells me about his own grandchildren, with their thirst for mobile phones and designer clothes, living a luxurious life which could hardly contrast more starkly with his own childhood.

Many of those parents who come from urban Hong Kong are the children of refugees who left everything behind as they fled southern China after the revolution. Dorothy's parents both originate from Guangdong and experienced loss and disruption in their youth. Her mother was a small child when her family escaped from Guangzhou city to Hong Kong. In the chaos, the little girl became separated from her parents and was later adopted by a wealthy factory owner. When she was in her teens she decided to look for her natural parents and was reunited with them in Hong Kong, where she remained with them, although they were never able to form a close emotional attachment, and she always felt angry with them for "abandoning" her. Dorothy's father had no father figure in his own life. He was a "bought" son, adopted from a poor family by a wealthy woman whose husband had emigrated from Guangdong to the US and never returned, leaving his wife childless.

Dorothy was one of five children born to this couple. When she was born in Hong Kong in the 1950s there was such overcrowding that children were sent to school in two shifts. She attended a different shift from her brothers and sisters, so

spent very little time with them. At the age of eleven she had to leave school in order to take a job in a garment factory. Her father gambled away much of the family's income so her mother relied on the older children to bring in some money to supplement what she could make by taking in dressmaking work. Dorothy made her contribution, but used her own share of her wages to finance her secondary education through evening classes. Eventually she won a scholarship to study abroad and returned to Hong Kong with a university degree to teach English. She later married a Scottish man and came to live with him in Edinburgh, becoming a housewife for the first time when her children were born. She is determined that her Scottish-born children would be free to follow their own interests and to make the most of opportunities for study which she was denied as a child.

Many Chinese parents whose children are now of school age speak very positively about a British culture which prioritizes the needs of children, and are making economic choices for the family based on the desire to spend time together. If the first generation of migrants, like Mrs Shek, were totally absorbed with the task of establishing themselves economically, then the next generation are reaping the benefit with greater financial security and the possibility of educating their children.

### **The moral duty of parents**

Diana, the A-grade student with whose story the chapter began, claims she is very unusual among Scottish-Chinese teenagers in working hard at school and going to university, and gives credit for this to her parents, who decided that her mother should remain at home with her and not go out to work as many other Chinese women do. In an email to me, she wrote:

I think having an adult “idol” or in general, someone to “look up on” is important for any child growing up because we tend to imitate the people around us. And for me I had my parents looking after me, to tell me what's right and what's wrong and to actually have the time to nurture me and to teach me. Whereas with a lot of teenagers here, their parents have been working in takeaways ever since they were born, they have just grown up with parents too busy to look after them and to teach them, a lot I know have been going to work with their parents during opening hours – for example 4:30pm till 12am. so that in itself disrupts their education and their willingness to learn because there's that lack of motivation, the parents are too busy in the takeaway they don't bother to help their kids with homework. Although some have their grandparents at home to take care of them

which is good. So the only people they have to look up on is basically just the people in school and unfortunately many meet the wrong kids who are spoiled by their parents with no willingness to learn.

At home there's just no serious morals or values being taught, kids just go to work with their parents at a takeaway at a young age until they are teenagers and being in that sort of work environment doesn't exactly encourage them to learn properly or to even concentrate. Whereas with say me and my friend, we had parents at home to form that emotional bond and to also nurture us in all aspects – that also reminds me, that's probably the reason why a lot of the teenagers here rebel all the time – they lack that emotional bond with their parents.

Diana's parents are both employed part-time in a small restaurant and Vicky describes her household to me as “quite a normal Chinese family.” One day I asked her what a good parent should do to prepare her child for the future. She answered, “I have to teach her how to make the right choices, how to get along with people (Cantonese *jouh yahn*). The teachers at school can tell her things I don't know, but I have to teach her how to be a good person.” This statement in part reflects the great difference in the experience of schooling between Vicky, who had completed a few years of primary education in Hong Kong before her family's poverty obliged her to leave school to start work in a factory at the age of eleven, and her now seventeen-year-old daughter, Diana. They had emigrated to Scotland when Diana was seven years old, and she had quickly become more fluent in English than in Cantonese. At the time of my fieldwork, Diana was preparing to take her final-year school exams with the intention of studying law at university.

Vicky's self-defined role as moral guide to her daughter was brought to the fore when Diana came home from high school weeping one day because she had discovered that her boyfriend, also a British-born Chinese teenager, had been seeing another girl. For days Diana appeared anxious and miserable, and barely spoke to either of her parents. One day Vicky accidentally discovered a long letter which Diana had written to the boy in which she told him she was so low, she had thought of suicide. The fact that the letter was in English, which Vicky struggled to read, only compounded her distress at the knowledge that her daughter was so deeply unhappy but unable to communicate this to her mother. Confronting her daughter in Cantonese, she begged her to talk about her worries. Diana merely told her not to worry, and assured her that she was dealing with the situation in her own way. Vicky

remained deeply concerned that the emotional upset would unbalance Diana, especially as she approached her exams and needed to be as calm as possible.

Vicky clearly saw it as her responsibility as Diana's mother to help her navigate the emotionally stormy sea of her love affair. Vicky longed to guide her daughter to a resolution of the problem, to help her to react in a dignified and mature way, but was frustrated by the linguistic barrier between them, which added to a teenager's reluctance to share her inner life with her parents.

### **A parent's role in education**

Related to this question is the extent to which children accept their parents' advice in making educational and career decisions. It has been argued that British Chinese children are more likely than their white classmates to take their parent's views into consideration (Cassidy et al. 2006; Francis & Archer 2005). Louie's (2004) research in New York likewise found that parents had strong influence over their children's educational choices and aspirations, and even where children did not conform to their parents' wishes, they felt some guilt and anxiety about this.

Approaches to the education of children in Scotland are heavily influenced by parents' understandings of the school system in Hong Kong. When asked why it is that Chinese parents expect their children to study so hard, and why it is that at least some children oblige, many of my informants would say that it is because this is expected in Hong Kong schools. Most of the families in Edinburgh have relatives still in Hong Kong, and comparisons are made between the schooling of cousins at home and overseas. It is also known that in Hong Kong there is fierce competition for good jobs, so that only those with excellent results in education stand a chance. Thus, parents assume that the same must apply in Scotland. The influence of the Hong Kong style also affects subject choices. One mother, herself uneducated, said, "I knew that physics and chemistry were important subjects in Hong Kong, so I made sure that my son picked those courses in high school."

The mismatch between these assumptions and the reality for young people in education in Britain can cause serious friction within families. One father was furious to learn that his elder son had graduated in medicine with a second-class degree. He shouted at him that he had brought shame on the family and wasted his time. When the second son was awarded a 2:2 from the University of Edinburgh, and immediately got a job as a Business Analyst at a major bank, he did not even tell his

parents for several weeks, because he was so afraid of their reaction to the news that he had not achieved a higher class in his degree.

Other parents are simply unable to converse with their children about their schooling. Mrs Chan, who works six days a week in a takeaway shop and speaks almost no English, could not tell me what subjects her seventeen-year-old son was taking. “If he could tell me in Cantonese I might know,” she said, “But he doesn’t know the words.”

### **Parental control over children’s behaviour**

While they may lack the knowledge and linguistic skills needed to help their children with academic work, many parents see their role as teaching them discipline, and protecting them from possible harm. This can extend to behaviour which the children can perceive as over-protective, in comparison with the relative lenience of white Scottish parents. It has recently been argued that one reason for the education success of British Asian (including Chinese) parents is that they strive to protect their children from some of the negative influences of Western youth culture (Modood, 2004).

Chris, the sixteen-year-old British-born son of Tommy the postman, told me about his family’s “house rules”. When he was younger he would regularly show his Dad his school homework but now he’s “beyond a certain level” he feels there is no point, as Tommy would be unable to comment on it. When he was younger they would always ask him when he came home from school: “What homework have you got, son?” and they would ask every day until he had finished it. He laughs, “There was no way I could forget to do my homework!” Now, if he ever fails to do his work, he says they shout at him. He has a desk in his room, space to work and says, “I work at my own pace.”

Chris complains that he is never allowed to go to sleepovers at the home of his school friends: his dad always objects that he would not get enough sleep, and would be too tired for school (or Chinese school) the next day. He has never been allowed to bring a friend home with him either. His parents say they have so much stuff lying around, they would not be able to see if anything had been stolen. Chris says, “There’s a basic lack of trust.” He only has one friend whom his parents trust, a Chinese boy whose auntie used to work with them.

Chris says, “My parents always know where I am.” He is allowed to go into town and to his friends’ houses at weekends – not on school nights, unless it’s for

revision – but his father always comes to collect him in the car and he must state the time he will leave and keep to it. Tommy is fierce about punctuality and has a catchphrase, “The only time you can be late is for your own death!” The one time he became furious and grounded both boys was after Chris’s older brother Paul had been half an hour late in coming out of a concert. Tommy displays the same commitment to punctuality in his own life: he worries about being late for work and always sets off in the car much earlier than he needs to, in case of problems en route. That means a very early rise for his shifts as a postman. He collects the boys from school by car every day (unusually, as many secondary school pupils travel to and from school independently by foot or on public transport) and he always arrives early for that, too.

Another absolute rule is no drinking, smoking or drugs. Tommy and his wife do not object to people having the occasional drink for a special occasion, but hate the British habit of binge drinking. “Good people lose control of themselves when they’re drunk,” Tommy points out. He tells me he often fears for the boys’ safety when they go out with friends: a drunk person might attack them because they are “foreigners”. If they themselves drink too much, they might take unnecessary risks. He also acknowledges that drugs are a problem for some Chinese, but tells the boys not to get involved because of the harm it can do to their brains.

Chris is learning judo. He sees it as a good way to get fit, but for his father it is a valuable skill for self-defence. He quotes the story of a Chinese man who was punched at random by a stranger while waiting at a bus stop in Princes Street, and is exasperated by the way that his sons apparently underestimate the threat to them as visible foreigners.

Tommy’s anxieties, and his strategies for controlling them by setting strict limits for his teenage sons, arose from their inevitable exposure to Scottish norms of behaviour for young people. As they grew older, he and his wife were no longer able to shelter them from these harmful influences, as they had done when the boys were tiny and had stayed under the watch of both parents in the takeaway kitchen. Western parents also may be mistaken to believe that they have the greatest influence over their children’s development: peers and siblings are equally and sometimes more influential (Harris, 1999). However, for immigrant parents the sense of powerlessness can be all the harder to accept.

In many ways, contemporary British culture supports a shift in power from adults to children, and this can cause great anxiety to some Chinese parents of

British-born children. One Hong Kong-born mother who teaches at a Chinese community language school complained to me that her students regularly fail to do homework, and answer back if she shouts at them, telling her that she is not “respecting their rights”. Her friend, also the mother of teenagers, agreed that it was almost impossible to discipline her own children, and said that her daughter had once threatened to phone the telephone helpline, ChildLine, if her mother scolded her. In response to my question about Amy Chua’s “tiger mother” approach to parenting overseas-born Chinese children, this mother said,

I believe Chua’s experience is familiar to every Chinese mother and we won’t be surprised. My family turned into a war zone a few years ago and I had pulled a white flag. Sometimes I wonder the rebellion genes in children is common which always target the ‘mother’. It seems to happen to all children regardless of their nationalities.

However, when Chua thought that she was right by copying her own childhood life to her daughters, she failed to consider the two different cultural environments of where she and her daughters brought up from. I assume her parents are both Chinese so she didn’t have other choice while her daughters are Eurasians and they have choices to go for East &/or West culture. Chua also neglected the education system here which tells children their human rights on the first day of school while she probably did not know her rights until she got her PhD.

While these two Hong Kong-born mothers smiled wryly as they told these stories, they expressed frustration as adults forced to reconsider their own roles and positions in relation to the younger generation. They could not fall back on the model of adult behaviour which they had observed from their own parents and teachers, in deciding how to discipline their own children.

### **Children’s care for their parents**

While Scottish Chinese parents try hard to guide their children, and protect them from harm, on many occasions it is the children who must take responsibility for their parents’ well-being. The phenomenon of children becoming “linguistic brokers” for their immigrant parents is well documented. Because they speak fluent English, the children of immigrants frequently take on responsibility for household matters which would normally not be their responsibility, such as dealing with government agencies, handling tax matters and accompanying their parents to medical appointments, a situation which can be embarrassing for all concerned. In an

anonymous blog, one young Scottish-Chinese student expressed her frustration at her parents' dependence on her for both practical and financial support:

I have to wake up at 6am tomorrow to do another past paper and wait until the council people opens so I can phone them up. damn the government, I think my parents would be better off if they were in hong kong but they refuse to go back and sometimes I get angry with them because them wanting to stay here troubles me a lot too – but I can't tell them that because they will just go back unhappily.

Sometimes I think what they expect from me is a little overboard – for example occasionally they ask (politely) if I could just give them as much as I can from my bank account, or if it's for holiday, to tell them when I can save up £1000. Or they ask me to phone the council, to help them print stuff, copy stuff, fix stuff...sometimes I think it's a bit too much to ask from me, from a daughter of a family who is supposed to be the one being helped with all the things she's helping them to do. However, I guess my family is different and there is no one there to help them. That is why I am so vulnerable, I have no one to turn to because honestly, I don't look at my parents as someone who can help me or protect me because they really can't, I don't look up to them or see them as a good example. I know it is sad but it is the truth.

British Chinese people are of course aware of the traditional values of filial piety. As studies such as those by Ikels (2004) and Yan (2003) demonstrate, this value is more often thought of in relation to the care of the elderly by their children, rather than the socialization of children, perhaps because the former is emerging as a more pressing social problem in many East Asian societies. However, in my conversations with British-Chinese parents I heard a great deal more about their children than about their elderly relatives. In this section, I use data from a set of interview with Edinburgh Chinese elders to ask whether this older generation feels the same sense of alarm about the “westernization” of their offspring as parents of younger children.

During a weekly lunch club at Cathay Court, a sheltered housing development for Chinese elders, I chatted with Mr Lam, a man now in his seventies and widely recognized within Edinburgh's Cantonese-speaking community as a successful restaurateur and leading figure in charitable projects. One such project is the Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association. This Association emerged in the 1980s as an offshoot of a number of local Chinese business associations. As the members of these restaurant-owners' associations began to approach retirement, they



took advantage of government funding available at that time to form an organization which would meet the needs of elderly Chinese people, running a weekly lunch club, day care and an advice service. The elderly association has also supported the opening of Cathay Court, which now houses about fifty elders.

Knowing that Mr Lam had grown up in the New Territories at a time when it would be normal for elderly people to live with their adult children, I asked him if he thought it was sad that elders should now be living in a place like Cathay Court, separated from their families. He immediately said no: on the contrary, most of the residents were there by choice and felt that living apart was far preferable to sharing with the younger generation who would only “pick on them” and have quarrels because of their different opinions and habits: the food they eat, the way they dress, and so on. The elders did not need or expect their children to give them money. On the one hand, retired people like Mr Lam were quite comfortably off with their state pensions and private savings, and on the other he took it for granted that his children and grandchildren would need all the money they earned to finance a higher standard of living than that which his own generation had ever expected. He laughingly told me that his grandchildren are always asking him for money to buy mobile phones and designer clothes. “Chinese children love expensive things,” he said; “I don’t know if it’s the same for Western kids – I don’t know any.”

To some extent Mr Lam’s reference to the consumerist desires of his Scottish-born grandchildren echoes the concerns of some Xiajia elders in Yan’s (2003) study about the materialism of the young in rural China. However, Mr Lam spoke with more amusement than disapproval when he told me about his family members’ love of gadgets. In comparison with the sense of “moral crisis” which Yan has identified in northern China, in relation to the abandonment of elderly people by their selfish children, British Chinese elders like Mr Lam express little or no concern that their children do not support them financially or by living together. Clearly, the ethnographic context is different in many ways, not least in the fact that Chinese elders in Britain are eligible to receive state benefits (and, in Scotland, free personal care) and need not depend on their family for their basic needs

On the contrary, Mr Lam and other men of his generation are proud that their offspring have gained the economic and social capital which enables them to live separate and very different lives from their parents. Towards the end of his life, Mr Lam finds himself indulging the expensive tastes of his grandchildren. As a young man in his twenties, the only son of poor fishing people in the New Territories, he

had become the main breadwinner for his whole family, when his parents decided that he should travel abroad to the UK to work in a restaurant on their behalf. His experience was typical of his generation of migrants in the early 1960s who were mostly young men coming alone to earn as much money as possible for dependants at home. Now in retirement Mr Lam does not express any bitterness over the change in circumstances which means that his earlier sacrifice will not be repaid by the support of his own children in turn, as instead he finds himself financing them. He appears satisfied with his personal success in business which allowed him not only to perform his duty to his elders, but also to establish his children in their own businesses when they reached adulthood, so that now the younger and older generations have the economic security to give themselves independence and choice in where and how they live from day to day.

### **Conclusion**

A conference of community leaders convened in 2007 by the Chinese in Britain Forum discussed the theme of “Success for our children: missed opportunities for our community?”. This seemed to encapsulate the ambiguous position of the Chinese population of Britain, which is both admired from outside, and proudly self-aware of the moral values of hard work, self-reliance and respect, stereotypically associated with Chinese people in Britain as elsewhere in the world. At the same time, many within the community now acknowledge that the economic and educational success of Chinese people has been won at the expense of less measurable achievements, such as trust and intimacy within families, and more generally, social and political engagement with mainstream British society. Success in business has also masked individual stories of loneliness and isolation, broken relationships, frustration and disappointment. These same moral values can motivate people, but can also cut them off from others in damaging ways.

In a context where the definitions of “good” and “bad” parents are regularly debated in the mainstream press and other arenas, migrant parents can find that popular discourse on the morality of parenting styles conflicts with their own (remembered) childhood experience and values. For example, parents and teachers in Britain today are encouraged to nurture children’s self-esteem through praise for positive behaviour. This contrasts with the way some Hong Kong Chinese parents have sought to discipline their children by drawing attention to faults and failings. Immigrant parents are faced with the difficult task of balancing their wish to

maintain cultural tradition, by drawing on the best aspects of their own upbringing, with the desire to explore new ways of relating to their children. Specific patterns of migration and working practices have shaped the choices which Chinese migrant parents can make concerning childcare in particular. At a more abstract level, migrant parents must manage the tension between allowing their children the freedom to make their own choices in their social, academic and professional lives, and protecting them from the threats and prejudice which the parents perceive in the world around them. Meanwhile the balance of power within the family is shifting as children are often more able, because of differences of language and education, to interact with people and agencies outside the family. One theme which emerges from the stories of Scottish Chinese families is the apparent need for families to choose between two ways of being “good parents”: establishing emotional intimacy and spending time together, or providing well for children in material ways. Tommy and his wife chose the former, but paid the price of a lower income from paid employment when compared with the money which can be made in catering. Vicky was painfully aware of her household’s relative poverty, and wished they could move to a bigger house, but knew they could never afford it if she did not go out to work. Both Tommy and Vicky justified their choices by comparing their children favourably with those of parents who were wealthier but spent less time at home: the offspring of those families, they would say, became lazy and acquired bad habits such as drinking and drug taking. Only a few households, such as Lily’s, are rich enough to achieve something of a balance between earning money and paying attention to the children. This said, while Lily is at home full-time, her husband sees his family for only a few hours each week.

The importance of education for Hong Kong Chinese emigrant parents can be viewed as a response to the deprivation and poverty of earlier generations, a simple strategy to protect their children against the threat of future drudgery. It also shows the continuing influence of Hong Kong on the thinking of people living overseas. However, it also represents a strong cultural idea about the role of parents as providers for their children, and the achievement of measurable results provides public evidence of this success in the practice of kinship. For some Scottish Chinese, then, economic success, educational success and success in parenting are closely bound together. On the other hand, the dissatisfaction of the younger generation with the more remote style of their parents, and their desire for a happier family life, suggests that kinship may prove to be the more lasting value. Indeed, the fact that

some families are satisfied to have all of their children working in catering, because this keeps the family together, suggests that this may be a value shared by many.

There is a sad irony in the way that some British Chinese parents are ultimately condemned by their own children and their peers as “bad parents” because they did not spend enough time with their offspring. These people worked hard in the demanding catering trade, at great personal cost, with the highly moral goal of achieving economic security and a better future for their children. It is precisely because of the schooling which their parents have made possible for them, that the children have learned English and become part of British society. This in turn gives them power to undermine and challenge parental authority, specifically because their parents remain socially and linguistically isolated by the very nature of their work.

## **Part 2**

### **Reproducing culture as community**

## Chapter 3

### The success and failure of “group-making” in Chinese community language schools

In this section I move on from the education and upbringing of children in their families, to look at how socialization becomes a collective activity for the self-defining “ethnic” group. Unlike the mainly implicit ideas about ethnicity which were discussed in the previous two chapters, the culture which is reproduced in community language schools is quite explicitly defined and articulated through set curriculums, and in a formalized, institutional context. In what I shall describe as a reification of Chinese culture by Scottish Chinese people themselves, it is also important to note that control over the reproduction of culture has social value, and indeed may be viewed as a source of power for those who would define themselves as group leaders through the kind of “group-making project” analysed by Brubaker (2004: 170).

Soon after I arrived in Edinburgh, I arranged to have tea with a family friend who had worked in the area of race relations for many years and in his present job for the city council had regular contact with Chinese community groups. “If you want to get to know the Chinese in Edinburgh,” he advised me, “You should go to their schools. Other groups have their temples or mosques, for the Chinese it’s the schools.” For anyone familiar with the social life of Chinese villages it might be unsurprising that schools should have a comparable status with temples for an overseas Chinese community: of course, many Chinese ancestral halls housed both temples and study halls. There is no Chinese temple in Edinburgh, and I found very little evidence of regular ritual practice, except at times of major life events: marriage, the birth of children, and funerals. Nor were there any organized lineage-based activities in the Edinburgh area. Watson’s more recent work (2004) has shown that today the descendants of the Man lineage have continued to engage in business and communal activities with their kinsmen all over the world. Overseas members of the Man clan also invest in Hong Kong, and increasingly in mainland China where they have ancestral connections. In other parts of Scotland, particularly the south west, Chinese people from the same lineage or place of origin settled close to each other, and the Kut-O Association, for instance, continues to provide social support for emigrants and descendants of emigrants from that district of the New Territories.

However, as Bradley observed (1973), there is no single surname group which dominates Edinburgh's Chinese population, and no local organization of lineage activities. Therefore, the collective projects in which Chinese people do engage, such as care for the elderly and education of children, are an example of migrants forming new social relationships, not based on kinship, but on an assumption of connectedness on the grounds of language and a more broadly defined place of origin.

While the Chinese population of Britain is often portrayed as dispersed and heterogeneous, the schools offer an example of how Chinese people from diverse backgrounds, unrelated through kinship, collaborate on a shared project for mutual benefit. For parents, the schools offer support in the often challenging task of bringing up children, and specifically of keeping the Chinese language and customs alive in a multicultural environment. The cultural socialization of children is a job for the whole group, not only the nuclear family. Benton and Gomez argue that British Chinese schools boomed from the 1980s onwards not least because of the decline of the "grandparent socialization" described in Chapter 2: "the grandparents' later emigration to Britain and the parents' realisation of the harm done by family separation eventually put an end to this practice, for which the Chinese schools became a substitute" (2008: 189). In what follows I shall concentrate on the role of community schools in the transmission of cultural values concerning the proper behaviour between generations. These are lessons which, in the past, children might have been expected to learn in the course of everyday interaction with members of an extended family. Scottish Chinese parents, now frequently bringing up children without regular contact with grandparents or other family members, have expressed concern over their loss of control over their children's behaviour, and enrolling the children in Chinese school is one strategy for righting this imbalance in power.

As a collective activity, the schools have also provoked debate over who represents and speaks for the "Edinburgh Chinese community". Leadership of the Chinese schools has come to be equated with power within the wider Scottish Chinese population, and I present a case study of a leadership struggle in the Chinese schools which highlights some of the internal tensions between "old" and "new" migrants, businessmen and professional people, men and women within the Edinburgh Chinese population. This relates to a broader theme of the whole thesis, the question of whether education is intrinsically valued by Chinese people in Britain, or whether achievement is to be measured in terms of wealth and business

success. There is also the question of how much the schools are truly community-led, Chinese projects, and how much they are following an external agenda. The initiative and direction for the schools does not come entirely from Chinese people as they are also shaped by the Scottish political agenda of support for multiculturalism which results in the schools receiving part of their funding from the City of Edinburgh Council.

The Chinese are far from the only immigrant population who organize supplementary classes for their children: in Edinburgh there are also community language classes in Arabic, Bengali, Persian, Polish, Punjabi and Urdu (Edinburgh EAL [English as an Additional Language], 2010) and throughout the UK, as in other countries, there are many more languages taught in this way. A number of recent studies of supplementary schools in Britain by educationalists and linguists (Archer & Francis, 2007; Francis, Archer, & Mau, 2009; Li & Zhu, 2010; Lytra & Martin, 2010; P. Martin & Creese, 2004) have used interviews and analysed classroom interactions between teachers and children to explore some of the issues of ethnicity, attitudes to learning and language, and the sometimes conflicting ideas of immigrant parents and teachers and their British-born children and pupils. Lytra and Martin (2010) discuss the various names used for such classes, in order to justify their use of the term “complementary school” which they use to emphasize what they perceive to be a positive relationship between the extra-curricular classes and the children’s mainstream primary and secondary schools. Such research has supported the view that minority ethnic children who attend weekend language classes do better in their mainstream education as a result. I prefer to follow the terms used by my informants who generally referred simply to “Chinese schools” (Cantonese *jung mahn hohk haauh*) or occasionally, in English, to the “Chinese community schools”. The English term “Chinese school” is, of course, slightly ambiguous given that “Chinese” can refer both to a language and to an ethnic category, whereas in Chinese the schools are clearly identified as schools for language learning. As I argue below, the usage of the Chinese term by parents and teachers marked a difference in the way they viewed the Chinese schools in comparison with their children’s full-time primary and secondary schools. In the minds of the parents, the children’s study of the Chinese language was in a somewhat different category to their mainstream learning.

There are now four Chinese community schools in Edinburgh, each operating for three or four hours a week, on Saturday or Sunday. Unlike Chinese schools in the



US which provide supplementary tuition in mainstream school subjects (Zhou, 2009: 158) the purpose of the Scottish Chinese schools is principally to teach the Chinese language (Cantonese or Mandarin) to British-born Chinese children, although some also attract non-Chinese pupils, and all of them offer extra-curricular classes in sports, Chinese handicrafts, dance and music. All of them are staffed mainly by volunteers although the City of Edinburgh Council provides a limited amount of funding for wages to be paid to teachers.

The oldest of the schools, the Edinburgh Chinese School (Cantonese *oi ding bou jung mahn hohk haauh*, henceforth referred to, for the sake of clarity as “the old school”) dates back to 1971 when a small group of Hong Kong Chinese mothers began to teach their children informally in a family home. At the time of my fieldwork, the old school was renting rooms in a high school in north central Edinburgh, and had approximately 120 students on the roll, both adults and children. The school is organized into classes by ability: ten junior Cantonese classes, from Year 1 to A-level, an adult Cantonese conversation class, five junior and two adult Mandarin classes. The language tuition takes place from 1-3 pm on Saturdays in term time; between 11 am and 12.30 pm there are optional classes in Chinese dance and Chinese painting.

The second largest school, the Edinburgh Chinese Community School (Cantonese *oi kiu jung mahn hohk haauh*, literally “Edinburgh Overseas Chinese Language School”, or “new school”) was founded in 2000 after a rift with the old school which I shall describe later in the chapter where I also discuss the significance of the school’s English name. It has a similar number of students and also rents space on a Saturday afternoon in a state secondary school, on the south side of Edinburgh. Like the old school, the new school offers classes in both Cantonese and Mandarin up to GCSE and A level, but it has a bigger extra-curricular programme, including badminton, Chinese music, calligraphy and Chinese knotting. Both the old and the new schools draw pupils mainly from Hong Kong Chinese families, with a few Mandarin speakers from mainland China. The new school attracts a greater number of families from the restaurant trade, while the old school has more mixed-race children, and Chinese children adopted by white Scottish parents.

The True Jesus Church, which now has two congregations in Edinburgh, also offers mother-tongue language classes on Sunday afternoons for the children of its members. Its Chinese language classes receive no support from the local authority and are not open to the Chinese population as a whole. Like the majority of

Cantonese-speaking Chinese in Edinburgh, True Jesus Church members work almost exclusively in the catering trade, but both socially and in their business practices they prefer to mix only with their fellow church members. Only one of my informants was directly involved in the church and I was unable to collect any specific data on their language teaching.

Finally, in 1994 a group of mainland Chinese professionals and academics founded the Alba Cathay Chinese School, another Saturday class meeting in rooms rented from a high school, to teach Mandarin Chinese to their children. These families are typically resident for only a short time in Edinburgh and because of the language difference, have little involvement in the majority Cantonese-speaking settled Chinese community. The following discussion concentrates on the first two schools, the “old” Edinburgh Chinese School and the “new” Edinburgh Chinese Community School.

### **A lesson in relationships**

I actually grew up speaking Chinese and I couldn't speak a word of English when I first started primary school so it's amazing how quickly kids pick things up. When I was getting to the age of ten or eleven my parents started thinking “she's getting a bit too westernized”, let's send her off to Chinese school. I think in those days the government were keen to give out grants to support communities and a lot of the Chinese schools were set up through funds from the government. I used to go every Sunday for about three years and I was taught martial arts and Chinese language as well. But I made the decision to stop going when I started studying for my Highers. It was great for me because it meant I could socialize with people from my own generation, in the same situation, to discuss things like racism. Friends that I made at school I'm still friends with today. However, in terms of the Chinese I learned, it was very basic – I can barely write my own name.

In the course of a conversation with Karen, a Scottish-born Chinese woman in her late twenties, she very neatly expressed many of the contradictions and ambivalence which surround attendance at Chinese school. Everybody knows that the children are unlikely to learn much of the Chinese language in just three hours a week, and given the competing demands of homework from their mainstream schools. Language learning, although central to the schools' stated mission, is almost the least important result. From the point of view of Karen's parents, going to Chinese school was a remedy for what they saw as the problem of their daughter becoming “too

westernized”. What she needed was a taste of Chinese education. Other parents I met agreed that Chinese school was a positive influence on children who were in danger of being led astray by the relatively lax standards of discipline in Western schools. One mother told me she was appalled when she looked over her eight-year-old daughter’s maths homework, and saw that the teacher had ticked all the correct answers, but had only marked the wrong ones with a discreet dot, and the girl was not required to write out corrections. The mother had gone to the school to raise the issue with the teacher and was deeply offended to be told, “In your country you do things your way, but in my school we don’t believe in destroying a child’s confidence.” For the Chinese mother this statement was indicative of a British teaching culture which had gone too far in shifting the balance of power from adults to children (see also Ran, 1999).

On my first day at the second Chinese school, I was invited to introduce myself and explain my project briefly to all the pupils, parents and teachers at the school assembly, a fifteen-minute gathering before the start of class. Knowing that the people there spoke a variety of languages, I first greeted them and gave my name in Cantonese, before switching to English. Later that morning I knocked on the door of the Year 3 classroom, where I hoped to observe the lesson. The teacher, a young Chinese woman in her twenties, smiled as she opened the door, saying in English, “Speak of the devil . . . !” and asking me to repeat the greeting I had given at assembly. She told me she had been impressed to hear a white person speaking Cantonese like that, and had been telling her pupils that she would like them to practise addressing people that way. The subject of greetings recurred in the lesson which I stayed to observe. The topic was Chinese New Year, and the first of the festival customs which the teacher described was that of *bai nihn* (offering New Year greetings). As an example, she said that she could lead the whole class next door to Year 2 and *bai nihn* with the children in that class. After she mentioned some of the formulaic blessings which can be said at New Year, one of the boys volunteered that they reminded him of the words he says to Buddha when he and his family mark Buddha’s birthday.

In the Year 2 class, which I observed the following week, the children were again discussing Chinese New Year. The teacher asked the children what they do with their families at New Year, and several children raised their hands. The first said, “we get *lai see* (lucky red envelopes)”. The teacher asked who gave them the red envelopes. They replied that their parents, grandparents and aunties give them.

“So,” responded the teacher, “what do we normally say to our parents on the morning of Chinese New Year?” The children looked back blankly, so he prompted them: “*San nihh fai lohk?* [Happy New Year]”. Some of them showed signs of recognition in their faces. Then, he said, “Your mum will give you the red envelope and will probably say to you, *gwai jai, gwai leui*, (good boy or good girl), work hard this year”.

It is not only in relation to special occasions such as the New Year festival that the children are taught explicitly to greet their parents properly. Stafford (1995) has described the use of text books in the moral education of school children. The Edinburgh Cantonese classes follow a series of textbooks written especially for British Chinese students and published by the UK Association for the Promotion of Chinese Education. In one of the very first lessons in the school curriculum, Year 1 students are taught the characters for “Good morning, Mummy”, and “Good morning, Daddy”, and the illustration in their text book shows a small child with neat clothes and brushed hair, standing in front of his seated parents and saying these words. The class teacher presents these phrases by asking the children what they do in the morning, prompting her desired answers: “You get up, you get dressed, you brush your teeth, you greet your parents. This is what you should do every morning”.

In the Cantonese classes, the purpose is very much to reinforce Cantonese as the children’s mother tongue. The teachers do this by referring regularly to practices which they assume to be common in the children’s homes. In this way, the children learn that these habits are not peculiar to their individual household, but are common features of British Chinese family life. The young teacher of the Year 3 class, who had moved to the UK with her parents at the age of thirteen and gone on to take an undergraduate degree at the LSE, told me explicitly that with her six- and seven-year-old pupils, she aimed to get the pupils to speak about their own experiences, to relate their studies in class to their lives at home and within the Chinese community. She wanted to encourage the children to use their Cantonese outside the classroom. In the course of teaching, this goal was evident by the teacher’s reminder to her class that they should be revising the material they had already covered that term, partly because they had a test coming up soon, but mainly “so the words will stick in your minds for the future, not just for the test.” She, and other teachers, made frequent reference to aspects of “Chinese culture” which they assumed to be part of the children’s home lives. Discussing the lunar calendar, the teacher asked whether any of the children had a traditional Chinese almanac – a *yaht lihk* – at home, sketching

one out on the board, until several of the children nodded, saying that they had seen such a thing. She then went on to speak of “Chinese customs” in a way which seemed to blend cultural stereotyping, speaking of “how things used to be” or indeed still may be in China itself, with an honest admission of the real ambivalence which people feel towards traditions.

For this young teacher, it was possible to be part of a group which she identifies as “we Chinese”, but still to distance herself from that by placing the beliefs in the past, saying,

We Chinese are very superstitious, because of our Taoist religion. Do you know that story, *Journey to the West*? The one about the monkey and the pig and all those characters? That story tells you how superstitious people used to be.

The teacher went on to explain to the children, in English, that in the past Chinese people would get up in the morning and look for signs in nature, such as the sun or the flight of birds, to decide what would be good today. Some people, she said, still do this today, such as when they are planning to get married (*jap yaht git fan* i.e. picking a day to get married), but she told the class, “I don’t know about it really because I’m not superstitious myself”. In these ways the teacher distances herself from the Chinese beliefs or traditions which she is describing by emphasizing the geographical distance (these things happened in China, we are in the UK) and the passage of time, and also by using mostly English as she speaks about them, only introducing a few Chinese phrases almost as untranslatable formulas. She is slightly more confused in her inability fully to separate between the beliefs of “we Chinese” and her own personal lack of belief in “superstition”.

The teacher’s attempts to make Chinese school the place where children learn to identify with a broader cultural heritage are slightly undermined by the fact that her pupils of course acquire explicit knowledge about China (not to mention often unspoken stereotypical beliefs about Chineseness) from other sources. For example, when the class teacher referred to the classic story of *Journey to the West*, one girl replied that she knows that story because her teacher at “English school”, i.e. her primary school teacher, told it to the class at the time of Chinese New Year. She had also seen some of it in a cartoon version on TV.

Furthermore, while the Chinese schools sought to enforce strong discipline and high academic standards there was recognition that the children were Western-educated and allowances need to be made for their different experiences and

expectations of good behaviour. In the old Chinese school there was certainly a strong emphasis on classroom discipline and the expectation of standards of behaviour that would be unusual in many British primary school classes. On the termly report cards sent home to parents, there would be an additional mark for “discipline”, or “good behaviour”, something which is not typically seen in the Scottish school system. However, these aspirations were often tempered by the teachers’ realisation that the children faced an uphill struggle learning Chinese in just a few hours per week, and allowances must be made if they expressed frustration with this difficult task.

A culture of regular testing was one aspect of Chinese school teaching about which students often grumbled. This was introduced from the very beginning. In October 2006 I observed the first exam set for the Year 1 Cantonese class, a group of nine children aged five or six, who had begun studying written Chinese just a few weeks earlier. The teacher, herself a mother of young children, moved her pupils so that each sat alone at a desk, and they waited in silence as she explained to them that she would give a dictation of five characters which they must write down perfectly in order to win a sticker. As she slowly read out the characters, one of the little boys began to cry and raised his hand for the teacher, who came over to him with a tissue. He sobbed that he could only remember four of the characters and so would not get his sticker. The teacher spoke to him quietly and reassuringly in a mixture of English and Cantonese, “Very good, *hou hou, mgan yiu*, it doesn’t matter.” In the end, she gave him a sticker anyway, although he was the only child who had not written all five characters correctly.

### **Forming a peer group**

More important than the formal curriculum and pedagogical approach is the very fact that Chinese school is a rare opportunity for both children and parents to socialize with other Chinese people in Edinburgh. Chinese school fulfils an important role for the children in normalizing cultural practices which might otherwise make them feel different from their white Scottish peers. Many British-born Chinese informants told me they knew no Chinese people outside their immediate family until they went to Chinese school. Calum, who is now in his twenties, said that at high school he had mainly Scottish friends but when he joined the GCSE class at the old Chinese school he became more and more friendly with his Chinese classmates. He found that they all had the same time constraints on their social lives as teenagers, attending Chinese

school on Saturday afternoons, and helping their parents in restaurants on Friday and Saturday evenings. These commitments often meant they were unable to go out at weekends with their white Scottish schoolmates. Instead, the Chinese teenagers would go out to eat together after Chinese school. Calum's Cantonese became more fluent (but with a Scottish accent, he was told) and he identified more and more with his Chinese friends. On his last day of high school he says he suddenly realised he didn't know his Scottish classmates anymore because he had spent so little time socializing with them. To some extent he regretted those missed opportunities and lost friendships. As it turned out, Calum continued to favour Chinese friends when he went to university and became president of the student Chinese Society. Some years later, he moved from Scotland to Hong Kong to work in an international bank.

In another example, one daughter of an Edinburgh restaurant owner became so fascinated by the Chinese language that she decided to study Mandarin at university, and later spent a year as a volunteer English teacher in a remote Chinese village: this girl was described to me as something of a curiosity, a rebel who had not followed the predictable career path into a well-paid job but chosen to follow her own interests and discover "China" for herself.

Stories such as Calum's illustrate the very real relationships which are shaped and formed by the experience of attending Chinese school. Even when English-speaking friends are curious in a positive way, for example asking the Scottish Chinese child to say some words in Cantonese, this can be embarrassing and unpleasant. Tommy's son, Paul, never felt any different from his white Scottish classmates until they started pestering him to show off his Chinese language skills. When they come to Chinese school, just as when they go on holiday to Hong Kong, children discover that what may have seemed like peculiarities of their own parents are actually signs of belonging to a wider group, which can be something interesting to explore. While the community school curriculum tries to teach a somewhat reified and exoticized form of Chinese culture in many ways the schools can be seen as sites where a new cultural tradition is being established, that of British Chinese culture. The schools are shared spaces where people form social relationships based on shared experiences of growing up with Chinese parents in the UK, and in this way they have value even for those British-born Chinese who see their future as remaining in Scotland and have no inclination to go and use their language skills while living and working abroad.

At this point in the history of Chinese migration to Scotland there is now a second generation of some families who are attending Chinese school here, which does suggest that the schools are becoming established as a central element of an emerging British Chinese tradition. Lily, now 35, told me in conversation that she took herself to Chinese school as a teenager, mainly for social reasons. She had several good friends there and her parents were happy for her to attend as they thought of it as a safe place for her to spend time while they were busy at work. Lily did well at Chinese school and got good marks but she can no longer remember what she learned, and in fact denies being able to read any Chinese at all. Lily now has two children of her own whom she brings to Chinese school each week. She mentions to me that she does not really force them to do homework for Chinese school. She is happy for them to treat it just as a Saturday club. Lily's eleven-year-old son has clearly picked up this attitude from his mother. On one occasion I ask him how the Mandarin class is going at school and he says it is "OK" but he does not especially enjoy it. He only likes going to Chinese school because he gets to play badminton, but that is annoying because they have to practise skills all the time, when he knows how to play already and just wants to have a match with his friends. He had told the teacher that he found it boring but the teacher did not listen to him.

Paul and Chris are the sixteen- and seventeen-year-old sons of Tommy the postman, and his wife Jin, a care worker. They joined the Chinese school relatively late, just four years ago, and so neither of them will progress as far as GCSE or A level Chinese, which would require at least three more years of study. At first they tell me that they only go to Chinese school because their parents force them to go: Chris says, "It's a chore". Paul will stop going when he starts university in the autumn and teases his brother because he will have to carry on alone for another two years. Their main objection to Chinese school is having extra homework and needing to prepare for tests every two weeks. However, like Calum, they admit that the social aspect of the school is something they value. Paul says he has made more Chinese friends than he ever had before starting Chinese school. The day after our conversation he was planning to go paintballing with a group of the senior students.

During one of my visits to Paul and Chris's home, their mother Jin announced that she had just signed them both up for Lion Dance lessons at the Chinese school, starting the following Saturday. The boys had not been consulted but accept their mother's decision, laughing to me, "Apparently we're starting Lion Dance class next week." Jin tells me it will be good for them to learn a Chinese



tradition and it will help to keep them fit. Significantly, the timing of the class will mean that they have to get out of bed earlier on Saturday mornings, and consequently Jin can attend her Chinese painting class starting at 11 am. This detail drew my attention to the fact that attending Chinese school was at least as important for Jin, who had made her own friends among the fellow members of the painting class, as it was for her sons.

### **The role of parents in the Chinese school**

In Chapter 4 I will describe another group of mothers who joined a Chinese knotting class at the community school and considered this to be precious time for them to relax and enjoy being with friends, as a respite from their busy working week. However, it appeared that the majority of parents would drop off their children at the start of classes, then leave the building. One teacher complained to me that parents viewed the Chinese school as a “babysitting service” which gave them some free time to go shopping or eat out with friends. This teacher was disappointed by the parents’ apparent lack of commitment to their children’s studies, and said that the parents of children in her class rarely encouraged them to complete homework, and regularly failed to attend the termly parent-teacher meetings. I observed that the end-of-year awards ceremony, at which the top three students in each class were presented with certificates in front of the whole school, and pupils sang songs and recited poems, was attended by approximately one third of all the parents. This was surprising given that pupils did not know until the day of the ceremony whether they would be awarded a certificate. This appeared to confirm the impression that the children’s success in the academic task of learning Chinese was less important to parents than their participation in a Chinese cultural environment.

The head teachers were keen to involve parents more closely in the schools, and in 2007 the old Chinese school applied successfully for funding to run a short course in ICT and CV-writing skills for parents, with the aim of enhancing their prospects in the external job market. Offering such courses in the familiar physical and linguistic environment of the Chinese school made them more readily accessible to people who might hesitate, because of poor English or unfamiliarity with the education system, to join classes offered externally. This class was fully subscribed, so it clearly did meet a need and paradoxically, given the children were there to learn how to be more Chinese, parents responded positively to the opportunity to become more integrated in British life. On the other hand, the new Chinese school did at one

time offer training for parents in both ICT and ESOL but these classes have not continued and there seems to be little demand for them.

### **Parents as teachers**

The disappointment felt by some teachers at the lack of support from other parents is interesting because the majority of teachers are themselves parents of past or present pupils at the schools. These parent-teachers are the first group of “stakeholders” whom I shall discuss as having an interest in the Chinese community schools. I shall go on to describe the business leaders, the mainstream school teachers and local government officials who also have a stake in the success of these schools.

I have already explained that Chinese mother-tongue language classes began as the initiative of a group of mothers. Mrs Shek was among a group of mothers who got together in the 1970s as a small group to teach their children to read and write Chinese. Initially meeting in a family home, as the group grew they moved to rented premises in the Barclay Church, Tollcross.

While the school is now much larger, most of the Cantonese classes are still taught by parents. When I asked some teenage friends, both active members of the Chinese school dance troupe, why so few of their contemporaries had continued coming to Chinese school after the age of thirteen or fourteen, they told me “some of them can be quite cruel about Chinese school. They say that it’s lame, and the teachers are not proper teachers.” It is true that most of the Chinese school teachers are unqualified and have no previous teaching experience, apart from helping their own children at home. The few professional teachers on the staff (i.e. people who have been to university, some of whom teach Chinese in mainstream schools during the week) are usually assigned immediately to the GCSE and A-level Chinese classes. Younger classes are taught by parent volunteers, most of whom have not been to university or even completed high school. All the teachers receive a small stipend from the City of Edinburgh Council, and take turns to attend training lasting a few days, once a year, which is organized by the UK Federation of Chinese Schools. The school can afford to send two people per year to this training course, and usually offers the places to new teachers, but in practice few take up the offer since the courses tend to take place in England, and the women find it difficult to leave their own children in order to attend. There may be some justification in the students’ criticism of the teaching, but this ignores the fact that the school does prepare students successfully for the external exams.

Although vacant teaching posts are advertised externally, many of the present staff originally came to the school as parents, and were gradually nurtured by the head teacher who encouraged some of them first to become classroom assistants, and later, having built up confidence and experience, to apply for full teaching posts. The head teacher of the old Chinese school is keen to develop the skills of teachers and parents as well as children, seeing that many of them need help and support to integrate more fully into Scottish society. The Chinese class teaching is, of course, only a part-time job, and several of the teachers have used the experience and references from the Chinese school head teacher to apply for jobs working with children or adult learners during the week. Vicky was one such teacher. She had taught a kindergarten class in Hong Kong, but stopped working when she migrated to Scotland in order to care for her daughter. She enrolled the little girl in the Chinese school and one day fell into conversation with the head teacher who invited her to start helping as a classroom assistant. Later, she took on a class of her own and felt so motivated by her success in teaching at Chinese school that she decided to apply for further education courses in childcare and IT, both of which, she believed, would improve her teaching at the Chinese school. Without the work experience at the school, she would have had no relevant qualifications or experience to list on her application form to the college, having left school in Hong Kong without taking exams.

Many of the parent teachers see their contribution to the school as a way of supporting their own children's education. Sarah has been involved in the old school since 1985, when her three children were pupils, and she has taught almost all the classes including GCSE and A-level. She told me that it was difficult in the early years because there were no teaching materials so she had to prepare all the lessons herself. She found it very demanding, and a big responsibility to get children through exams. After she came to Scotland from Hong Kong she was a stay-at-home mum for a while, but returned to full-time work as an accountant and so was very busy teaching at the Chinese school on Saturdays as well. She says, "My house was a mess – I had no time to do chores!" She was keen for her children to learn Chinese and take their culture seriously, so decided to volunteer to work for the Chinese school because this would show them that she was committed, and they should be likewise.

The Mandarin teachers are mainly more recent arrivals in the UK, and diverse in background. One taught mathematics at a secondary school in Beijing for many

years before emigrating to Britain with her daughter and her husband, a Chinese university lecturer who had been offered a job at a UK university. Another woman, from northern China is childless and married to a British-born Chinese man. Two younger teachers are from mainland China and currently studying at the University of Edinburgh, after which it is unclear whether they will remain in the UK. For the university students, the weekly wage is an important incentive for teaching at Chinese school. Meanwhile, the older Mandarin teacher told me simply that she took the teaching job in order to make friends with Scottish people, knowing that her class would all be adults, and mostly not Chinese.

In everyday situations, such as hurried conversations in the staff room during break at Chinese school, there was no doubt that Cantonese is still the dominant language of both community language schools. Mandarin speakers are in the minority, and this is shown in small ways, such as the printing of all literature from the school using the traditional Chinese characters still preferred in Hong Kong, rather than the simplified characters which are taught in mainland Chinese schools. In all of the staff meetings which I attended at the Chinese school most of the discussion was in Cantonese. If she remembered, the head teacher, who chaired the meetings, would summarize the discussion in rather stilted Mandarin, but for most of the time the four or five teachers who speak no Cantonese were completely excluded from the conversation.

### **Being custodians of “Chinese culture” in Scotland**

The Chinese schools serve not only as a hub for the Hong Kong Chinese community in Edinburgh, but also as intermediaries between Chinese and Scottish people in the city. The distinction is subtle and not absolute. The different ways of celebrating the lunar new year, which I shall describe in Chapter 5, provide one illustration of this. To give a further example, when there was a spate of burglaries targeting the homes of Chinese restaurateurs in Edinburgh in the summer of 2006, the police approached the new Chinese school and asked them to disseminate information within the Chinese community, advising people of the threat and offering extra security protection if they felt they needed it. On the other hand, when trading standards officers issued a public warning about faulty, Chinese-made electric lamps on sale from Edinburgh shops, local journalists asked Kathy Miller, head teacher of the old school, to comment on how these particular lamps were used by the Chinese community in funeral rituals. In recent years, Mrs Miller has also been interviewed

regularly by the *Edinburgh Evening News* around the time of Chinese New Year, describing for Scottish readers how the festival is celebrated both by Chinese families in Scotland, and by their relatives in Hong Kong and China.

In spring 2008, a group of parents from the new school received funding and support from a literacy and numeracy project to produce a bilingual, illustrated book of Chinese folk tales. This book was intended for all the pupils at the school, to add to their cultural knowledge and improve Chinese language skills. There seemed to be no plans to distribute the booklet more widely. By contrast, staff and parent volunteers from the old school go into local primary schools to deliver workshops on Chinese traditions and customs, responding to the demand from teachers for “multicultural” education and general interest in China and Chinese culture. These are relatively trivial and everyday examples of how the schools are seen by non-Chinese people as representatives not only of the local Chinese population but indeed of “Chinese culture” as a somewhat nebulous whole. However, the question of who controls the Chinese schools has been contentious, which shows the high value of Chinese education as a source of power and prestige within the community.

In this section I draw on interviews with longstanding Chinese residents of Edinburgh to describe various accounts of the formation of the Chinese schools and the disputes which have arisen over leadership. I discuss the current “leaders” of the Chinese community, and how their role as leaders in the schools relates to other measures of success such as wealth and education. Integral to this discussion is the question of gender and the changing nature of the Chinese population in Edinburgh.

The Edinburgh Chinese School (the “old school”) claims a continuous history dating back to 1971. This implies that the school sees itself as growing organically from the mother-tongue classes started by Mrs Shek and other women at that time. In 2001 the City of Edinburgh Council commemorated this date with a reception at the City Chambers, in the presence of the Queen, to celebrate thirty years of Chinese education. One of my young informants, Jon, was among a group of children who sang at this event. His mother, Lily, also attended with his younger sister and recalls the very expensive Chinese delicacies served – “food for a queen.”

In 1976 Cantonese language classes began under the auspices of the Edinburgh Hong Kong Chinese Association, but hosted by the Women’s International Centre, a voluntary organization providing training and advice from ethnic minority women in Edinburgh, and by the Lothian Region Education Department (*Evening News*, 1976). Up to sixty children were enrolled and several of

them travelled in from outside Edinburgh to attend class. All of the teachers were native speakers. I found no other references to these classes, and the Edinburgh Hong Kong Chinese Association is no longer in existence. As the Chinese population of Edinburgh in the 1970s and 80s was quite small, in practice the women described by Mrs Shek probably had family connections to the restaurateurs' association. The question of who began Chinese classes may be minor, but already shows the competing claims for leadership within the Chinese community. It is interesting that none of my Chinese informants mentioned support for the Chinese classes from non-Chinese organizations.

In the 1980s funding became available from the city council to support supplementary language schools, which could then pay a small salary to the class teachers. They were also able to access to mainstream school facilities, including professional support and advice from a team within the council's education department. At the same time the Chinese school relocated to more suitable premises at Craigmoynton High School before moving to Drummond Community High School in central Edinburgh, where the old school has remained ever since. It remains the case that all of the class teachers and the head teacher are paid as sessional workers by the City of Edinburgh Council, which also provides advice and support through visits by a Quality Improvement Officer. A Council representative attends most of the school's festival celebrations, serves as invigilator for the GCSE and A level exams, and presents student achievement certificates at the end-of-year prize giving.

However, the head teacher stresses that the council's support for teaching, while welcome, does not cover all of the school's expenses, and additional funding must be found each year to buy textbooks and other materials, and particularly to cover the costs of room hire. The textbooks, which are bought by the school and distributed to students at the start of the year, are specially written for children learning Chinese in the UK, and published in this country. The school prints its own stationery for teachers and students: jotters, homework books, class registers and mark books. Students pay an annual fee of £50 for children, and £90 for adults, with dance and painting classes costing a little extra. To make up the shortfall the school must seek sponsorship from local businesses and individuals, an onerous task for the Chair of the management committee who finds it increasingly difficult to attract donations in this way.

The head teacher in the 1980s was a professional woman who had a university degree from Hong Kong. She became very successful at applying for

grants from external bodies, making it possible for the school to expand its activities beyond the minimum of language teaching which was funded by the council. However, the period of this woman's headship came to an abrupt end in 2001 with the departure from the school of much of the management committee, teachers and pupils, to form a new organization, the Edinburgh Chinese Community School (the "new school").

The new school was, and continues to be supported by four groups: the Edinburgh Chinese Association (ECA), the Edinburgh and District Chinese Association (EDCA), the Edinburgh Chinese Women Association (ECWA) and the Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association (ECESA). I was unable to collect data on either the ECA or the EDCA, except from an interview with one of the founder members of the ECA, a retired restaurant owner now in his seventies. He said that the ECA began as a group to represent the interests of Chinese restaurateurs in the late 1970s. The EDCA was formed a few years later as a breakaway group because of "political differences". Both groups are still in existence but have virtually no meetings or formal activities. The offices of Chair, Secretary etc. continue to be passed on from one person to another but office-bearers have few responsibilities, other than representing the "Chinese community" for example at civic receptions at the City Chambers. My informant felt that there was less need for, or interest in such mutual support groups, as the younger generation of Chinese businessmen speak good English and are more integrated in Scottish society. The ECWA and ECESA were founded more recently and do hold regular meetings for their members. Most of the present-day committee members of ECESA were at one time office-bearers of the ECA or EDCA.

The support of these four groups for the new Chinese school was both financial and practical, in that representatives from each of the groups formed the board of governors at the new school. Importantly, these groups represented many of the most established and prosperous Chinese restaurant-owning families in the city. These families not only withdrew their children from the original school, to enrol them at the new one, but also withdrew their financial support. Previously the old school had received regular donations from the Chinese business community, particularly around the time of Chinese New Year, but this source of income was lost when the wealthy families moved to the new school. There was a further blow to the original school as about half of the teaching staff – most of whom were parents of pupils – moved to the new school with their families. Some of the teachers did

remain at the original school, because they believed that it was well established with a good academic reputation, and that their students deserved some continuity in teaching, but remembered in 2007 that they had been put under “some pressure” to transfer their allegiance to the new school.

The original school gradually recovered from the rupture, recruited new students and teachers and continues now in much the same form as it took prior to 2001. The former head teacher resigned soon after the split, and subsequently left Edinburgh to return to live in Hong Kong. Many of those involved prefer not to discuss the incident, conscious of continuing hurt and sensitivity over the event. It was only after many months of fieldwork, in which I had attended classes and teachers’ meetings, and participated as a volunteer in extra-curricular events, that a few of the staff would speak to me relatively freely about what happened. Their coded and partial accounts hint at a quarrel which had little to do with education and much to say about power relations within the Chinese community in Edinburgh.

The simplest version of the story was that some members of the original school board had felt dissatisfied at the management style of the old school, and that the new school board was aiming to operate in a more open and transparent fashion. Speaking more frankly, a representative of the old school told me, many months into my fieldwork, that the real reason for the split was a personal disagreement between the then head teacher and the board of governors. They accused her of not behaving transparently, because she was “going off on her own to apply for funding from outside instead of working with others inside the Chinese community”. The head teacher had effectively detached herself from the Edinburgh Chinese Association who saw themselves as sponsors of the school, and they did not like that. The present head teacher of the new school, whose husband owns one of the oldest and most successful Chinese restaurants in the city, used an analogy from their own business to explain the frustration:

It’s the same if you own a restaurant – if I’m the owner, and go off on holiday, leaving a manager in charge, it’s not good if the manager takes over and starts running the restaurant in his own way.

This image made clear to me that it was patronage of the school by business leaders which was really at issue. Another rumour still prevalent throws another light on the incident. It was whispered at the time before the split that the then head teacher of the old Chinese school had been nominated for an MBE in recognition of



her service to the Chinese community. This angered the chair of the Edinburgh Chinese Association, another prosperous restaurateur and long-term Edinburgh resident, married to a Scottish woman, who enjoyed his status as spokesman for the community to the local media and authorities, and felt that he had done a great deal for Chinese people through his leadership of the restaurant owners' association and also the elderly support group, and deserved public recognition of this. Although now retired from his previous role as chair of the new school board, this person still attends many school events and is a significant donor to the school. I tried on several occasions to set up an interview with him to ask about the history of the schools, but he told me that he had no time to talk, being too busy "looking after my restaurants and running the Chinese community."

In one sense it can be argued that this self-proclaimed "community leader" is merely responding to the demand from the Scottish authorities, as part of their multicultural political programme, for individuals to come forward as spokesmen for groups defined by ethnicity. At the same time, through their sponsorship of the new Chinese school, senior restaurateurs in Edinburgh are following a path that is well established in Chinese history, when businessmen enhance their status within the community through the visible support for education. In his discussion of two Yunnan villagers, one a teacher, the other a businessman Stafford (2004) shows how the seemingly divergent paths of scholarship and business come together as wealthy men seek to improve their own social standing through patronage of schools and other projects for the betterment of the community: "One makes money in order to study and perform good works in the tradition of literati-gentlemen, including providing support for learning" (Stafford 2004: 188). Such is the prerogative of the successful businessman, and for the wealthy restaurateurs of the Edinburgh Chinese associations, to have this role taken from them by a woman who chose to take funding from elsewhere, was threatening to their own sense of self-worth and status as business-owners and indeed as Chinese elders.

### **Partnership with mainstream schools**

While asserting itself very clearly as the Edinburgh Chinese *Community* School, and thus stressing its independent, community ownership, the new school made an interesting strategic choice by immediately locating itself within Telford College, a further education college in North Edinburgh. Both Telford and the new Chinese school expressed their pride in a new "partnership" agreement which would see the

college supporting not only Saturday language classes, but also ESOL classes and ICT tuition for Chinese parents and grandparents, in a project which ticked all the right boxes for a worthy community education project of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Publicity material from the college described the basis for the partnership as “the pursuit and promotion of equality of opportunity, active citizenship and social inclusion. Creating opportunities to learn about Chinese language, heritage and culture, initiatives that promote family and lifelong learning and innovative solutions to widen participation and attract new learners.” By 2003, the school had an enrolment of 285 students of all ages, a significant increase on the roll at the former school.

However, this phase was short-lived, as the Telford College staff who had worked on the partnership plan left the college shortly afterwards, and the Chinese school found it more difficult to work with their successors. One head teacher after another resigned. Eventually, in 2006 Telford College moved to new, purpose-built premises and increased the rent charged to the Chinese school by 100%. This financial crisis precipitated a decision by the new board to relocate, and a new home was found for the school at Liberton High School, on the other side of Edinburgh, but in a residential area popular with Chinese families. Liberton High School itself has a relatively high proportion of Chinese pupils enrolled in the mainstream, and the head teacher, as well as having the personal interest of being the adoptive parent of a Chinese child, has expressed interest in collaborating with the Chinese school in offering Chinese language classes to mainstream school pupils.

By the time of my fieldwork in 2007, the new school had moved to Liberton and thus gained new autonomy in its management, having ended the partnership with Telford College. Teaching continues to be subsidized by the City of Edinburgh Council, but this funding pays the expenses of only ten class teachers and the head teacher. There are sixteen classes in total, and rent to be paid to Liberton High School, so fundraising from other sources is essential. Representatives of the four founding community organizations continue to serve on the school board, and it is understood that one part of their role is to give money to the school, often from their own pockets, although nominally on behalf of the associations they represent. More money is raised through school fairs, and from the dinner-dance held at Chinese New Year.

It is possible that the new Chinese school will develop a new form of partnership with the mainstream school at Liberton High. In the 2007/8 academic year Mandarin Chinese was introduced into the mainstream curriculum of two state

high schools in Edinburgh, and it was hoped that provision would be extended to other schools in future years. The head of Liberton High School had met members of the Chinese school board to discuss collaboration with them, perhaps sending pupils from the high school to Saturday classes, thus offering them the option of gaining qualifications in Chinese language. The new Chinese school already enters its own pupils for public exams, so such a partnership would not threaten their freedom to continue operating in the same way. However, they would gain the prestige of being recognized by mainstream educators as proper providers of language training.

The move to Liberton in August 2007 established certain equilibrium between the two Chinese schools. The ability of the new school to attract donations from the Chinese business community remains a divisive issue, but may be balanced by the greater willingness of present staff and volunteers at old school to approach external bodies for funding. Geographically the two schools are now well placed to serve the northern and southern sides of Edinburgh respectively, and after the new school moved from Telford College (which is in north Edinburgh), many families returned to the old school simply because it was nearer their homes. Enrolments at the new school fell to just over 100, while the old school grew to around 180 pupils. The head teachers both believe that there is sufficient and growing demand for Chinese tuition to justify the existence of two schools, and are pleased that the numbers have balanced out so that neither school is too large to manage easily. The head teacher of the new school told me she was pleased that her school roll had fallen, as this created a more intimate and family-like atmosphere within the school, where it was possible for her to recognize all of the children attending.

## **Conclusion**

I originally approached the two main Chinese community schools in the expectation that they would be ideal locations for an ethnographic study of relationships between the generations. Certainly, participant observation in the everyday activities of teaching and studying at the schools did provide data on the ways in which Chinese language and culture are transmitted from adults to children. However, I was surprised to discover that fieldwork in these schools was revealing as much about the adults involved, and their relationships not only to Chinese culture, but also to other Scottish Chinese people and to the wider Scottish community within which they were living.

Some Scottish Chinese adults give a great deal of time and energy to running the Chinese schools: all of the activities I have described, including the New Year celebrations, are organized by volunteers (the expenses paid by the City of Edinburgh Council to community school teachers are too small to be a significant incentive to do the work), and both individuals and local businesses consider the schools worthy causes to which to donate money. The history of the new school shows that altruistic motives may be mixed, for at least a few individuals, with ambition and the pursuit of recognition and power which come from leadership of a community organization. However, a more general motivation appears to be a widespread sense of pride in being Chinese, and the desire to communicate this pride not only to British-born Chinese children, who are at risk of losing any sense of belonging to “China”, but also to non-Chinese. Repeatedly in my fieldwork, I encountered the view that Chinese migrants should do their best to establish good relations with the host community, but should never forget their distinctiveness. Indeed, there are many ways in which Chinese people do not wish either themselves or their children to become fully westernized, despite seeing many positive aspects of life in Scotland. This ambivalence may reflect a desire to maintain the positive aspects of Chinese culture as it is valued intrinsically, or may be seen as a more general tendency of parents to wish to pass on to their own children the best of what they received in their own upbringing from the previous generation, while always hoping that the children will have still greater opportunities than they did themselves.

The Chinese community schools serve as spaces where, if only for two hours a week, Chinese people can speak their own language and no longer be a “minority”, but part of a larger group. The sense of belonging to this group may be as simple as the realisation that finally, one is among people who look similar to oneself; most Scottish Chinese children have few Chinese friends outside of Chinese school and spend most of their week with peers whose physical appearance is different, however similar they may feel in attitude and tastes. For adults, who have migrated to Scotland later in life, the opportunity to socialize with people from the same place of origin builds confidence and counters the loneliness which many experience as they build new lives in a foreign place. The evidence to the popularity of Chinese schools for both adults and children points to the great importance of what Brubaker would describe as the experience of “groupness” as an event, as well as to the value placed on the Chinese language and culture.

However, the Chinese schools can no longer ignore the fact that non-Chinese people are making claims on aspects of Chinese culture which may once have been thought of as boundary markers, only accessible by birth as a Chinese person. An obvious example is the growing demand from Westerners to learn the Chinese language, but other cases include the popularity of martial arts and Chinese medicine for Western consumers. One of my informants told me that she always wants to giggle when she sees a group of white people practising tai chi, because to her it appears so incongruous. There is also the evidence of Chinese language and culture becoming commoditized as an examinable subject in the mainstream Scottish school curriculum. This globalization of Chinese culture is huge and complex. Against this background, it is interesting that the Chinese community schools still choose to position themselves as the custodians and exponents of Chinese culture to Scottish audiences. There is still a sense that only people born Chinese can truly appreciate the richness of Chinese language and arts. On the other hand, the contrasts and comparisons between the two Chinese schools in Edinburgh point to a complexity in what we define as “Chinese culture”. Beyond the outward signs – lion dances, Chinese language, classical arts of dance, music and calligraphy – are cultural practices such as the respect for hierarchy and wealth as a marker of individual success. These latter practices are clearly being challenged within the Chinese community itself, for example in the old Chinese school where the previous male-dominated leadership, based on wealth and influence has been replaced with a more meritocratic approach and one where women, mostly mothers take the lead.

## Chapter 4

### The tie that binds: gender and handicrafts in the reproduction of culture

Perched on the leather sofa in her sitting room, Lily is tightening the last loose ends in a closely woven mesh of orangey silk cords. Held in the palms of her hands, as she pulls the cords together the object takes the shape of a round peach, sitting on two green leaves. Seen up close the threads on the upper part are graduated in colour, blending pink, orange and cream to suggest the natural colour of a ripe fruit. This project has taken several days to complete, as Lily found odd moments to continue work on it, between driving her children to and from school, after cleaning the house and in the evenings as the family sat down to watch TV. Chinese knotting is Lily's passion, and her home is full of examples of her work: animals representing the signs of the Chinese zodiac, lucky peanuts and maize, bouquets of flowers and the traditional red knots of the sort which hang in many Chinese restaurants in the UK.

As I got to know Lily over the duration of my fieldwork, her knot work frequently came up in conversation. In April 2007 we were both in Hong Kong for short visits and she told me she had been on a shopping trip to the Lo Wu shopping mall in Shenzhen, where she had stumbled on a shop selling books of knot work designs, and ornaments such as replica Chinese coins, which could be incorporated into a knotted decoration. On another occasion when I visited her home in Edinburgh she was speaking by phone to a family member in Hong Kong, giving instructions for him to visit a certain shop where he could buy silk cord of the specific colour she needed for a new project.

Lily's knotted peach, representing the Chinese symbol of longevity, is a model for the larger version which she is planning to make for her father-in-law, the owner of a chain of four Chinese restaurants in the Edinburgh area, who will turn sixty next year. Many Chinese immigrant families in Scotland continue the custom of holding big family dinners for relatives who become sixty and over. In the past Lily has given her father-in-law small pieces that she has made, but for this special birthday, she wants to make something memorable. Her father-in-law likes to display her ornaments in his house, especially at New Year time, and she is proud of this sign of their mutual affection. She tells me with some sadness that the longevity peach may be the last thing she makes for her father-in-law, because this year her

sister-in-law May has started to learn Chinese knot work. The two women have an already strained relationship and Lily says that she does not want any competition over their handiwork to worsen the situation. Lily is in fact divorced from her husband, who is the eldest of her father-in-law's four children, all of whom work in the family restaurants. Lily's ex-husband is his father's most trusted son: for example, he will speak to lawyers or accountants in connection with any of the family businesses. However, he was unfaithful to her throughout their brief marriage, and they separated permanently when their son and daughter were still very small. May is married to the second brother, and Lily claims that May bitterly resents the fact that her father-in-law continues to treat Lily as one of the family, and possibly even favours her over his other two daughters-in-law because she is the mother of his eldest grandson.

Lily is one of a growing number of Chinese women in Scotland who are taking up the hobby of Chinese knotting. She first came across it around 2006, when a class began for adults at the Saturday Chinese school where she takes her two children to study Mandarin. Lily decided to enrol as a way to pass the time while her children were in lessons, but quickly became hooked. Now the knotting teacher, a Malaysian Chinese woman in her fifties, has about fifteen students, some of whom, including Lily have progressed to an advanced level of knotting. The teacher and some of her students are often asked to demonstrate their work at public events such as the school's celebrations of the mid-autumn and lunar New Year Festivals, and the much larger Edinburgh Mela, a multicultural festival funded by the City of Edinburgh Council and held each September.

In this chapter I will explore the meaning of hobbies and leisure in the Scottish Chinese community, and more widely. This is a question which relates directly to the theme of education and socialization, as Lily is learning the craft at the same Chinese community school where her children study Mandarin. I ask what such activities can tell us about ways of sharing knowledge, and whether it is possible to interpret a hobby like Chinese knotting as an embodied form of cultural transmission, not only of learning a particular skill, but also of socializing the participants into particular social identity based on class, gender and ethnicity. I will argue that Lily's hobby is an embodied technique by which she both learns and enacts a desirable status as a middle-class Scottish Chinese woman.

Bray (1997) has explored the role of technology in the processes of cultural transmission by which the culture of late imperial China (from AD 1000 to 1800)

became established at every level of society, across a vast population. Specifically she is interested in technology as a form of communication, a means of “producing people and relations between people” (1997: 3). Most relevant to the present argument is Bray’s inclusion of the weaving of cloth in late imperial China as one of three examples (the others being house design and reproductive technologies) of what she terms “gynotechnics”, that is “a technical system that produced ideas about women, and therefore about a gender system and about hierarchical relations in general.” (1997: 4)

Bray’s discussion focuses on the domestic production of cloth, traditionally women’s work, as distinct from men’s work outside in the fields. Although the practice she describes is not a hobby but an activity essential not only for the health and wellbeing of the family, but actually for the good of the social order, some of what she says about weaving may be helpful in understanding the Scottish Chinese women’s practice of knotting. Bray describes how changes in the textile industry in China between the Song and the Qing led to the displacement of women from weaving, as greater commercialization saw men take over this work. This led to concern over the potential disruption to the very social order, because of the failure to distinguish properly between the genders. One response can be read from popular texts of the time which depict spinning and weaving at home as proper and suitable activities for a virtuous woman. The purpose of such work was not commerce, but filial piety, as a woman was expected to produce comfortable clothes for her husband’s family. Bray adds that spinning was valued for teaching the “specifically female virtues of thrift, frugality and diligence.” (1997: 243). As I shall explain, in Lily’s family there were very different expectations of the proper behaviour for men and women. Knotting is an exclusively female activity and it can be argued that it requires the very three virtues of thrift, frugality and diligence which Bray identifies in association with spinning.

This discussion will again touch on the theme of authenticity which runs throughout the thesis. Lindholm (2008: 1) has argued that authenticity is “taken for granted as an absolute value in contemporary life” and in his book explores “how people from different cultures and periods have sought refuge and inspiration in their own pursuits of authentic being” (2008:2). I argue that for some British Chinese women like Lily, the pursuit of what is perceived to be an authentically Chinese hobby is indeed a kind of refuge from the sometimes negative consequences of growing up as the socially marginalized children of immigrants. By spending time on



a craft which attracts admiration and respect for the achievements of Chinese civilization, Lily and her fellow knotters are seeking to establish both personal authenticity and an authentic group identity as overseas Chinese. As Lindholm writes of the problem of assigning authenticity to ethnic art,

marginalized groups seeking to control valuable artistic production now often claim that only those people proven to be genealogical members of the group (defined variously as a tribe, nation, race, or ethnicity) have the right and the innate capacity to produce its characteristic art forms (2008: 21).

There is a large anthropological literature on artwork, and on the production of handicrafts in the context of work (e.g. Ehlers, 1990; Kondo, 1990). Much less has been written on crafts pursued as hobbies, where the intention is rarely, if ever, to sell the finished product as a contribution to the household income. Gelber (1999) has argued that hobbies are a relatively recent and culturally specific phenomenon, arising in Western societies from the nineteenth century onwards as a result of people's alienation from work after the Industrial Revolution. Maines (2009) rightly argues against Gelber that there are ample examples from Western European culture of hobbies going back to antiquity, such as Seneca's accounts of gardening, embroidery by women of the social elite including Mary, Queen of Scots, and Izaak Walton's writing on fishing in the seventeenth century.

One of the difficulties in distinguishing work from hobbies is that the same activities may be defined as either, in different circumstances. People may keep animals, for example, because they are farmers, or because they have the space and time and a desire to do so. It is not merely a question of whether one is paid for one's work, but as Maines argues, whether intrinsic motivation and satisfaction are to be derived from the activity. There is an inherent problem in determining how another person really feels in relation to her activity – how are we to tell whether a woman sewing is experiencing pleasure in relation to her work, as opposed to, say pride in anticipation of reward for it? In non-Western and non-industrialized societies of the kind traditionally studied by anthropologists it may have been even more difficult to make the theoretical distinction between work and hobby. Maines gives the example of embroidery as one seemingly cross-cultural hobby, by its nature decorative rather than functional, but even embroidery could be counted as work, if for example the needlewoman were to use embroidery to add value to a garment which was going to be sold. Maines' key argument is that the transformation of a former work activity into a hobby takes place through "hedonization of technology":

the removal of all need to make, sew or repair textiles in the home free artisans – most, but not all of them, women – to enjoy and explore the aesthetic, sensual, intellectual, and emotional rewards of needlework, and even to find in it a form of salutary escapism from the troubles of ordinary life, whether pre-, proto- or post-industrial. (Maines 2009: 4)

At the same time, there are external forces encouraging the pursuit of leisure crafts and Maines' book sets out in detail the growth in the market of tools and equipment for hobbies, and the boom in publishing of books, magazines and the like. Her term “hedonized technologies” refers to the way in which consumer demand has led to the adaptation of technologies from the strictly functional, to those which can be a pleasure to use: an example for knitting would be the availability of bamboo needles, which feel better in the hand than steel, and of hand-painted wool and other luxury yarns.

She identifies a further set of factors which may explain or at least describe the long growth in demand for hedonizing technologies: one is what Clifford Geertz has described as the human need for work-like play, and the experience of shutting oneself off from everyday concerns; a second is a sheer love of tools; a third, for some hobbyists, is nostalgia for technologies of the past; fourth, is the pleasure of separating oneself off from other people while being absorbed in a craft; and fifth would be that hobbies create an area to develop skill and excellence. Finally, she points out that crafts result in a product which can be given or shared.

Maines highlights the “aesthetic, sensual, intellectual, and emotional rewards” of a craft pursued for pleasure, and for Lily these personal motivations are very strong. She is a woman who achieved little in formal education and has no training or experience for work except as a waitress in family restaurants. Her voluntary commitment of spare time to knotting shows that it brings her emotional rewards as a pleasurable activity, and it is clear that she enjoys the aesthetic and sensual aspects because of her efforts to choose and purchase the best quality materials she can afford for her work. Later in the chapter I will tell the story of Lily's life, to illustrate the point that Scottish Chinese women like her have time to create their chosen form of textiles – Chinese knot work – precisely because their families have achieved a level of economic stability where it is no longer necessary for the women to work all day. I explain that knotting, like other crafts, underwent a transformation from being a purely utilitarian skill to a form of art, in the same way

that Maines describes candle making, for instance, emerging as a hobby when it had ceased to be economically necessary.

### **A women's domain of knowledge**

In Chapter 1, on the restaurant trade, I explained that work in catering is divided on gender lines, and expertise in cooking tends to be a male field of knowledge. Chinese knotting is also a highly gendered craft, being practised only by women, and represents a domain where cultural knowledge is passed on down an exclusively female line. In terms of learning, it combines the use of specialist texts (available only from China and Taiwan) with, importantly, direct contact between teacher and students in which, as with apprenticeships in many cultural contexts, there is a clearly demarcated path of expertise along which students can only progress after demonstrating their mastery of practical skills.

The class in Edinburgh is taught by a Malaysian Chinese woman in her late forties or fifties who has lived in the UK for many years since marrying a Scottish man. Josephine had learned Chinese knotting in a small class run by the wife of the Taiwanese consul in Edinburgh some years before. All of the students in that class were women. Discovering a talent for it, Josephine went on to acquire certificates in knotting, following a syllabus developed in Taiwan where the craft has been revived and was popularized in the 1970s. Apart from teaching the class at the Chinese school, for which she was paid a sessional rate, Josephine made elaborate knotted ornaments at home and sold them at craft fairs around southern Scotland. Her type of work is relatively unknown in Scotland and she knew of only one other person locally who was almost as expert as she was: another former pupil of the consul's wife.

Along with about eight of Josephine's original group of students, Lily has now progressed to an advanced level, while Josephine has taken on new pupils and now runs three small "classes" in parallel, teaching beginners, intermediate and advanced students. In autumn 2007 there were fifteen students, all mothers of children at Chinese school, and all Cantonese-speaking Chinese, except for the beginners' class. Apart from Lily's sister-in-law May, who was learning knotting for the first time, the beginners class was made up of myself, a young Polish woman and an Englishwoman in her sixties who had retired to Edinburgh. The two other non-Chinese students had come across Josephine's work at a craft fair and decided to

study with her, adding to their existing skills in other handicrafts such as quilting, ribbon work and jewellery making.

Our classes met for two hours each Saturday afternoon in term time, using an ordinary classroom in the high school where the Chinese school took place. The beginners' class sat at one side of the room, around four tables pushed together, and the intermediate and advanced students sat on the other side forming one big group around more tables. Josephine would move between the two groups, giving instructions then leaving us to work at the latest project while she spoke to the other students.

The beginners' course was structured so that each week we would learn a new type of knot, which would be used to make a small object: as it was the autumn term we made several Christmas tree decorations, as well as a more traditional Chinese button and fastener, and a hair clip. The intermediate and advanced students were working on larger objects, such as the longevity peach, and different types of flower, which sometimes took more than one lesson. Josephine provided written instructions, usually photocopies from a Chinese-language manual with diagrams, and all the materials.

Josephine often spoke to us students about the years of practice she had undertaken to gain her certificates in knotting, and of the high demands of her teacher, who would not accept work which was less than perfect. She would ask her pupils to undo a piece and make it again from scratch if she thought the cords were too loose or too tight, or the shape was uneven. By contrast, Josephine hinted that she was quite relaxed with us, not insisting that we complete perfect models. If, however, we ran out of time in class and took the work away to finish at home, she always asked us to bring it back the following week for her to check.

By supplying all the materials and patterns, Josephine kept strict control over our work. We were allowed to buy extra materials from her if we wanted to make more than the single model items which we worked on in class, but she expected us to follow her instructions exactly and never encouraged us to experiment with different materials or to adapt her patterns. An exception to this was that the advanced students were asked to buy an ornamental plant pot to hold the knotted orange tree which they had made over several weeks. This project had required extra work at home to make enough fruits to for a full tree, and Lily was one of only two or three students who actually finished it. She bought her pot from a Chinese home

wares store in Edinburgh and received compliments from Josephine and the other students on finding something so appropriate.

One of Lily's friends admired the piece so much that she offered Lily £100 to make one for her. Lily refused the money, on the basis that she should not accept payment for her work until she had as many official certificates as Josephine. Josephine had forbidden it because if there were any flaws in the student's work, this would reflect badly on the teacher. In the end, Lily agreed to do the work if her friend agreed to pay for the materials, but no more. At the same time Lily was clearly flattered to have been given the commission and proud to have put in enough effort to master the skill of knotting, and to track down a really beautiful accessory, the pot. She felt that she had followed Josephine's instructions, unlike others in the class who had not spent the same amount of time practising outside class, and her reward was to be admired as one of the most expert students.

### **A social space for women**

The weekly knotting class served as an important social space for Scottish Chinese women, most of whom saw each other only once a week, at Chinese school. This contributed to a sense of collective belonging to a group defined by ethnicity, gender and for most, the shared experience of mothering. Students in the knotting classes would talk amongst themselves while they worked: the senior group chatted entirely in Cantonese, about all sorts of things, while the beginners, with English as our common language, spoke less, and mainly about the knotting, except when I prompted May to tell me more about her life now and while she was growing up.

May told me that she saw the two hours of the knotting class as "time for me", the first thing she had done for herself since her first child was born seven years before. However, she was not completely free of her childcare responsibilities. May was the only student to bring a child along to the class, her youngest son Andrew, aged three, who was not old enough for the language classes. He was almost always silent and would stand at her side, wander around the room or crouch on the floor. He occasionally took things from his mother's handbag or ate biscuits or sweets which May brought in a bag for him, but mostly just looked at what we were doing, sometimes picking up the pins, threads or cigarette lighter. If he did touch anything, May would take it away from him, laughing, but rarely gave him anything else to play with. Later Lily told me that Josephine and some of the other students had also been grumbling to each other about Andrew's behaviour, particularly because he

dropped food in the classroom where we were not supposed to eat. The other mothers had suggested that May should give him a Nintendo to keep him occupied and the following week he was in fact holding one.

Because we sat far apart in the room it often seemed as though the two knotting groups were quite separate but Lily's comments on Andrew's behaviour demonstrated how closely people observed each other. Another time she told me that she and the other senior knotters had been chatting about their children's schoolwork, and one of her friends said pointedly, "You don't need to worry how well Christopher [Lily's son] does at school. Your father-in-law will find a job for him." Lily blushed and told her to be quiet in case May heard and accused her of flaunting their father-in-law's wealth.

The knotting group was important as an occasion for Chinese women to come together with people outside their immediate family group. I realised this was unusual for them when sitting downstairs drinking coffee with May one day during the break in the middle of class. Looking around the room, where parents were sitting and children were chasing each other among the chairs, she said, "It's really weird seeing so many Chinese kids in one place." She may have been exaggerating slightly, as many Chinese families would go out to the same restaurants for lunch on Sundays or Mondays when their own businesses were closed, or for family celebrations. For many of the children as well as adults, Chinese school was a unique opportunity to meet other Chinese people. The women in the knotting group treated it very much as a social occasion. Apart from chatting loudly, one or two of them would often bring in plastic boxes of home-made snacks or Thermos flasks of a special drink to share. Cooking was a favourite topic of conversation but also provided scope for some competition between women who would like to show off their signature dishes and new recipes.

### **Hedonized technology**

We were asked to provide our own tools for the classes: dressmaking pins, small pliers, a cigarette lighter for sealing cord ends, and a polystyrene mat on which to fix our work. One could buy these at little cost in Edinburgh. However, the cords and beads which we used were impossible to buy in the UK, so Josephine imported them herself from a specialist supplier in Taiwan. She charged us at cost, usually no more than £2 a week. This, of course, added to our sense of the craft as something truly Chinese and truly specialized.

For one project, Josephine asked the senior class to find their own beads or other ornaments to decorate a large red knot. Lily produced an antique-style Chinese coin which her father-in-law had bought for her on a business trip to Hong Kong. None of the other students had anything like it and they all crowded round to admire it when she brought it to class the next week. Lily was unusual among her friends in having family members who travelled back and forth from Hong Kong several times a year, so that she could quite easily and quickly obtain things which could only be bought there. Another time she ran out of a particular colour of cord, and phoned a cousin in Hong Kong who went to the craft shop to buy it for her. The fact that Lily's relatives travelled so often was an obvious sign of their wealth in relation to other Scottish Chinese families, who might have to save up for several years before they could afford flights back to Hong Kong. Lily's father-in-law often travelled back, or sent his relatives back, in order to recruit and accompany new workers for his restaurants in Edinburgh, because of a shortage of specialist chefs in the UK. Other members of her Scottish-based family would travel to Hong Kong simply to visit their relatives still living in Sha Tau Kok, a village in the New Territories on the border with China.

Following Maines, the efforts which Lily makes to obtain the best materials for her craft demonstrate that these are hedonized technologies, in the sense that even the pursuit and selection of the tools has an element of pleasure. Because these materials could only be obtained from Hong Kong or Taiwan, they acquired an added value by virtue of their perceived authenticity – their very Chineseness, it seemed, enhanced the value of the artefact which Lily would make with them. And not only the perceived value of the object, but Lily herself appeared to gain prestige among her circle of women friends because of her easy access to the source of these authentically Chinese materials.

In his review of Lindholm (2008), Parish writes,

In the culture of authenticity, people have to establish a provenance for themselves, establish their identities and 'essence', know their roots, and verify their origins. They try to bring together essence and appearance. Most of all, they seek their own authentic selves. (Parish, 2009: 139-40)

I am arguing that Lily's activity of Chinese knotting is one means by which she seeks to establish a sense of who she is, as a Scottish-born Chinese woman. Parish goes on to point out that the practices of authenticity are often activities which engage the body and senses in a lived experience which maybe indexically linked to

an imagined, abstract community. Parish cites examples such as eating a national dish or performing a regional dance. He stresses that such activities, by engaging real emotions and sensations, elicit a strong feeling of “being real” in one’s self. The very tactile action of handling knotting materials is arguably another means of making palpable a sense of psychological attachment to a far-off place of origin.

In the next section I argue that having access to the homeland of China, through visits and the acquisition of Chinese goods, may contribute to an overseas Chinese person’s self-worth because of a deep sense of pride in the achievements of Chinese civilization. This is in spite of the fact that a Chinese person such as Lily, born overseas and unable to read or write Chinese beyond a very basic level, had only very limited personal knowledge of that civilization. Chinese knotting is to a large extent an invented tradition (Hobsbawm, Ranger, & Morgan, 1992).

### **Cultural authenticity and multiculturalism**

Chinese knots were also a kind of currency in the public presentation of the Chinese community in Edinburgh. On occasions such as the Chinese school’s New Year fair and the Edinburgh Mela, women from the knotting class ran workshops for members of the public, mainly children, who could drop by and learn to make a simple knotted ornament. At the Edinburgh Mela, a publicly funded multicultural festival which runs over three days in a city centre park each summer, the Chinese knotting took place in a tent as part of a “craft village”, alongside stalls where children could make Native American dream catchers or Nepali kites, have their hands painted with henna or try some African drums.

Lily worked on the Chinese knotting stall with Josephine and was amazed firstly at how busy they were, with children crowding around all afternoon for a chance to make their own knotted jewellery. Secondly, Lily was surprised at how much public money was spent on the Mela. She was paid £45 for her afternoon’s work, and the council had reimbursed Josephine for her time and all the materials. Lily had not attended the Mela before and said she had assumed it was only for Pakistani people. In fact, it was started by Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people in Edinburgh and most of the music was South East Asian. However, the people who attended were a mixed group, including large numbers of white Scots as well as other ethnic groups.

While capitalizing on their ethnic distinctiveness through work in the catering trade, Scottish Chinese people like Lily often seem surprised that a non-Chinese



person should be interested or even want to participate in Chinese activities such as knotting. Lily had been amused when I told her of my intention to enrol in the knotting class, almost doubting that I would be able to learn, because I was not Chinese. In the same way, she was puzzled when I first explained that I wanted to learn Cantonese from her, and she would always make me “English tea” because she was so sure that I would not like green tea. Of course, it is very well known that the food served in British Chinese restaurants bears little resemblance to the food British Chinese families eat at home. Lily actively hid her Chinese food from non-Chinese people. On one occasion a visiting child, a white Scottish friend of her son, had commented on the smell of a steamed fish she was cooking that afternoon. After that, she consciously cooked only “Western” food, which she defined as things like pies, sausages and chips, on days when the children had friends around to play. While appearing to trade openly on their ethnicity, for people like Lily, true Chinese identity is intricately linked to everyday family life, but not something to be shared publicly with non-Chinese.

### **Knotting as an invented tradition**

Knotting is also promoted as an authentic ethnic craft in the way that it is used not only at the Chinese school, but also at public events such as the Edinburgh Mela and Chinese New Year celebrations, as an example to non-Chinese of the rich and civilized cultural history of China. When she participates as a demonstrator at public workshops, Lily is presenting herself as a representative of that ancient civilization.

Knots have been a feature of Chinese civilization for thousands of years, serving numerous purposes in hunting, fishing and clothing, among others. This basic function of knots became further developed into an art form in Imperial China. There is pictorial evidence of ornamental knot work from artefacts such as bronze vessels and silk paintings dating as far back as the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE). The practice continued as both an elite and folk art until the early twentieth century (Chen, 2003).

And yet, although Chinese knot work has a very long history in China, it was not part of Lily’s family culture growing up, and as a handicraft it is still not very widely known in China today. The practice had fallen into abeyance in the course of industrialization in mainland China, and in the Cultural Revolution. As a modern craft, it was revived in Taiwan in the 1970s by Lydia Chen of the National Palace Museum. Chen was instrumental in establishing a Chinese Knotting Promotion

Centre in Taipei and went on to publish a series of books, in Chinese and English, giving instructions and illustrations of how Chinese knots could be used by hobbyists to make items such as jewellery and accessories as well as household ornaments. The fact that Chen's books were published in English by US publishers and remain in print twenty years after first publication demonstrates that interest in Chinese knot work grew quickly outside Taiwan. It is taught in Chinese heritage language schools in the US as well as in the UK and the format of the books, with clear, easy-to-follow directions makes the craft accessible to non-experts.

The revival of Chinese knotting in Taiwan in the 1970s supports Myron Cohen's (1994) argument that the peripheral places of Chinese culture including Taiwan are crucial to the survival and regeneration of Chinese civilization. Cohen has argued that in China's late traditional culture to be Chinese was no less than to be a proper person, within a social and political structure which was seen to obey the very principles of the cosmos. Migration by Han Chinese over a huge geographical area led to the replication of a shared culture over many regions. Key features of family organization, for instance, were common to people throughout China, including patrilocal marriage and patrilineal authority within the family, as well as the custom of property distribution through family division. Cohen points out that despite the linguistic diversity of China, it is striking that in late imperial times as many as two thirds of Han Chinese spoke Mandarin or a variant of it, while linguistic unity over an even wider area was achieved through the use of a common script for writing.

Cohen argues that identifying as Chinese has become much more difficult since the Chinese state and its ruling elite ceased to play their part in sustaining the all-encompassing ideology of traditional China. If the authorities not only fail to endorse, but actively oppose ritual practices and even the traditional social structures, then to continue to behave in the traditional way is self-defeating. While the modern Chinese state may command the nationalist loyalty of its people, it does so, argues Cohen, through a form of nationalism which lacks cultural content and elicits no special forms of behaviour. He contrasts this with Taiwanese nationalism, which has been built on a new assertion of traditional Chinese culture and ritual observances, in a deliberate attempt to claim an authentic identity separate from mainland China.

In the following section, concerning the celebration of festivals and the growing interest in the Mandarin language among Scottish Chinese people, I will argue that mainland China may be reclaiming its position as cultural centre, taking

back the initiative from the periphery. Following Cohen, however, the global spread of the art of Chinese knotting, particularly among overseas Chinese communities in the US and UK, suggests that these communities, geographically far from the cultural centre of mainland China, have indeed been the spaces where Chinese traditional cultures is being kept alive.

Lily's dutiful behaviour towards her husband's family may be interpreted as another example of how Chinese views of personhood and relationships are perpetuated in the diaspora. One reason why Chinese knotting appeals to Scottish Chinese women like Lily is its "authentic" cultural origins in classical China. The possession of Chinese artefacts such as furniture and household ornaments is extremely important in Lily's family; the emotional value of such possessions became clear to me when Lily explained that her father-in-law showed his appreciation of her as a daughter-in-law by bringing her a genuine antique dresser from mainland China to put in her dining room in Edinburgh. Lily believed that the gift had riled her sisters-in-law who felt bitter that he was showing favouritism towards Lily. In that context, her intention to make and present him with a hand-made, very traditional Chinese gift, is laden with emotional and cultural power. Not only is she a loving daughter-in-law, but she is deeply Chinese, with all the associations of proper moral standing that Chineseness carries in the traditional context.

### **Lily's story**

I had been making weekly visits to Lily's home for about six months before I asked her to tell me her life story. The arrangement was that each week I would spend about an hour with her eleven-year-old son, supervising his homework and giving him additional coaching in English language. Afterwards I would sit with Lily downstairs drinking tea and chatting about anything that was going on in her life that week. Over two or three sessions, she told me a history of her family, and I filled in further details on other occasions. My intention in recounting the story here is to show that Lily herself, and certainly the women of the older generations in her family, have not always had the luxury of leisure time as comparatively recently they were all occupied in meeting the basic needs of their household. Maslow (1954) has pointed out that leisure crafts and hobbies are pleasurable luxuries to which we can only turn when our "deficit needs" for physical security, food, shelter etc. have been met. This section, I hope will demonstrate why the surge in interest in hobbies such

as Chinese knotting, not only for Lily but other Scottish Chinese women too, is an important illustration of the changes in Scottish Chinese family life, particularly of gender roles, at a point when, in Maslow's terms, the most basic needs are secured and people are freed to pursue what he describes as the higher goal of "self-actualization".

Lily's mother was born into a wealthy family in southern China. Her father died young and when the Japanese invaded, Lily's grandmother escaped with her two children, Lily's mother and uncle, to Hong Kong. In Lily's account, many such families left behind their wealth, burying gold and other valuables in the expectation that they would one day return, but actually never seeing it again. Her mother's family became impoverished in this way. Her grandmother remarried in Hong Kong, to a kind man with whom she had two more children before he also died. After that, the family struggled to make ends meet, and Lily's mother had to leave school at the age of thirteen and went to work in a glove factory. She was bitterly disappointed by this, as she enjoyed school and did well in her studies. At the age of nineteen, she was married to Lily's father, the son of a former servant of the family in China, and they migrated to the UK to work with his relatives. They had heard that there was a lot of money to be made in restaurants, but did not realise how tough the work would be, and how isolated they would become, not speaking English and living in overcrowded accommodation. At this time she became very depressed and wanted to divorce her husband and return to Hong Kong. However, there had been disagreements within her husband's family, so they were no longer working together in the same restaurant, and she and her husband had to carry on working in order to survive. By this time they had both begun smoking heavily and gambling which made their money problems worse, and attracted criticism from other Chinese – Lily remembers being teased about her parents' habits by Chinese children at school.

Lily was born in Scotland but was sent back to Hong Kong as a tiny baby as her parents were too busy working to take care of her. She spent the early part of her childhood in the New Territories with her maternal grandmother, and remains very fond of her. She seems much closer to this grandmother, who had grown up in a happy and rich family in China, than to her mother, who she barely saw until she was five or six. Her earliest memory of her mother is of arrival in the village to collect Lily, and of her being horrified at Lily's shabby clothes and uncut hair. One of their first activities together was to travel into Kowloon to buy her a new dress.

Lily came back to Scotland with her mother and started primary school where she struggled to learn English and felt lonely and isolated from her non-Chinese classmates. She and her little brother now lived in a house with their paternal grandmother, an aunt, uncle, and several small cousins; her parents lived elsewhere and saw the children just once a week. The grandmother was extremely strict and never took the children out of the flat except to go to school. Lily, as the eldest girl, was soon expected to take care of her younger cousins and recalls much of her time being spent changing nappies and feeding babies.

From her early teens she moved in with her parents and helped out in their takeaway shop on several evenings a week. She left school at sixteen with no qualifications and little confidence in reading or writing English (her third language, as the family spoke Hakka at home but she had learned Cantonese by chatting with other Chinese children at her school in Glasgow). She did not hesitate to leave her parents' home as soon as she was old enough, taking her future into her own hands by moving from Glasgow to Edinburgh at the age of sixteen to live with her husband-to-be, a British-born Chinese man whom she had met through mutual friends. She told her parents that she was going to do a college course in Edinburgh but actually moved in with her boyfriend and his siblings, and worked with him in a takeaway until they married two years later. Lily tells me that she and her then husband decided when they married that they would not have children unless they were able to take care of them without family help, and Lily has stayed at home with the children since they were born, while he worked for his father, soon taking on the management of his own restaurant.

It was not long after their marriage that Lily's husband was unfaithful to her for the first time, and they divorced eight years later. Despite his marital infidelities (he currently has two girlfriends, one Polish and one from mainland China, both of whom worked in his restaurant), her ex-husband is reliable in his maintenance payments and Lily and the two children live in a newly-built three-bedroom house on a private development on the outskirts of Edinburgh. She drives a new people-carrier and they have a holiday in Hong Kong every year.

Lily is proud of working hard as a mother and housewife, and her home is always immaculately clean and tidy. She is also very loyal to her ex-husband's parents, only occasionally complaining that they continue to ask her for help although she is divorced from their son. In fact she does a lot for them, driving them to the airport when they go on holiday, accompanying her mother-in-law to medical

appointments and, when some cousins decided to emigrate with their teenage sons from Hong Kong to Edinburgh, it was Lily who was asked to find them a flat to rent and to enrol the boys in high school. She believes it is because she is known to be reliable and hard-working that her in-laws choose Lily for tasks like this, but also links the work to the money she receives from her father-in-law and the duty expected of a daughter-in-law. This arises in conversation when she complains that her sisters-in-law have accused her of taking payment from the cousins in return for sorting out their housing – Lily says “it’s funny how they complain about me getting money from the family, because I’m divorced, but when there is work to be done they expect me to do it, as though I’m still part of the family.” In return, she is critical of her sister-in-law May in particular, for spending excessively on designer clothes and handbags, and for boasting about her newly built luxury home. Despite being the innocent party in her failed marriage, Lily continues to work hard at the emotional work of maintaining good relations with her ex-husband’s parents. In return, she has achieved a level of domestic stability for herself and her children and a relatively affluent lifestyle.

### **Adorning the home**

In her study of the emergence of a new Chinese middle class, through the redevelopment of urban spaces and specifically residential areas in mainland Chinese cities, Li Zhang (2010) describes the revalorization of self-worth in this context. In her argument, private home ownership has become central to conjugal relationships, but has also led to a refiguring of gender identities. There are obviously huge political and economic differences between the cities of Edinburgh and Li Zhang’s Kunming. In addition, it is important that my informants have their family roots in Hong Kong and the New Territories, and so have no first-hand experience of life in China under communism, with its dramatic effects on gender and other social relations. However, I see strong parallels between the processes Li Zhang describes in China and the changes in Scottish Chinese households such as Lily’s.

For men, self-worth is tied to a form of masculinity manifested in one’s ability to make money, possess desirable material goods, or gain political power. The traditional *wen* [refined behaviour and scholarly achievement] and *wu* [physical strength and martial prowess] qualities and the passion for revolution have been eclipsed by material accumulation in the contemporary quest for a masculine self. For women, self-worth is deeply intertwined with the

refeminization of their body, physical appearance, and conduct. There is a growing, intense interest among young and middle-aged urban women in fashion, cosmetic surgery, and etiquette training classes with the aim of cultivating refined femininity. (Li Zhang 2010: 166)

Lily's family situation exemplifies these gendered differences in desire for outward signs of self-worth. Her husband has always sought to be the sole breadwinner in the family, and both he and his brother (May's husband) have provided their wives and children with their own homes in new housing developments. In fact, ideas about physical appearance and self-worth emerged early in Lily's account of her own life, when she recalled her mother's dismay at the way she looked on their first meeting after several years of separation. Although the women's attitudes to the cultivation of physical beauty differ – Lily is now publicly scornful of May's love of designer clothes and accessories – their pursuit of hobbies such as Chinese knotting does convey a shared desire to cultivate “feminine” interests. The types of object made in the knotting class all fed into this desire: they were items of jewellery and accessories for clothing, or decorations for the home.

Lily's pride in her home was most evident in the extent to which she prepared for Chinese New Year. In the six or seven other Chinese homes I visited around that time of year, there was little or no visible indication of the festival, except for one or two cards on mantelpieces. For families where the mother worked part-time or full-time in a restaurant, Chinese New Year was a time when there was less, not more time to spend together as a family, and certainly little time to decorate the house, because catering businesses had their busiest period. Staff leave was cancelled and many people worked extra shifts. In Lily's family, however, it was usual for her extended family of brothers- and sisters-in-law, their children and some cousins to visit each other at home over several days. During this period Lily would generally pay a visit to her own parents, whom she saw only occasionally during the year. In preparation for the visits from her ex-husband's relatives, she would bring boxes of decorations down from her loft and hang ornaments on her doors and from lights. She set out dishes of the traditional symbolic sweets, nuts and dried fruit. Many of the decorations were her own knot work, which she displayed along with gifts which her parents-in-law had brought from Hong Kong. In 2007, the year of the pig, she had in the hallway a jade pig which her mother-in-law had bought as a gift for Lily's son when he was born in the previous year of the pig, twelve years before. While she

was entirely dependent on her ex-husband for financial support, and for her house itself, Lily proved herself the mistress of her home through its beautiful appearance.

Li Zhang's analysis of the housing market as a central feature in conjugal relationships also suggests one possible interpretation of Lily's seemingly anomalous position as a divorced woman who continues to be housed and supported financially by her ex-husband. As Li Zhang points out (2010: 180), a woman must take financial considerations into account not only when marrying or divorcing, but when considering re-marriage. Lily once told me that her children often urged her to start dating and get herself a boyfriend, but, she said rather obliquely, she would rather stay single to avoid problems with her husband's family. Li Zhang describes a Kunming woman in a very similar situation to Lily, who had divorced but in the settlement received a luxury apartment and a new car, as well as her husband continuing to pay their son's school fees and all their living expenses. This woman no longer needed to work, but paid the price of never being able to marry again because any other man would feel ashamed to come and live in a house paid for by her ex-husband. Furthermore there was no guarantee (as is also highly likely in Lily's case) that she would find another man rich enough to provide her with a similarly high standard of living.

Li Zhang argues that in Kunming this dual process of remasculinization and refeminization is "not only an effect of a raging market culture that seeks to harness consumer desires but also a reaction to the socialist erasure of gender that is seen by many Chinese today as having been dehumanizing" (ibid: 166). Chinese Scots, of course, did not experience the social effects of communism, but arguably the experience of first generation migrants, who were obliged to work together as men and women, jointly running a family business, had a similar effect. Lily's mother was unable to live with her children and really missed out on the everyday experience of mothering because of the need for her to work outside the home. In Lily's own account of her life, she and her husband took the conscious decision not to repeat the same pattern in their own married life. They shared the view that Lily, as a wife, should dedicate herself to raising their children and not call on relatives to do that for her. While the marriage failed, Lily has succeeded in the aspiration to a more leisured life as a housewife and full-time mother.



### **Leisure time for men**

If Chinese knotting is a gendered and socially respectable leisure activity for Chinese women in Edinburgh, there is a parallel pastime for men. Lily's "Uncle Bruce" (the father-in-law of her ex-husband's sister), is a founder member of the Edinburgh Chinese Golf Association. On the mantelpiece of the small semi-detached house that he shares with his second wife, Jenny, are five or six trophies awarded by the Association and on the wall above are several framed photos of Bruce on the green with about ten other Chinese men, mostly in their forties and fifties. One day I was drinking tea with Jenny when Bruce came downstairs wearing a polo shirt embroidered with the Edinburgh Chinese Golf Association name, and the logo of Mercedes Benz which has sponsored the club. I asked him how golf had become such a big part of his life.

Bruce, who is now 54, explained that he came to Britain as a teenager, to join his father who was working in a Chinese restaurant in Newcastle. In 1971, Bruce's brother-in-law offered him a job in his new restaurant in Grangemouth, West Lothian, where he worked until he had saved enough money to open his own business. By the 1980s Bruce was married with children and owned two restaurants but employed managers to run them so that he had very little to do. He only had to call in at the end of the evening to cash up and check everything was OK. He spent a lot of time playing snooker, and going to private clubs and pubs to meet friends, local Scottish people. He would have a drink and a chat with them, spend a pleasant evening then bring them back to his restaurant for a meal at the end. He had to do this for his business, because if he didn't bring them to the restaurant, why would they come? They were more likely to come back if they knew the boss, and if he came to sit with them after they had finished eating, buy them drinks and have a friendly chat. It gave them a better experience.

In those days, he says Chinese people would mainly relax in casinos or in smoky snooker halls. It wasn't healthy. One of Bruce's Chinese pals who had been a caddy when he was a boy in Hong Kong suggested that Bruce should come and play golf with him one day. That first day, out of eighteen holes, he got one on par and he was hooked. Soon he was playing three times a day, from morning to evening, driving between courses in Bathgate, Linlithgow and elsewhere. It was much healthier than snooker, getting gentle exercise and spending time out in the open air.

It was also a social game. In the 1980s, Bruce went on holiday to Korea and Taiwan with a group of Chinese friends from Edinburgh, and when they came back,

a group of ten of them started to play golf together. They would play a round then have a meal together. After a while someone suggested that they should organize themselves into a formal association. Bruce taught them all to play golf, taking them to driving ranges and so on. Now they have forty or fifty members, all men. Many of them have retired now so have lots of time to play. It's a healthy way to spend your leisure time, he repeats. He cites one friend who is in his seventies now but, according to Bruce, appears twenty years younger, because he spends so much time outdoors, exercising on the golf course.

At one time Bruce owned four restaurants in Edinburgh, but when he divorced his first wife, he gave her a house and two of the restaurants, which she still runs with their son. Because of ill health, Bruce gave up work completely in his late forties, but he has saved enough money to enjoy a comfortable retirement. I ask if he thinks his son will also eventually have such a leisured existence, employing other people to do the work for him, but Bruce says no, his son is too lazy. He will never make it.

Not only does Bruce play golf in Edinburgh three or four times a week, but once a year he goes on holiday with friends to China, where they play golf at new resort hotels. It was at one of these hotels, in Guangdong Province, that Bruce met Jenny, who was then nineteen and working as a waitress. They married a year later and she came to live with him in Edinburgh.

Like Chinese knotting for women, golf is seen by those Chinese men who have time for it as a pleasure which they have earned through hard work in past years. Just as Lily feels she deserves to live comfortably now as a housewife, after the deprivations of her childhood, so Bruce believes that time on the golf course is his reward for the drudgery and long hours of work in restaurants as a young man. Golf is desirable as an activity which is healthy and good for the person's physical well-being. It can also become a field for the individual to acquire skills, and Bruce is proud to be one of the better players among his acquaintances, good enough to have taught many of the others to play.

It is also an arena in which men display their status to each other as elite members of a group of successful restaurant owners, proud of their self-made success. Although Bruce did not mention this aspect of the game to me, a white Scottish acquaintance told me on one occasion that he often saw the Chinese golfers playing at Muirfield (a private golf club on the outskirts of Edinburgh), and he was aware that large sums of money were being gambled on their games. In this respect

golf contrasts strongly with Chinese knotting, which costs very little money; on the other hand, to be a golfer at a private club, and bet money on it, requires considerable wealth. Golfing is a sport played in public, often taking men away from home for quite long periods. Here is another difference from the domestic hobby of knotting.

The Edinburgh-based Chinese golfers form part of a global phenomenon of golf as part of the lifestyle of a successful businessman. The fact that Bruce and his friends find luxury resorts where they can play golf in China points to the place of golf in China's new business culture. The Scottish government indeed recently launched a strategy to attract Chinese golfers on holiday to Scotland, recognizing that this is a lucrative new market (Scottish Government, 2009c). While located in Scotland, Bruce and colleagues are part of this Chinese business culture which is now becoming internationalized through the political and economic links being established between Scotland and China.

In their leisure activities, then, this group of Scottish Chinese business people express themselves as gendered individuals, who are marked also by their financial status and their command of leisure time. This distinguishes them from other Chinese migrants to Britain, in the past and now, whose lives are still dominated by the drudgery of work in restaurants.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that knotting has become a desirable pastime for some Scottish Chinese women in part because it is seen as cultivating various positive characteristics in them as people, characteristics that are very close to those identified by Bray in writings from eighteenth-century China. Lily demonstrates filial piety to her ex-husband's family not only by giving practical help to her parents-in-law and their relatives, but also through symbolic gifts of her own handiwork, of which the birthday peach is just one special example. Thrift is another important virtue for women like Lily. She complains to me, and I believe to other people, about her sister-in-law's extravagant spending on luxury goods and is stung by criticism in turn from May which implies that Lily is greedy and would take money for herself and her children without working for it.

The fact that Lily has time to do handicrafts as a hobby reflects well on her husband who has made it financially viable for her not to go out to work, and she enjoys her status as a housewife because her life is so much more comfortable now than it was in her childhood. There is some irony in this, as Lily simultaneously

laments the fact that her parents forced her to work, and did not prioritize her education, instead training her from a very early age to care for children and a home. She has fulfilled their expectations of her by remaining at home but manages to convince herself that this was at least in part her decision, as it was her decision to run away and marry the man of her choice.

The Chineseness of the craft is crucial to its importance for Lily and I hope to have shown how a sense of ethnic identity is tightly bound up with ideas of proper family relationships and of respectable economic choices. Yet these ideas of correct behaviour and thinking have not come down through an unbroken chain of tradition and, just as Chinese knotting has been rediscovered and re-invented for modern hobbyists, so too Chinese Scots are finding their own ways of being Chinese, based on particular notions of what is authentic. Lily's celebration of Chinese New Year was very like the "ideal" version of how the festival should be celebrated, as other Scottish Chinese people would describe it to me, while laughing that they personally did not follow any of the traditions, and mostly thought they were all in the past, in Hong Kong. The circumstances of emigrant life and the specific nature of the ethnic catering trade meant that customs had altered for most, but in Lily's family it seemed that after a generation of disruption, she as a young housewife was choosing to structure her time according to a very traditional model.

## **Part 3**

### **Reproducing culture as Chinese overseas**

## Chapter 5

### **Chinese New Year celebrations in Edinburgh: preserving tradition or celebrating integration**

In Chinese communities around the world today, celebrations of the lunar New Year or Spring Festival tend to fall into at least three categories: these include private celebrations of reunion with family members at home; meals with friends and colleagues in restaurants or other public places; and the large-scale public events, such as television entertainment, which serve to bring nations together in a common sense of identity. This chapter consists of an analysis of two public celebrations of Chinese New Year in Edinburgh in 2007 and 2008. The first is the stage show by amateur and professional performers which was held at the Edinburgh Festival Theatre, and organized by the Edinburgh Chinese School (the “old Chinese school”). The second event, billed as a “Shanghai Nostalgia Extravaganza”, was a dinner-dance for 250 people at the Sheraton Hotel. This was organized by the Edinburgh Chinese Community School (the “new Chinese school”), in collaboration with the Edinburgh Chinese Women Association and the Edinburgh Chinese Association.

These were not the only celebrations of the lunar New Year in Edinburgh. Community groups such as the Chinese elderly lunch club serve special New Year meals for their members. Outside the Chinese community itself, Scottish museums and public libraries laid on craft workshops and music performances for the general public. The extent to which Chinese New Year has been appropriated as a theme to celebrate multiculturalism in British schools and public services would merit a chapter in itself. Here I restrict myself to discussing celebrations of the third type outlined above: large-scale events which draw together strangers as well as friends in a common experience of ethnic “groupness”. In this way, I am diverging somewhat from other work in the literature of the anthropology of China where the lunar New Year festival is often discussed as a ritual centred on the family. Feuchtwang (2001) has shown that the domestic rituals connect with a much broader cosmology of a whole hierarchical empire, not merely the order of families. However, as Feuchtwang points out, in the popular celebrations the reunion of family members is foremost in people’s minds at this time of year. Stafford (2000) has drawn further attention to the ways in which processes of separation and reunion are culturally elaborated in Chinese society, as some of the most important aspects of relationships

between people. He argues that “at times it seems that going away and coming back together again are even more significant, *vis-à-vis* certain kinds of relationships, than any fixed state of being together” (Stafford 2000: 2). For Stafford, separation must be seen as a universal constraint on human social life. Stafford suggests that the family reunions and visits to relatives which take part after the main day of the New Year festival are the events which stand out most for his informants in a mainland Chinese village. The movement of people (living and dead) is central to the celebration.

In comparison with Chinese families in other parts of the world where the lunar New Year is an occasion to stay off work and spend time with relatives, for many of the Chinese people living in Edinburgh, the New Year season allows little time for relaxation or for travel towards their loved ones. Chinese restaurants and takeaways have a regular boom in trade over this period, with increased demand for Chinese food from both Chinese and non-Chinese customers. For wealthy Chinese Scots this is a time to eat out and mark the New Year with banquets shared with extended family, friends and clients. However, for those who are restaurant employees there is little opportunity to celebrate, as managers cancel all leave for staff at this time of year. Some do manage to schedule informal visits to members of the extended family who live nearby, and most households buy traditional sweets from the Chinese supermarket to exchange as gifts with friends and relatives, but the idea of a full family reunion dinner is impractical for most and the drabness of the Edinburgh cityscape is particularly galling when they imagine the bright lights and music of the Hong Kong streets at festival time. It is a time when many people feel painfully the separation from relatives left behind in Hong Kong or China, but the high cost of travel, as well as the necessity to work, mean that very few are able to return home for private family celebrations.

Some Scottish Chinese families do gather for New Year reunion meals, at home or in restaurants. Lily, whose story I told in Chapter 4, comes from such a family. Lily was born in Glasgow and makes one of her rare visits back there when she drives over to deliver gifts of food and money to her parents in the days after Chinese New Year. Lily celebrates the festival day itself with her husband’s family in Edinburgh, as her father-in-law, a restaurateur, likes to cook a meal at home for his four children, their spouses and children. Having employees to run their restaurants, they can afford to take time off at New Year. Their celebration includes many customs remembered from Chinese New Year parties in Hong Kong. The children are given *lai see* (red envelopes) with money gifts from most of their

relatives, and symbolic presents such as ornaments in the shape of the animal of the year. In 2007 Lily's eleven-year-old son received over £100 in cash from his senior relatives, money which he was allowed to spend immediately on computer games. Lily's wealthy family are typical of those who attend the New Year dinner-dance at the Sheraton Hotel. Attendance at the dance is part of a lifestyle in which these families enjoy the material rewards of their business success, through conspicuous consumption, beautiful clothes and lavish donations. However, I would stress that these people are in the minority of Edinburgh's Chinese population.

My friend Vicky, whose household has suffered misfortune in business and ill health, is more typical of a low-income Chinese family in Edinburgh. As employees, not restaurant owners, she and her husband cannot afford to travel to Hong Kong more than once every five or six years, and they have no close relatives in Scotland. The only visible sign of the festival in Vicky's home was a collection of five or six greetings cards tacked to the wall in the living room. These come from Chinese friends in Edinburgh; on the day of the festival itself, Vicky would make a rare phone call to her elderly mother in Hong Kong. There is no family reunion for Vicky at New Year. She is however heavily involved in the Chinese school show at the Festival Theatre.

Both the old and the new Chinese schools claim that the main purpose of the New Year celebrations is to raise money for school funds. Simon Mak, a man in his forties with two young children, is Chair of the old Chinese school's Management Committee and told me that the run-up to the lunar New Year is the busiest time for him in that role. A financial advisor by profession, with many Chinese restaurateurs among his clients, his task is to approach these contacts and ask for donations for the school. For the past ten years, the school has celebrated Chinese New Year with a Sunday afternoon performance of Chinese music, dance and acrobatics, featuring both professional performers and students of the school. Recently the show has taken place at a large venue, the Edinburgh Festival Theatre, with an audience of nearly 2000 people. Most of the cost of staging the New Year show itself has been covered by a grant from the Scottish Arts Council, and from ticket sales, which meant that any additional donations could go towards the school's annual running costs. Donors would be duly acknowledged with advertising in the glossy programme for the New Year show, and in the past the school has been well supported by local businesses. Recently, however it has become harder and harder for Simon to elicit donations. He puts this down in part to a general downturn in the economy, and tough times for



Chinese restaurateurs and partly to competing demands for their support from other local charities, including the rival new Chinese School. After the Festival Theatre show in February 2007, it became clear that the day had raised far less money than Simon had hoped. Some companies had made donations, and teachers had placed buckets outside the auditorium for members of the audience to leave donations, but these were not prominently labelled and in the end, very little cash was received. Arguably, then, the old school New Year show was less focused on fundraising, and more on presenting Chinese arts and cultural achievements to the general public.

I will argue that the public celebrations of Chinese New Year in Edinburgh are important moments of “groupness” for Hong Kong Chinese people; however, they are not only occasions for experiencing a common sense of belonging with other Chinese, but also events which bring into being the “Edinburgh Chinese community” as a self-conscious construct. The Edinburgh Chinese New Year celebrations must be analysed as events which take place in Scotland, not China. I will discuss what the New Year celebrations may reveal about the Scottish Chinese population as an “ethnic minority” in multicultural Scotland, and what such collective festivities may tell us about the way that Scottish Chinese people regard their own status, both in relation to China, and in relation to Scotland where they have made their homes. Further, this chapter considers what we can learn about migrant family life: I ask whether these celebrations are intended for Chinese people, as an occasion to mark a shared cultural heritage, and to demonstrate traditions to the younger generation of British-born Chinese, or whether they are also a performance of Chinese culture for Scottish audiences. Do they underscore the “other-ness” or foreign-ness of Scottish Chinese people, or show the confidence of a population which feels so well established in Scotland that it can invent new traditions here?

I would also like to stress what the two celebrations say about the differences in class and cultural politics of the two Chinese schools. As I have suggested in the last paragraph, the rather different styles of celebration highlight important variations in the economic status of Hong Kong Chinese families in Edinburgh: the dinner-dance cost more to attend than the variety show, and was indeed prohibitively expensive for some families. In Chapter 3, comparing the two Chinese schools, I pointed out that the new school was supported by the wealthier restaurateurs, with a longer history of social connections to the local police, city council and other authorities. I would argue that these people, having already worked at forming themselves into a group, whether as restaurateurs (in the Edinburgh Chinese

Association), as Hong Kong Chinese women (in the Edinburgh Chinese Women Association) or as an autonomous school (Edinburgh Chinese Community School) take a more possessive or defensive stance in presenting themselves, both to Chinese and non-Chinese people in Edinburgh, as leaders of what they term the “Chinese community”. In this chapter, I am suggesting that Chinese New Year provides an opportunity for the local Chinese elite involved in the new Chinese school to articulate their sense of themselves as a successful, ethnically and culturally distinctive social group within Edinburgh society.

In contrast, many of the teachers and families of pupils at the old Chinese school have arrived more recently in Scotland and have not been members of the Chinese community associations formed by restaurant owners and their families. Indeed, several of the staff do not work in the catering industry at all, as they are professional people, many of them Hong Kong Chinese women married to white Scottish men. I will argue that their form of New Year celebration is more open and inclusive, intended to “share Chinese culture” with white Scots and Chinese alike. The theatre show had a far larger audience who paid only a nominal fee for the ticket.

In the next section I will describe each event in more detail, explaining their differences in structure before going on to compare and contrast the two, considering what the events mean for the participants in each.

### **Chinese New Year Celebration at the Edinburgh Festival Theatre**

Dear Friends, The link show you what I did on the day before I went to HK. This annual event is part of the reasons I was not able to go to HK during Chinese New Year for so many years. The event last us always the full day. The DVD production is more than 2 hours, therefore, in order not to bore you, I will just send clips for you to enjoy.

On 4<sup>th</sup> March 2008 Dorothy sent an email to her friends and family in Hong Kong and around the world. Those who clicked on the link would find themselves on YouTube, watching a video of a bare stage decorated with red lanterns. Onto the stage glide three young women in classical Chinese gowns, with floor-length skirts and trailing green silk sleeves. Their hair is wound high on their heads in elaborate twists and their faces are vividly made up. All three look Chinese, although one is recognisably mixed race. To a recorded soundtrack, the girls perform a five-minute dance, slowly and gracefully moving about the stage. As the dance ends, the camera

pulls back to reveal the full width of the theatre and the volume of applause indicates the large audience present.

The video clip was taken from the full DVD recording of the old Chinese school's lunar New Year celebration, which took place at the Edinburgh Festival Theatre on the afternoon of Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2007. This annual variety show is the most public event for Edinburgh's Chinese community, attended by almost two thousand people, including Chinese and non-Chinese families, and a major fundraising opportunity for the schools. As Dorothy's email indicates, for those most closely involved in the planning and preparation of the show, it is a time-consuming but very exciting occasion, one of the most significant days of the year. In fact, Dorothy has for a long time given her commitment to the school and its Chinese New Year show a higher priority than her desire to return home to Hong Kong and spend the holiday season visiting her close relatives.

Dorothy is the deputy head teacher of the Edinburgh Chinese School and her seventeen-year-old daughter Joanne is a member of the school's Senior Chinese Dance group. Joanne was one of my informants for whom Chinese New Year formed a major focus of her whole year. The daughter of a white Scottish father and a Hong Kong Chinese mother, she was born and brought up in Edinburgh but had regular contact with her Chinese grandmother, aunts and uncles who had migrated to Scotland after her mother arrived in the mid-1990s. Joanne attended Chinese school from a young age and was more or less fluent in Cantonese, although she struggled a little with writing. Since her early teens she had been a key member of the Chinese School's dance troupe, and when other members dropped out, she and one other girl continued dancing to a senior level, coached by a student teacher from mainland China. The dance group's main performance of the year would be at the New Year show, in which they would perform two dances. It took many months to learn these routines, so that rehearsals for the following year would begin almost as soon as each New Year had passed. The girls met every Saturday to practice for two hours before their language classes, and sometimes got together informally at home for additional rehearsals as the date of the performance came closer. It was very important to the girls that their performance should be very authentic in technique and in appearance. Not only did they learn their steps from a classically trained teacher from mainland China, but their costumes were made to measure for them and imported from China. In a previous year, they and a group of other children had researched and produced an illustrated book of costumes and hairstyles from different periods of Chinese

history, which they used to design their own makeup and hair (Edinburgh Chinese Dance Cultural and Youth Group & EYSIP, 2004).

Joanne's parents were both enormously proud of their daughter and made sure that each of her performances was video-recorded. In the last few years her mother has posted these videos online, sending links to her friends and relatives in Hong Kong so that they can see what her daughter has achieved. On other occasions, I frequently heard both of her parents praise what they termed their daughter's unusual "Eurasian" beauty; yet it was clearly not only her physical attractiveness, but also her mastery of a demanding Chinese art, and her emotional commitment to that part of her ancestry, which made them so proud.

The 2007 show was the old Chinese school's tenth annual "Chinese New Year Celebration" at the Edinburgh Festival Theatre. The show had been promoted to families at the Chinese school, and other local schools, and thanks to the backing of the Festival Theatre marketing department, was advertised widely in the mainstream media and listings magazines as well as on huge posters outside the theatre itself. Tickets at £5 each were sold to the general public through the theatre box office, as well as direct from the Chinese school, and with an audience of 1400 were almost sold out. The audience was largely made up of local Hong Kong Chinese parents with children, but many arrived with grandparents and other family members. There were a significant number of Scottish people there, of all ages, some belonging to groups such as the Scotland-China Association and a support group for Scottish adoptive parents of Chinese children, who make a point of attending the school's celebrations each year.

The performances were scheduled to begin at 2 pm on a Sunday afternoon, and the audience was encouraged to arrive early in order to participate in free workshops. These took place in the theatre foyer, and included opportunities to try calligraphy, Chinese knotting and even learn some acrobatics. On the street outside the theatre, a busy thoroughfare in central Edinburgh, members of the audience and passers-by were greeted by lion dancers, alternating in their alfresco performance with members of a Scottish military pipe band, who would then march in to the main auditorium where their marching, baton-twirling and rousing tunes entertained people as they took their seats.

Meanwhile a private reception with wine and snacks had been prepared for VIP guests. As a member of Dorothy's Cantonese class for adults, who were going to perform a song in the show, I was in the privileged position of greeting some of these

guests as they arrived at the theatre and escorting them to the side room where they would be received by the school's senior teaching staff and board of governors. My classmates and I, some white Scottish, and others Scottish-born Chinese, but all dressed in Chinese silk, thus presented a picture of racial inclusivity as we met around a hundred people including the Chinese Consul in Edinburgh, a Minister of the Scottish Government, a senior officer of the Lothian and Borders Police, City of Edinburgh councillors and representatives of a number of public and charity sector organizations in Scotland, other ethnic minority groups, and some of the businesses and funding bodies which were supporting the event. These included the Scottish Arts Council and Awards for All as well as local Chinese catering businesses, and Edinburgh-based banks and law firms with strong ties to the Chinese community. Apart from being invited to the reception where they would meet staff and committee members of the school, these sponsors were acknowledged in the free programme distributed to everyone in the audience.

During the reception, the Consul General, the Scottish Government Minister and the Chairman of school were presented with flowers by two small girls, one Chinese, one white Scottish, both pupils at the school, and each gave a short speech; in previous years these speeches had been addressed to the whole audience in the main theatre, but it had been decided this year that to save time and prevent the audience becoming bored, the ceremony should take place in private.

Promptly at two o'clock, the Chinese Consul and Scottish Government Minister came into the auditorium with the school head teacher and Chairman and took their seats in the front row. The performance proper then began, introduced by four senior students of the school, speaking alternately in English, Cantonese and Mandarin. These young MCs in evening dress would return to the stage between each act, linking the items with a scripted trilingual repartee which they had been rehearsing for weeks before.

Some of the acts were drawn from the school itself, starting with the senior dance group and the larger junior dance class, which included little girls of white Scottish and African origin as well as Scottish Chinese. Students from the adult Mandarin class performing their own dramatization of the story of the Chinese zodiac. My Cantonese classmates and I sang a karaoke version of a 1980s Hong Kong smash hit, *Chin go taai yeung* ("A thousand suns"). (This would prove to be useful in my research as in the months after the show I was recognized by several new informants as "one of those *gwai mui* (Westerners) who sang in Cantonese at

New Year". They seemed to view this favourably and possibly responded more patiently to my questions as a result.) Other performers had been invited from outside the school and again represented a blend of Scottish and Chinese cultural traditions. The team who demonstrated martial arts were all ethnically Scottish. A folk singer, Andy Chan, who had been born in Fife to Chinese parents, sang both traditional Scots and Cantonese songs, and ballads describing events in his own life. The Intercultural Music Project Orchestra, an ensemble of instrumental players and singers made up of Scottish-Chinese children and adults were directed by Kimho Ip, a Hong Kong-born musician and composer who has made his home in Edinburgh.

Finally, there were two acts by a professional dance troupe from Taiwan. The presence of this last group, for whom this performance was just one engagement on their tour of the UK, had caused some difficulties to the school in the weeks immediately before the show. Chinese people living in Edinburgh, but not associated with the school, had complained that Taiwanese performers were being given a platform at such a high-profile event, and threatened to make a public demonstration at the theatre, disrupting the performance. I never learned which group had made the complaint – it may have come from the politically active Chinese students' association at the Edinburgh universities – but it was understood that the Chinese Consul could be placed in an embarrassing position by the presence of the Taiwanese, and might have to stay away from the event, despite her support for the school over many years. Eventually the matter was resolved quietly, several days before the show. The school agreed to stop distributing posters advertising the Taiwanese group's UK tour, and it was resolved that their country of origin would not be referred to by anyone on stage, or in the printed programme. Thus, everyone was able to continue with dignity, and the school succeeded in retaining the performers which formed the star attraction in the New Year show. Nonetheless, the staff and committee were rattled by the accusation of partisan bias, and subsequently both the school website and printed publicity materials were amended with a statement of the school's non-political and charitable status. It was a somewhat startling reminder of the global political dimension of claiming authority over Chinese cultural traditions. While the purpose of the school remained firmly apolitical, and apparently controversial, it rather unwittingly found itself positioned in an unwanted partisan stance.

Despite meticulous planning and co-ordination of all the groups involved, the show overran its scheduled two-hour slot by forty minutes. A grand finale, with all

the performers on stage, was rushed, and to cut it shorter the organizers decided not to sing the Chinese New Year song that should have ended the show. Instead, it concluded with the Scottish New Year favourite, “Auld Lang Syne”, sung by audience and performers led by the Pipe Major of the military pipe band. In the post-show evaluation, some teachers complained that the show had both begun and ended with Scottish music, making it less Chinese. This was countered by the argument that the show was intended to celebrate a common life, and that the music underlined the happy co-existence of Chinese and Scottish people in Edinburgh.

Parents of children and young people who performed in the Festival Theatre show were proud to see them participate in specifically Chinese forms of music and dance. This requires some effort for children who speak English more fluently than Cantonese or Mandarin and consider themselves as Scottish as the majority of their friends. Their parents showed their support by attending the show with grandparents, siblings and other relatives. The commitment of these parents was also evident in the regularity with which some of them brought their primary-school aged children to weekly rehearsals of the junior dance group and Chinese children’s orchestra. The case of Dorothy’s YouTube videos being made available to relatives in Hong Kong illustrates how important it is for the self-respect of parents living in Scotland to demonstrate the Chineseness of their Scottish-born children. This implies that they fear the criticism of relatives if they fail in this task, a fear which can be passed on to the children themselves. Dorothy’s daughter told me on another occasion that she was determined to keep using her Cantonese as often as she could in Edinburgh, because she didn’t want to go back to Hong Kong on holiday and hear herself described as a *gwei mui* (foreign girl) because of not speaking fluently.

A week after the Festival Theatre show Jin was driving her two teenage sons and me to their home in north Edinburgh. Paul, the older boy, had been one of the MCs (comperes) for the show and I complimented him on his performance, introducing acts in what seemed to me to be fluent Cantonese and English. Dressed in suits and cocktail dresses, the young presenters had all looked confident and older than their sixteen or seventeen years of age. Jin looked stony-faced and remarked that the Mandarin-speaking girl MC had been far better than Paul: if only he had worked harder at learning his script, he too could have been word perfect. Jin’s reaction may be the one expected from a Chinese mother, loath to praise her child in case he should become lazy and proud. In fact, Paul and the other MCs had taken their parts in the New Year show very seriously. They had been refining and

rehearsing their lines for several months, arriving at Chinese school two hours before class to prepare for the New Year show. Like Joanne the dancer, Paul had invited some of his white Scottish school friends to watch his performance at the Festival Theatre. They were clearly proud of what they were doing, and Joanne told me that her best friend and boyfriend thought her dancing was “cool” and had told her how beautiful she looked in costume. The best friend was so intrigued by the Chinese part of Joanne’s life that she enrolled in the Cantonese adult conversation class the following term.

Another group of parents present at the New Year show were some who had adopted Chinese daughters and who attend the New Year show each year as part of a conscious process of familiarizing their families with their daughters’ “birth culture.” Tessler, Gamache and Liu (1999) show that many American parents of Chinese children find it important to expose their children, and themselves, to aspects of Chinese culture such as language classes and celebration of festivals, and this seems to be also the case for Scottish adoptive parents. These families experienced the New Year celebrations as something new and foreign, as neither parents nor children had personal memories of celebrating New Year in China. As their children are still young, it remains to be seen how these girls will come to see themselves in relation to the wider “Scottish Chinese community”. However, their presence at the show further begs the question of what kind of enculturation was taking place. While it was clear that both audience and performers approached the event with a desire to experience a “Chinese” event, it was very obviously an invented tradition, a somewhat ad hoc amalgam firstly of elements from both Chinese classical tradition (the dances, Monkey story and martial arts) and Hong Kong popular culture (our Cantonese song and the sophisticated MCs), and secondly from Scottish popular cultural forms (bagpipes and folk songs). This actually reflects the heterogeneous backgrounds of the school population: although the majority have family ties to Hong Kong, there are also families from mainland China and Malaysia, the families of mixed (Scottish and Chinese) marriages, and others with no biological connection to China at all.

To a certain extent, by presenting the show, the school is claiming its authority as a cultural mediator and representative of cultural China in Scotland. However, this is not an exclusive standpoint and the school, in this show as in its teaching, offers its expertise in Chinese language and culture as a resource for anyone in Scotland.



### **“Shanghai Nostalgia Extravaganza” at the Sheraton Hotel**

A year later, in February 2008 I attended the “Shanghai Nostalgia Extravaganza”, a formal dinner-dance hosted by the Edinburgh Chinese Community School (the “new school”), at the Sheraton Hotel. This also took place on a Sunday, perhaps because many Chinese catering businesses are closed on Mondays, or as one of my fellow guests suggested, because it was cheaper to book the Sheraton on a Sunday evening. The dinner-dance, for which guests were encouraged to dress in the style of the 1930s, was of course advertised to families at the school itself, but posters also appeared in the windows of Chinese supermarkets in Edinburgh, and it was announced in the newsletter of the Scotland-China Association. However, this publicity was small compared with that for the school celebration. Tickets for the dinner cost £40 per adult, and £20 for children, making it prohibitively expensive for many families. One of my informants, a mother of two children at school, whom I considered to be well off by comparison with other Chinese families I knew, said simply that she could not afford to buy tickets *and* pay for the new clothes which would be expected. During the event, I realised that the financial outlay would not necessarily stop there, as there was constant encouragement to buy raffle tickets, or place bets in party games where some people were staking up to £100 a time. The dinner was clearly presented as a fundraising event for the school, with the added attraction of being a glamorous and enjoyable evening.

The dinner was certainly well attended, with around 250 guests seated in tables of ten in one of the Sheraton’s banqueting suites. The majority of people were Chinese, aged from their twenties to fifties, with just a few older people and some twenty or thirty children. There were several dozen white people at the dinner, many seated with Chinese friends and partners, and my husband and I had been seated at an exclusively English-speaking table. There were echoes of the East-West cultural mix of 1930s Shanghai in both the musical selection and the food menu: our tables were decorated with bowls full of traditional Chinese New Year snacks – red pumpkin seeds, dried fruit and tangerines – but the dinner was a decidedly Western meal of soup, steak, and crême brûlée with wine and coffee. The music playing through loudspeakers throughout the meal was Western pop, and guests were dressed in either Western evening dress or Chinese jackets and gowns.

Promptly at seven o’clock two MCs – parents and board members at the school – greeted us in English and Cantonese, and invited in the lion dancers who danced around the room for a full ten minutes, leading a procession of school

children clattering gongs and drums. As they ended their dance to great applause, the lion dancers removed their costume, revealing that not one of them was Chinese. There is no Chinese-run lion dance troupe in Edinburgh now, so this team had been hired from a Scottish kung fu club. There followed speeches from the VIP guests who were seated at a central table at the front of the room: the Chair of the Board of Governors, a British-born Chinese accountant whose two children attend the school, welcomed us all and spoke of the teamwork and participation which had seen the school through a year of many successes. Interestingly, he did not refer to the school's academic success, as shown by the outstanding results of entrants in GCSE and A level Chinese exams, but picked out two social highlights of the year: the school's involvement in an Edinburgh Chinese community float in the Edinburgh Festival Cavalcade parade in summer 2007, and the publication of a book of Chinese folk tales by a group of mothers from the school. Next, we were addressed by the Chinese Consul who did refer to the school's annual prize-giving ceremony as a high point of the year.

The programme of entertainment began with a dance by children from the school, wearing black leotards, tails and huge ears in honour of the Year of the Rat. The head teacher then got up to lead us all in singing a song, "Shanghai Ocean", for which we have been given song sheets, but there was little enthusiasm for the collective singing. Later in the evening one of the board members, a British-born Chinese woman in her late thirties appeared with her Irish husband to perform a Shanghai jazz dance, she in a classic ankle-length cheongsam, he in a kilt of matching midnight blue Chinese silk. All the while children were circulating the tables, encouraging us to buy tickets for a raffle for which prizes had been listed in a booklet laid at every place setting: not only the prizes, but the names of their donors and the cash value were set out in a list in descending order from the star prize of a Louis Vuitton handbag (£400), down through restaurant vouchers, jewellery, dinner sets, Chinese ornaments (£50) and small souvenirs of Edinburgh. Many of these had been donated by Edinburgh Chinese restaurant owners, but others came from a casino which is well patronized by Chinese clients, a food wholesale business, and local dignitaries such as the Chief Constable and Lord Provost of Edinburgh. The souvenir booklet also contained the rules of a betting game called "Rat race" for which we were urged to place bets of between £10 and £100. The game itself, another comical allusion to the zodiac sign for the New Year, was played after dinner, with huge cut-out cartoon rats and mice being raced along a track according

to the throw of an out-sized dice. There were several rounds in which cash prizes could be won. Although a lot of people had bought raffle tickets at £2.50 each, far fewer took part in the Rat Race, where betting appeared to be dominated by a handful of people, most conspicuously by one prominent restaurateur seated at the VIP table.

Some of the biggest donors to the school were acknowledged in a presentation ceremony at the end of the meal. Ten of the major sponsors were invited to stand at the front, to have their photos taken as a group and to be presented with commemorative pennants. The sponsors were introduced in order of the size of their donation, starting with Royal Bank of Scotland and the Dragon Foods wholesalers (£1000 each), then the Lothian and Borders Police, the Fire Brigade, the Xanadu restaurant (whose owner, Irene Chiu, is on the school board), the Edinburgh Chinese Golf Association (made up largely of retired Chinese restaurant owners), the Edinburgh Chinese Women Association, and one Mr K. Ng. In his introductions, the school Chairman made much of the generosity of these groups and individuals in supporting the school and the audience applauded them politely. The formal programme over, the disco music resumed and many of the guests left, others staying on to dance as the tables were cleared.

Although it was not expressly presented as such, the new school's Chinese New Year dinner-dance at the Sheraton Hotel was in many ways a more "traditional" Chinese celebration having much in common with a temple or village lineage celebration in rural Hong Kong. The parallels would include the publication of a list of donors, and the very format of a meal at which we sat at round tables for a shared meal. There was also gambling, although in a very different form from the all-night games of *mah jiang* which Stafford (2000: 36) describes in ethnography of a family New Year celebration in China. The organizers of the dinner dance were precisely the descendants of families who would have held such celebrations in the New Territories; indeed some Chinese Scots still do return to their home villages for ten-year clan reunions. Although lineage organizations are not as active in the Chinese community in Edinburgh as they are in other parts of UK and elsewhere in Europe, the business associations (Edinburgh Chinese Association and Edinburgh and District Chinese Association) used to exercise a similar form of community leadership.

Just as villages record the success of lineage members, the Sheraton dinner dance was clearly a celebration of the achievements of Chinese people in one place.

The conspicuous display of wealth and patronage pointed both to the economic prosperity of the settled Chinese community, and to the good relations it has established with the local authorities and powerful institutions in Edinburgh. At this event it became clear to me how, for this section of the Chinese community, success in business is most often correlated with leadership within the community itself: most of those wealthy restaurateurs who were named as sponsors or donors of raffle prizes were also office-bearers in the Chinese community organizations such as the school, the Edinburgh Chinese Association or Edinburgh Chinese Women Association.

It was important for the organizers of both New Year events that they should be attended by VIP guests from within and outside the Chinese community. The Chinese Consul was at both, and made speeches at both, although her comments were entirely apolitical. The Chinese Consulate in Edinburgh has supported each school with the donation of textbooks and other teaching materials but each likes to stress its non-political nature, as was shown in the controversy over the Taiwanese dance group. Her presence at the New Year celebrations confirmed the status of each school as a custodian of authentic Chinese culture in Edinburgh. At both events, there were representatives of the city council, the police and fire services. At the Festival Theatre, the police chief was greeting with some informality by the head teacher and her deputy, who had met him before and joked with him informally at the pre-show reception as he had spent some years in Hong Kong and could speak some Cantonese. The police's representation at the dinner-dance was more formal, as along with other VIPs the police chief was publicly presented with a certificate in recognition of the force's support for the Chinese community in Edinburgh. Another difference was that the school had invited many more guests from other minority ethnic organizations and educational institutions in Edinburgh, while the school dinner-dance was attended by more business people. The school's bank manager, from the Royal Bank of Scotland, was thanked along with the police and other public services.

Regrettably, I was unable to obtain a final statement of the amount of money raised at each event, but it was clear that people were donating large sums of money at the school dinner dance. The conspicuous spending, gambling on the raffle and donation of prizes at the school event underlined the financial success of Chinese people in Scotland. If the theatre show presented Chinese immigrants as desirable because of the richness of their cultural contribution to Scotland, the dinner marked

the “immigrant success story” of a group who cause no problems to the host society, because of their self-reliance and business acumen bringing wealth to the country.

### **Preserving and passing on tradition**

For Chinese parents in Edinburgh, the desire to attend a collective New Year celebration is twofold: first, it is comforting to spend time together with other Chinese people at a time of year when immigrant adults can feel especially homesick for Hong Kong and the relatives they left behind there. On the Saturday before the Festival Theatre show I was helping a small group of teachers to decorate the stage, unpacking paper lanterns and tying them at precise lengths from a bar to hang over the stage, when Agnes, one of the senior teachers, described to me how strange it felt to see Scottish people out and about their ordinary lives, the city streets no different from usual, when inside she was feeling all the customary excitement of anticipating the approaching festival. She suggested to me that I would experience the same sense of strangeness if I were to travel in December to a country where people did not celebrate Christmas. Agnes carried with her an inner sense of the cycle of the year, punctuated by festivals like the seasons. Her life now follows other cycles, such as the academic year of the schools which her teenage sons attend, and the busy and quiet times for business in the catering trade, shaped by the flow of visitors and students to and from Edinburgh, for example. Yet she remains conscious of the Chinese calendar too, not least through regular phone and email contact with friends and relatives in Hong Kong who would be preparing for the New Year holidays. Having grown up celebrating the festival every year Agnes would miss it deeply if the day passed unmarked. Celebrating the lunar new year is a meaningful part of her sense of who she is as an individual, based on her autobiographical memory of past celebrations. This is just one reason why people like Agnes arrange New Year events, but I would like to draw attention to this emotional or individual psychological aspect before going on to some of the broader questions around group identity and ethnicity.

Secondly, parents see the New Year celebrations as an opportunity to give their children a taste of their own remembered experience of New Year in Hong Kong. Another mother said to me, “New Year is so special for us. I want [my son] to see something like what it is like. One day I would love to take him to Hong Kong so he can really see it for himself.” Here she implicitly acknowledges that the celebrations in Edinburgh are not “really” Chinese New Year: it is important to take

part, but it would be better if her son could share her direct experience of a Hong Kong New Year. Yet, for many parents the New Year events in Edinburgh, particularly the theatre show are valuable as an opportunity to expose their children to Chinese arts and customs. Tickets for the Festival Theatre show cost £5 each, making it affordable for parents to bring their whole families, and there were many large family groups of several generations in the audience. What is more, by bringing their children to a major event where the majority of the audience and participants are also Chinese, parents reinforce the sense of belonging to an ethnic group beyond the immediate family.

### **Contingency and transience**

It is striking that the form these festivals take is dependent on a variety of quite contingent circumstances: without the Scottish Arts Council funding the old Chinese school could not afford hire a venue as large as the Festival Theatre, and the shape of the celebration would inevitably change. Indeed, two years after the 2007 performance which I discuss in this chapter, the Arts Council grant was cut and the school was forced to cut back its celebrations dramatically, so that although the same variety show format was retained, it took place in a school dining hall and was attended by just a couple of hundred parents and family members connected to the school.

The new school's dinner dance depends on the patronage of the community associations and especially a few wealthy Scottish Chinese individuals who enjoy this opportunity to network with members of the Edinburgh elite and to display their wealth. These are events which, I will argue, make varying claims to be authentic representations of Chinese cultural tradition, and yet which in themselves are novel and arise from a very local and historically specific environment. This is true not only in Scotland, but also in other overseas communities, and to some extent also in China itself, where lunar New Year or Spring Festival celebrations might be supposed to be more "authentic" and deeply-rooted in tradition. Yeh (2004; 2008) has shown how Chinese Americans in San Francisco have used their annual New Year parade and beauty pageant to create a new image for their community against the backdrop of changing diplomatic relations between China and the US, and of changing gender and sexual politics within American society. She argues that Chinese American business leaders have used the festival to present themselves as anti-communist, patriotic Americans, and to develop their ties with non-Chinese

business and political figures. This was particularly important during the Cold War period when Asian Americans sought to pre-empt accusations that they were affiliated to the Chinese Communist government. Their New Year celebrations were very much an “American festival.”

This said, I will argue that for all their contingency and transience such social events have powerful emotional and psychological resonance for the people who take part in them. Invented traditions they may be, but they matter a great deal to those individuals for whom they become a significant part of their lives. Scottish Chinese people look outside the immediate family for support from the community in organizing a festival, which is another example of cultural reproduction for the next generation. I will show how Chinese-born parents hope to recreate for their children some of the magic and excitement which they recall nostalgically from New Year celebrations in the past, in Hong Kong. This, they hope, will encourage the children to feel positively about their Chinese heritage. For the children themselves, attendance and participation in the New Year celebrations is a real and authentic part of their Scottish-Chinese childhoods. For them there can be a great deal of pride at stake in performing well and being seen to celebrate the Chinese festival.

I address these questions in the context of work such as that by Fortier (2000), who analyses the festivals and public gatherings of Italian migrants in Britain as performative acts, “displays of presence” which produce what they claim to be reproducing: in other words, an Italian “community” comes into being when Italians come together to celebrate. This is very like Brubaker’s idea of “doing ethnicity” and the experience of groupness as people who might not previously have thought of themselves as members of an ethnic group, may begin to do so when they participate in activities that claim to be representative of such a group. Fortier points out that emigration is represented by emigrants themselves as “the source of loss, alienation and foreignness, which are resolved in written renditions of past and present Italian immigrant lives in Britain, narratives of transcendence, or displays of presence.” (Fortier 2000: 157) It is the last of these forms of resolution which I address here. I suggest that the public celebrations of Chinese New Year are equivalent to the Catholic processions and pilgrimages which Fortier describes. She argues that such activities are particularly important for Italians because, as white Europeans, they are “invisible migrants” in Britain. Their public processions through the streets of Clerkenwell “[symbolize] the multicultural fabric of London by displaying the presence of an enduring Italian culture.” (Fortier 2000: 142) Because of physical

differences, individual Chinese people are highly visible in Britain, but because of the geographical dispersal of the Chinese population, and their relatively low levels of integration into the general workforce, collectively they are often described as an invisible or silent minority. Therefore, the annual gathering of hundreds of Scottish Chinese to celebrate the New Year is in itself worthy of attention. In particular, I draw attention to those elements of the festivities which stress the similarities between and blending of Scottish and Chinese cultural forms. These are a deliberate attempt to portray Chinese Scots as an established part of Scottish society, and as a group who make a positive contribution to public life.

The Festival Theatre show contrasted with the Sheraton dinner-dance in its very public nature. The use of such a large and high-profile venue was only possible for the school because of a large grant from the Scottish Arts Council. The award of this grant was symbolic itself as a statement that non-Chinese people accepted Chinese New Year as a part of contemporary Scottish life, thus bolstering the status of Scottish Chinese people as a settled part of Scottish society. For the school, the show was clearly not for Chinese families alone. As the show brought some of the richness of Chinese cultural tradition to a Scottish audience, so, it implied, Chinese migrants themselves enhance Scottish society by their presence in it. At an array of stalls before the performance proper, audience members were encouraged – free of charge – to try their hands at Chinese acrobatics, knot-making and calligraphy. This added to the message that Chinese people make their contribution openhandedly. Yeh (2008) argues that Californian Chinese designed their New Year parades to counter the anti-Communist suspicions of white Americans. Similarly, the Festival Theatre show contradicts the British stereotype of Chinese people as insular and subdued and expresses a willingness to contribute to Scottish social life.

While the Chineseness of the event was crucial, so too was the representation of successful integration into Scottish society. Both the Festival Theatre show and the dinner-dance included obvious alignments of Chinese and Scottish cultural symbols. The audience at the Festival Theatre were greeted by a Scottish pipe band followed by a Lion Dance troupe on the pavement outside, and the show ended with the singing of both Auld Lang Syne and a Chinese New Year song. New Year (Hogmanay) is of course a major celebration in Scotland, when Scots explicitly perform stereotypical aspects of their own “cultural heritage” in food, drink, dress, music and dance, so it is very reasonable to draw parallels between the Chinese and Scottish traditions. The *Edinburgh Evening News* which publishes a story on Chinese



New Year celebrations most years, regularly refers to Scottish Hogmanay customs in association with Chinese New Year traditions. By pointing to these quite obvious (if superficial) similarities, this discourse simultaneously emphasizes the “otherness” of the Chinese community, and makes their practices appear more familiar and understandable to a Scottish audience. This appeal to shared features is one strategy for securing the acceptance of the Chinese population as Scots. It enables Chinese migrants to feel more at home in Scotland, not only by recreating customs from their place of origin, but also by familiarizing white Scots with these customs so they become part of a shared field of cultural references.

In selecting the theme of “Shanghai Nostalgia”, the committee of the school made a more subtle allusion to the longer history of cultural contact between China and the West, and both the dress code and 1930s songs which were played during the evening conjured up associations of style and sophistication, as well as the period of decadent wealth enjoyed by some in Shanghai in the first half of the twentieth century. This was interesting, since the family origins of many of the Edinburgh Chinese people present were not in the cosmopolitan urban centres of China, but in the rural New Territories and villages of southern China. Their “nostalgia” was wholly manufactured, but pointed to a desire to be seen not as wholly exotic outsiders, but from a civilization which has embraced contact with the West. In the same way, the Edinburgh restaurateurs present themselves as modern and willing to integrate with contemporary Scottish society.

Joanne, the Chinese dancer, is almost an embodiment of the wider significance of New Year celebrations for Chinese Scots. First, they are a major activity of the Chinese schools, and an integral part of their mission to pass on a knowledge and love of Chinese language and culture in British-born Chinese children. They are occasion to observe the pride of parents in children who perform well according to cultural expectations, and the pride of adults who enjoy their own financial success and living the “good life” as migrants made good. I have argued that the events more broadly celebrate the community’s links with China and its admirable cultural achievements, but also pride in their success as immigrants, particularly as a group which has enhanced both its economic and its cultural capital in the years since migration, and which is now extremely well and harmoniously integrated into Scottish society. In doing so I have referred to other literature on overseas Chinese, such as Yeh’s (2008) work on Chinese New Year in San Francisco’s Chinatown, where she found evidence that the celebration was in some

ways more about the community's place in America than about their status as Chinese. However, I argue that in Scotland the Chinese New Year festival is not only about how Chinese people are perceived externally. The New Year festivities are both a celebration of what has been achieved and an expression of the desire that this success should continue.

## Chapter 6

### Like a chicken talking to a duck: the shifting values of speaking Chinese in Scotland

Mr Liu lives with his wife in a retirement flat in a modern apartment block not far from the city centre. Now in their seventies, they moved to Edinburgh from London in 2004 in order to be closer to their youngest son, an Oxford graduate who recently took up a research post at the University of Edinburgh. Mr Liu had lived in London for nearly fifty years, having emigrated to work in British restaurants as a young man. He was born in a single-surname village near Fanling in the New Territories, his parents' only child. As a child, he helped his parents on their farm where they grew rice, vegetables, sweet potatoes, and carrots. They had a few chickens and ducks and a cow to work on the land. They usually had enough to sell a small surplus but Mr Liu says, "People then didn't understand how to make much money". However, he was one of the first young men to take up the opportunity to work abroad. When he first left the village, he was already married with a three-year-old daughter; his wife and child remained in the New Territories. For the next seventeen years, during which time a second child, a son, was born, the family were reunited every three years or so, when Mr Liu would return for visits lasting two months at a time until in 1975 the whole family moved to England.

When his family came to the UK, their eldest daughter was twenty and their son was thirteen. A third child, a boy, was born after Mrs Liu came to the UK. She never worked outside the home because the children, widely spaced in age, kept her occupied for most of her adult life. Of the two older children, only the son attended school in London for a few years and learned good English. The daughter married soon after arriving in Britain, and ran a takeaway shop with her Chinese husband in Bournemouth. The Hong Kong born son also went into the catering trade and married a British Chinese woman. Both siblings have children whom Mr Liu considers to be British and native speakers of English. His youngest boy, who was born in London, was educated entirely in English, although his parents did send him to Chinese Saturday school for a couple of years; this was unnecessary for his older siblings who were already literate in Chinese having been to school in Hong Kong. He did well at school and graduated in sciences from the University of Oxford, before taking research posts at Harvard and now Edinburgh. It is clear from his

expression that Mr Liu is hugely proud of this son for achieving a level of education which was not available to Mr Liu or his wife.

The different educational and career paths of Mr Liu's three children fits the pattern described by Song (1999) in her study of British Chinese children's labour in family businesses. She found that typically the older children were expected to support their parents in maintaining the family business, in order to allow their younger siblings to concentrate on their schooling. This was particularly true of families where the older children had spent part of their childhoods in Hong Kong and were less fluent in English than their younger brothers and sisters.

For most of his forty-eight years working in the West Mr Liu cooked in restaurants in London, first in Wardour Street and later his own shop in Harrow on the Hill. In the early years, however, he had two short spells in mainland Europe, first in Berlin for a few months in 1972 when Britain joined the Common Market, and later in Stockholm where some friends were setting up business. He offered to go with them to help and "have a look at the place". On both trips, he wanted to learn some of the language so asked a friend to teach him how to say the German/Swedish for "Excuse me, what is the word for this?", so he could point at an object and ask for its name. This way he learned several new words each day.

I had several conversations with Mr Liu, once over lunch at the Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association, where Mr Liu had recently joined the committee and was busily carrying food to the tables for the other elderly guests. Unusually for someone of his generation he was eager to chat with me in English. With a cheerful smile, he told me how much he enjoyed learning languages, saying, "Even if it's a little, it's good to learn." Knowing that I am studying Cantonese, he teaches me the proverb, *jouh do louh, hohk do louh* – as long as you live, you can learn. In return I explain to him that there is a buzzword, "lifelong learning" in Britain today, and Mr Liu carefully writes this into his notebook. Mrs Liu is sitting with us but says very little, only once speaking up in Cantonese to tell me how proficient her husband is in English: when the children were small he sorted everything out for the family: medical care when she gave birth to their younger son, hospital visits, buying a house, arranging the family's emigration to the UK. In his retirement, Mr Liu is actively studying English with a volunteer home tutor and teaching himself Mandarin from karaoke songs which he plays on their new flat screen TV. He shows me his collection of four or five pocket-sized dictionaries Chinese-English, English-Chinese, and monolingual dictionaries in each language.

He explains that he tries to speak the languages as much as possible. In the morning, he goes to the park to exercise and he likes to practise dancing the five-beat cha-cha-cha. Each time he counted the numbers one to five in a different language: English, German, Cantonese, and Mandarin. He says, “I know I look mad, but I don’t care. I’m a happy person, always have been.” He likes to tell his wife too that she should learn something new because it is good to keep the mind active as protection against dementia.

I present this thumbnail sketch of Mr Liu as an introduction to the chapter because the stories he told me about language study highlight many aspects of the meaning of languages for migrants like him. One aspect which is rarely written about is the pleasure to be derived from learning new languages, a pleasure which for Mr Liu seemed to be linked to a curiosity about the world and enjoyment of new experiences. Much research on the experience of migrants draws attention to the negative aspects of their experience, their hard work and social exclusion on structural grounds. Mr Liu reminds us of another side to the story, which is the emotions of excitement and optimism of arriving in another place and embracing the opportunities which arise there. I also noticed that Mr Liu appeared completely to accept the fact that his grandchildren (and to some extent his children) no longer spoke Chinese but used English as their first language. He was delighted that they had access to education and careers, which he did not and in fact, he and his wife seemed to be closest of all to their youngest son, the most “Western” of their three children. Here my findings echo those of Stafford (1995) who found a similar process at work in a Taiwanese village, where parents invested heavily in their children’s schooling, despite this meaning the children learned a new language and ultimately became the kinds of people that their parents were not.

In this chapter, I build on two themes in the literature of linguistic anthropology: language shift and language management. Li Wei (1994) has described the process of language shift in British Chinese families in his study of language use over three generations of Hong Kong Chinese in the North-East of England. The first generation, now grandparents, are monolingual Cantonese speakers; the second generation use a mixture of Cantonese and English, and the third, British-born generation have English as their first language, and are limited in their command of Cantonese. This generational pattern was broadly true of all my informants, including Mr Liu’s family, although it would be simplistic to state that all speakers of a particular generation spoke only certain languages in all contexts. I

was surprised by the extent to which some British-born Chinese adults, despite having been to Scottish schools and speaking English fluently, preferred to speak Cantonese in day-to-day interaction with British Chinese friends and relatives.

The linguistic range of my field site was not, however, a simple dichotomy of English and Cantonese. As I shall go on to explain, many Scottish Chinese families are Hakka in origin, but speak some Cantonese too. Moreover, Mandarin is increasingly heard, as the first language of new migrants to the UK from mainland China and as an option for study in both mainstream and complementary schools. I will consider what it means for British Chinese people to speak English, Hakka, Cantonese or Mandarin. Kulick (1992) and Grillo (1989) have described the hierarchical valuation of particular languages, and there has been a clear shift in the perceived value of speaking a Chinese language. I explore how values attached to each language link with cultural ideas about success and achievement. I will look at ways in which beliefs about language intersect with perceptions of authenticity, ethnicity and modernity. I will also consider whether the external factor of China's growing influence in the world has affected the self-perception of overseas Chinese people in Scotland. If an older generation of British Chinese people have felt handicapped by not speaking a valued language, it remains to be shown how the aspirations young British Chinese people are affected by the languages they know.

In order to understand fully why people are choosing to learn (and speak) one language rather than another it is necessary to understand the wider context in which those languages are used and evaluated. British Chinese parents must make numerous decisions about language in the family: which language or languages should be spoken at home? Should the children study their "heritage" language in addition to their mainstream school subjects? Which dialect of Chinese will they use: Cantonese, Hakka or Mandarin? How can they support their children's English acquisition, which will be essential to their success in British society? Not all of these choices may be conscious or deliberate and many children learn one language rather than another purely according to the circumstances of where they were living and who was available to take care of them during their childhood.

As I will show in this chapter, there are also moral or ideological considerations in the choice of language. First, the ability to communicate with other members of one's social group is crucial for the formation and maintenance of proper relationships, including those between family members. Furthermore, in many overseas Chinese communities, the ability to speak a Chinese language is viewed as

essential to one's identity as a good and authentic Chinese person. This has been encouraged by a prevailing discourse tying language to ethnicity in a way which causes great problems to individuals who consider themselves to be "Chinese" while having English, for example, as their first language. Ang has described the predicament of "not speaking Chinese" as "a condition that has been hegemonically constructed as a lack, a sign of loss of authenticity" (Ang, 2001:30).

Chinese language use in Britain has been influenced not only through the family but also through local and national institutions and policies: since the 1980s, there has been local government funding for classes in "community languages" and the provision of translators and interpreters in public services. Educationalists have recognized the benefits both to children and to the nation of speaking other languages. The Scottish government too has seen bilingualism as both a cultural and economic asset to the country. Finally, China itself is increasingly active in promoting the study of Mandarin worldwide and this has an impact on British Chinese families who previously thought of Cantonese as the most useful Chinese dialect for their children to learn. At one level these two kinds of learning (first language acquisition and second language learning) are quite different things, but, especially in a multilingual context, both can be seen to involve choice, or what Spolsky calls language management: "the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs" (Spolsky, 2009: 4). As a term in sociolinguistics, the domain is defined as a social space which can range in size from a household or family, to a nation or state, with any number of smaller institutions in between. Those authority figures who attempt to manage the linguistic practice of others may be parents, or teachers, employers or politicians. The types of language management to which I will refer include the choices made by parents regarding their children's use of language at home and at school; the changing curricula of both Chinese complementary schools and mainstream secondary schools in Scotland; and the language-related policies of governments in Scotland, Hong Kong and China.

### **On not speaking English**

In Chapter 1 I referred to the way in which British-born Chinese young people, in common with many other children of immigrants, find themselves taking on important responsibilities such as attending medical appointments and filling in tax forms, because they are more fluent in English than their parents are. This is one

example of the unequal balance of power in relationships between speakers of different languages. Chinese immigrants who do not speak good English experience their relative powerlessness daily, through repeated incidents of failed communication and the inability to express themselves as intelligent and competent adults.

One evening my husband and I were queuing for return tickets at the Filmhouse, which was giving a gala screening of “Goddess”, a Chinese silent movie of 1934, for which a new musical soundtrack had been commissioned from Kimho Ip, an Edinburgh-based composer originally from Hong Kong. The performance was part of the year-long China Now festival in Britain, and tickets had sold out in part because the actor Maggie Cheung was to attend: Cheung had played the part of actress Ruan Lingyu, the star of “Goddess”, in a film about her life. As we were waiting I saw my friend Vicky, approach the main ticket desk with another Chinese friend. I could see that Vicky was speaking to the box office staff more and more urgently, as they shook their heads and looked at her blankly before eventually picking up the phone. Only as the performance was just about to start was she handed some tickets. She later explained to me that she had been given guest tickets for the performance by the composer Kimho Ip, with whom she worked as an assistant in a children’s music group. She assumed the tickets would be ready for at the box office, but in her broken English was unable to explain who she was and what she wanted. “I feel so bad,” she told me, “they don’t understand me.” Eventually the staff had understood Kimho’s name and called him in the green room to sort out the problem. Vicky, despite feeling so close to the production and knowing Kimho who was at the centre of it, was almost excluded from this special and glamorous occasion because unlike him she was not fully bilingual.

I came to know Vicky well after offering my services as a volunteer English tutor: she offered me coaching in Cantonese in exchange for help with conversational English. Over several months, I learned more about her early life and young adulthood. Vicky’s schooling had been much curtailed: coming from a very poor Tanka fishing family, she was obliged to leave school at the age of eleven, in order to start work, and she says she was then barely literate in Chinese. During her teens, she attended evening classes and slowly improved her written Chinese but had no opportunity to study English. When they moved to Scotland Vicky found herself fully occupied keeping house and caring for her daughter. It was only when her daughter reached her teens that Vicky felt she had time to do other things. She became a teacher at the Chinese school, and in 2003 and 2004 signed up for short



courses in ESOL and ICT at a local further education college. By the time I met Vicky in 2006 her daughter was in her final year of school and Vicky was ready for more challenges. As well as working part-time in a friend's restaurant in the evenings and teaching a junior Cantonese class on Saturdays she was assistant teacher to the Chinese dance class. She had begun music lessons with a Chinese neighbour who was teaching her to play the *guzheng* (Chinese zither) and *siu* (flute). The first time I actually saw Vicky she was shepherding a group of children onto the floor of the Museum of Scotland, where they were performing in a musical ensemble directed by Kimho Ip as part of a multimedia performance on the theme of a Chinese tea house.

The format of our tutorials was that I would ask Vicky to teach me Cantonese sentences and vocabulary relevant to my on-going fieldwork, and she would note down phrases in English which she had wanted, but failed to say during the week. Often these were associated with her work in the restaurant – “The pudding is on the house” or “Would you like white wine or red wine? – or at the Chinese school, where she mainly spoke to her pupils in Cantonese but sometimes wanted to explain things in English when it was clear they were not following her Cantonese: “For homework you must copy each character ten times.” Vicky would laugh ruefully as she explained how her customers and pupils would ask her to repeat things again and again, unable to understand her heavy accent. Communication became slow and laborious and every such conversation clearly made Vicky feel a fool. Vicky was an outgoing and intelligent woman who liked to develop new skills, to meet people and enjoy life. However, her broken and heavily accented English was a significant barrier to her in everyday life. Some weeks after I had begun visiting her regularly at home, she asked for my help in completing a college application form. She had decided to pursue a long-held ambition to qualify as a nursery nurse and had located a relevant course through which she could be supported by a bursary scheme. However, in order to be accepted it was necessary to fill in a written application and attend a face-to-face interview with course tutors. Clearly, Vicky did not feel confident to write on the form herself, and so she asked me to write down her responses as we worked through the questions together. The fact that she had left school with no qualifications seemed not to be a problem, as she had relevant work experience and the recent ESOL certificates to compensate. Some weeks later Vicky told me that she had passed the initial selection and the course organizers had invited

her for interview. Unfortunately, and to her great disappointment, when she attended the interview Vicky was told that her poor English disqualified her from the course.

The theme of choice – or lack of choice and control over one’s life – was a recurring theme in conversations with older Chinese people in Edinburgh, especially those who spoke no English. I once asked Mrs Chan, who with her husband had worked in restaurants for thirty years, what she thought of catering work. She answered obliquely, “What else can we do? We don’t speak English, but we have to make a living.” Not speaking the dominant language saps confidence. Mrs Chan’s sense of weary resignation to a restricted life of tedious work is in strong contrast with the personal motivation and aspiration which, I will argue, can be seen in younger people who speak more than one language.

### **Hakka – a language of the past?**

Before even coming to Britain, many Hong Kong Chinese people have already gone through a shift in language use, from Hakka to Cantonese. Hakka people form an ethnic minority within Hong Kong and southern China, and came to settle in the New Territories several centuries after the majority Cantonese-speaking Punti population. For this reason, they occupied the least fertile land and were often perceived as fitting the literal translation of their collective name, “guest people”. The Hakka language cannot be understood by most Cantonese people, and most Hakka people in Hong Kong, and in Britain, have acquired Cantonese through everyday interaction with other Hong Kong Chinese people. Hakka is never taught formally, as Cantonese is, in Chinese complementary schools. When I asked people about it, they usually dismissed Hakka outright as a “village language” which belonged to the past. Lily, whose first language was Hakka, told me she never spoke it with her own children – they used Cantonese at home – because it would sound so odd to her, hearing those old-fashioned words in her modern house in Edinburgh.

Lana and Jason, some of whose story is told in Chapter 1, are fairly unusual British-born Chinese who speak no Cantonese, only imperfect Hakka, and fluent English. They recounted their predicament very vividly as they describe wandering the streets of Hong Kong on holiday, feeling that people were looking at them oddly as they chatted to each other in Hakka. Lana said,

You get looked down on in Hong Kong. If you’re in the main city kind of area, and people hear you speaking Hakka, people a) don’t know what kind of language you’re speaking, and then other people think it’s quite cute, and they’re like

‘What are you speaking’, then people look down on you and think “Oh my god, where are those people from, they speak Hakka.

Similarly, at university Lana joined the British Chinese society, hoping to “find a connection” as she described it, with other British-born and Hong Kong Chinese students, or “honkies” as they were affectionately termed by the British-born Chinese. She told me,

I desperately tried to unite people, get them actually talking and interacting, but there was a clear divide, the honkies would stay with each other and the BBCs would stay with each other and there was a clear divide between the two groups. I eventually left that group because I sort of felt I wasn’t making any connections with people, I didn’t get the in-jokes, I couldn’t speak Cantonese with them, as I only speak Hakka, we speak Hakka at home. I actually ended up making friends with a Russian girl who had also joined the Chinese group, because she could speak Mandarin, she’d been to China a few times, and I actually had more in common with her because Chinese was her second language, and it’s really my second language as well, so I became more friendly with her.

Speaking Hakka as a young person now provokes a sense of dislocation in time and space. Both Lana and Lily express a sense that Hakka is out of place in modern physical environments such as downtown Hong Kong or suburban Edinburgh. It is also incongruous in time, both in historical time as a dialect that is dying out, and in terms of their own age as young adults. Many British Chinese have abandoned Hakka, and they feel no great sense of loss over it. However, for some people like Lana and her partner Jason it is a live and meaningful element in their individual experience of being Chinese.

### **Cantonese, language of family and tradition**

Over coffee one morning with Phoebe and Lydia, two Scottish Chinese mothers in their thirties, the conversation turned to languages. I had been asking Phoebe about her childhood, when she spent five years living with her grandparents in Hong Kong while her parents were working in Scotland. She summarizes it as “five years perfecting my Chinese”, although from her account, it was already a multilingual environment, as her grandparents spoke what Phoebe describes as “their slang, Hakka.” She explained to me (in English),

I can understand Hakka but I can't speak it because in Hong Kong mainly speaking Cantonese. We use Cantonese everywhere. My grandparents can understand Cantonese but they can't speak it.

Phoebe now sounds confident speaking English, and uses it daily in her part-time job as a carer for elderly people. Lydia also speaks Cantonese as her first language, although she was born and educated in Scotland all the way through, so her English is excellent. However, Lydia observes that since having the first of her three children she has spent more time with Chinese people than ever before – mainly other mums at Chinese school, Chinese church and the Chinese music classes where she met Phoebe – and so she has noticed her English becoming less fluent. By now our own conversation had switched to Cantonese and she laughed as said that “the less time you spend with Western people, the more broken (*kikka kikka*) your English becomes.” This confirms previous findings that the strength of an individual's social ties with other members of the same ethnic group is a more significant factor in his or her language choice than other factors such as age or generation. (Li, Milroy, & Ching, 1992)

To some extent it seems that language-switching for Scottish Chinese people is a casual, unremarkable process. At different times in your life, you may speak more of one language than another, and language choice also depends on whom you are with. Children from Hakka-speaking families pick up Cantonese seemingly effortlessly by mixing with their peers at school. Learning English requires more effort but also happens relatively easily for Chinese children in English-medium schools. Nonetheless, Lydia's comment shows that one can never feel totally confident in mastering the language if one is not using it day to day.

The two elder of Lydia's three children are at primary school and she recounts how they come home from school each day, talking English non-stop. Lydia asks them to speak Cantonese, so they switch for one or two words, then go back into English. Phoebe says that her children speak to each other in English. She wants them to speak more Cantonese – if they do not use it now, they will not in the future. Then they won't be able to communicate with her father. Phoebe laughs, quoting the Cantonese expression, *gai tuhng ngap gong* (it's like a chicken talking to a duck, i.e. there's a language barrier). Lydia agrees that she gets embarrassed when they're at her mum's house and the children start speaking English – she knows her mum can't understand. However, the children's inability to speak Chinese does not only mean a breakdown in family relationships – for parents like Lydia, it is also a moral

disintegration, as desirable moral values are integral to speaking the language. As Lydia put it

If you speak so much English, you become a Westerner – it's not our culture, it's not Chinese culture. Even myself, I sometimes join in and speak English with them.

Phoebe replied soothingly, “You were born here, it's natural for you to speak English”, but Lydia continued forcefully,

I think that Chinese culture is so rich, you know. I'd maybe encourage them not to get married to a Westerner. I think that on-going generation of being Chinese is so important, you know, speaking Cantonese and in a Chinese family. My mum is so old-fashioned, so traditional, but we don't have that anymore.

I went on to ask Lydia what it meant to be “traditional”. She replied,

You respect your elders, and you're hard-working. I think they have a moral teaching, not like . . . and you know, they do drink, but they drink Chinese tea more.

### **Language and the Chinese person**

When Lydia referred to “being Chinese” she defined it as “speaking Cantonese and in a Chinese family”. Speaking the Chinese language is equated, from this point of view, with being an “authentic” Chinese person, within a proper set of family relationships. For many Chinese people, physical appearance was the unspoken element in this ideal matching of ethnicity and language proficiency, and that attitude has been mirrored in the many white British people who, on hearing about my research topic, have told of their own encounters with Chinese people who “open their mouths and come out with a broad Edinburgh accent.” The apparent incongruity is usually surprising and often amusing.

There are racist terms of language in both Cantonese and English which insult overseas Chinese on the grounds that their physical appearance does not correlate with their thoughts and behaviour. In Cantonese they are called *juk sing* (hollow bamboo) and in English, “bananas”, implying that the person is “yellow” or Chinese on the outside, but inside really white or Western. These terms were used by several interviewees, in a self-deprecating way against themselves or people close to them. One apologized, saying “banana – it's a really nasty expression.” These expressions are hurtful because they imply a pejorative view of the other person, but

also because they hit a raw nerve for some British-born Chinese who at times feel unpleasantly conscious of looking different from the majority British population, and feel badly about the ambiguity of their position both in British society and among Chinese people, including their relatives, in Hong Kong. Lana expressed the problem this way:

In a sense. I mean, we look different on the exterior, but we think the same as the English on the inside. We're born and raised here, we've been through the education system, so we are British inside, but we don't feel sometimes that the public recognize that because of the way we look. We've had people say to us in the past, "My god, you speak very good English, you speak better English than me!" but what do you expect? I was born and raised and educated here, so of course I do.

And what's funny as well is that I spend some of my time on the phone and I'll ask for such and such, and they'll ask for my name and when I give it they say "Oh! Where's that from then? You don't sound Chinese". We get comments like that all the time. It's quite nice in some ways to surprise people, but then again, for god's sake . . . on the flip side, if we go to Hong Kong, we get treated different there as well, because from the exterior, we feel really comfortable in Hong Kong because suddenly we're surrounded by people who look like us, are the same height and everything, and it's great, but as soon as we go into a shop and try to order something in Hakka . . . I mean, my boyfriend can speak a bit of Cantonese, but I can't speak any Cantonese and people don't know how to take this. I mean, in Hong Kong, how ridiculous is a Chinese person who can't speak Chinese, it's ridiculous.

### **Mandarin or Cantonese?**

With few exceptions, my Hong Kong Chinese informants had no problems in equating Cantonese or Hakka, as opposed to the standard Chinese dialect of Mandarin, with an authentic expression of Chinese personhood. Yet they clearly distinguish between the cultures of Hong Kong and mainland China. For British Chinese themselves, Cantonese is valued as a sign of belonging to Hong Kong and not mainland China. The cultural connotations of Hong Kong and Cantonese popular culture are almost entirely positive. Scottish-born Chinese teenagers look forward to their family holidays in Hong Kong because they love the cheap food, the nightlife and fashions, which are all the more desirable by contrast with the much quieter pace of Edinburgh life. Jon, who is twelve, always waits to go to Hong Kong to have his hair cut, because the hairdressers there can do the coolest styles. Mandarin and mainland China have seemed at best remote and beyond the lived experience of most

Scottish Chinese, at worst associated with negative stereotypes: older people lived through the trauma of war and Cultural Revolution, overcrowding and food shortages in Hong Kong.

On one occasion I was chatting with Lily about a TV documentary we had both seen, on the many unsolved cases of child abduction in mainland China. My choice of conversation topic provoked a flood of anecdotes from Lily about her negative experiences of mainland China. She had spent a lot of time with relatives in Sha Tau Kok, literally on the border between the New Territories and the PRC, and described the fear she felt with the other village children, seeing the armed PRC border guards just across the road. As an adult she made regular shopping trips across the border to Shenzhen, but told me that she never ventured outside the mall because she was too afraid of pickpockets. Also, she hated seeing thin and disfigured children begging on the streets of Shenzhen.

During a visit to Hong Kong, when I was travelling on a KCR train northwards with another Scottish-Chinese friend, she pointed rather disparagingly to some fellow passengers whom, she told me, were mainland Chinese. “I know from their clothes,” she said, “and because they are carrying all those shopping bags. They like to buy them in Hong Kong because here you can buy the real thing, like real nappies for the baby. In China it’s all fake.” This view was echoed by Yuan, a mainland-born woman who had married a man from Hong Kong before emigrating with him to Scotland. When I asked her why she had married a Hong Kong man, she paused, then replied, “There was nothing romantic about it. A friend arranged it for me. But I knew with a Hong Kong man you were getting the real thing. In China so much is fake – fake cosmetics, fake labels – but in Hong Kong it’s real.”

Although these examples do not deal directly with language, and the contrast between Mandarin and Cantonese, they do demonstrate one kind of prestige which is associated in people’s minds with Hong Kong, and by association with Cantonese; the prestige associated with modern consumer culture. There is a desire to be associated with Hong Kong and all its material benefits, which contrasts with the fear and repulsion associated with some of the realities of life in mainland China. Here, of course, my informants are noticing the daily lives of some of the poorest people in Chinese society. On the other hand, more and more British Chinese people are paying attention to the growing opportunities for wealth in Chinese cities, and this is changing attitudes to the use of Mandarin.

## **Studying Chinese as a foreign language**

Studying Chinese is not only a matter of remaining in contact with a Chinese cultural identity: being competent in the language can be an intrinsically valued skill, and at the other end of the school, the most senior pupils are working towards the very tangible targets of GCSE and A level qualifications in Chinese. All of the Chinese schools enter candidates for GCSE Chinese every year; they usually have candidates for A level too, but it can be harder to find a teacher with the skills and confidence to teach the A level class, and there are not always enough senior students. The school likes the children to sit the GCSE or A level. As one head teacher said, “At least they have something to show for all their work – some of them have been coming to Chinese school for nine or ten years, and if they don’t take the GCSE they have nothing to show for it.” For the school then, the external recognition of the children’s achievements (and by implications, the school’s success in educating them to that level) is important. The latest grades achieved by pupils are mentioned prominently on the schools’ websites, in the school annual reports, and in the case of the Edinburgh Chinese School, in the printed programme for the Chinese New Year Celebration at the Festival Theatre in February 2007.

Yet many children continue to drop out of Chinese school without sitting these exams and the usual reason given is that they were under too much pressure to succeed in their mainstream school subjects. Neither students nor their parents really valued a qualification in Chinese language, despite the fact that they invest so much time in attending Chinese school as children, and that academic qualifications are generally highly regarded by British Chinese people. It was possible that this was because Chinese school has a different social function from mainstream schools, or because of the intrinsic value attached to Cantonese or Mandarin. An alternative explanation might be that the GCSE and A level exams in Chinese were perceived as too demanding for children who have only ever studied Chinese languages part-time at community schools.

There is a widespread view that studying Chinese is less important than gaining qualifications in mainstream school subjects. Several teachers and school board members told me this was the reason for the decline in attendance at Chinese school by children of secondary school age: in part, it was because their parents were less able to control their movements and force them to go to Chinese school once they reached their teens, and in part the parents actively encouraged them to focus on preparing for mainstream school exams. This was interesting, given that those



students who did persist with Chinese classes long enough to sit GCSE or A-level exams, usually attained A\*, A or B grades in an internationally recognized qualification. Apparently, this was not enough, as it seems there was something intrinsic in the study of Chinese which made parents and students alike devalue it in relation to other academic subjects.

One of the Chinese school teachers, a Taiwanese woman called Sophie, has a full-time job during the week teaching Chinese at a private school in Edinburgh. With many years of teaching experience, she was on the committee which worked on the development of the new Chinese language curriculum for Scottish schools. At one of the monthly teachers' meetings at the Chinese school she came in, a little late, carrying a gateau which she passed around to everyone. As she did so, and people were exclaiming over the cake and chatting to each other, as was usual at the end of these meetings, the head teacher explained to anyone who was listening that Sophie had just been approved as an official examiner for the new SQA exams. Few people seemed to hear, and when I asked Sophie about it afterwards she said rather dismissively, "I'm sure it doesn't mean anything to most of them." This reminded me of another teacher, also a Mandarin speaker but from Beijing, who complained that in addition to the language difference she had very little in common with most of the Cantonese language teachers, who "only like chatting about recipes and that sort of thing." The difference between Chinese as a community language and Chinese as an official school subject became real in the interactions between teachers

The Scottish Chinese schools have entered children for the English GCSE and A level because until 2007 there were no Scottish qualifications in Chinese language for school-age pupils. The introduction of exams in Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin) by the Scottish Qualifications Authority is part of major efforts by the Scottish government to promote Scotland's engagement with China, and has been accompanied by the training of teachers of Chinese, and the introduction of the subject to several state primary and secondary schools throughout Scotland. Chinese was introduced initially at Access 3 and Intermediate 1 levels (roughly equivalent to the English GCSE), followed by a Higher (roughly equivalent to AS Level) in Cantonese and Mandarin from 2009. Suddenly the Chinese supplementary schools have lost their exclusive position as teachers of Chinese to children, and Chinese has changed from being a minority, mother-tongue language of immigrants, to a highly desirable and profitable skill for students from all ethnic groups. However, the school did not rush to enter candidates for the new exams. When I asked about this, the head

teacher explained that they had chosen to remain cautious and wait for a few years until any initial problems with the syllabus had been ironed out; also they felt that the sample teaching materials provided by the SQA were rather dry, too text-based and not as engaging for teenagers as the GCSE and A level materials with which the community school teachers were already familiar.

The Scottish Government has invested heavily in developing a relationship with China, and this involves cultivating business links as well as educational exchanges and the drive to introduce Chinese into the Scottish school curriculum (Scottish Executive 2006). Teachers and a handful of children from the Chinese community schools attended a national conference of pupils and teachers of Chinese held in Edinburgh on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007 where they were addressed by Alex Salmond, Scotland's First Minister. He told the children about increasing commercial and industrial links between China and Scotland, such as the Royal Bank of Scotland becoming the first Western bank to establish links with a Chinese financial institution. Another example was of a computer game which had been designed in Scotland to be played on hardware made in China. With this, he promised the children that exciting career opportunities would be open to them if they had skills in Chinese language and understanding of Chinese culture.

Apart from such top-down encouragement, most British-Chinese families have relatives or friends who have grown up in the West but as adults sought work in Hong Kong or mainland China. Most of these people speak enthusiastically about the opportunities and freedom to conduct business in centres such as Shanghai and Hong Kong, but say that having poor Chinese (often they are weak in reading and writing, even if they can speak fluently) will always hold them back. These personal examples could encourage British-born Chinese schoolchildren to improve their future prospects by studying Chinese. One parent, who was also the Chair of the Chinese school board, a British-born Chinese accountant by training, addressed this directly in an interview:

I have a ten-year-old son and a six-year-old girl. They're both, really we wanted, I think everyone appreciates the school is only for two hours on a Saturday, you could never expect them to be really proficient, but my wife is really good, she speaks to them as much as she can in Chinese, Cantonese and Mandarin, both languages, so they have a practical outlet for what they are learning. But what we try and do is get at least a bit of an interest there, because ultimately with Chinese, I think there is a big push for the future, within the educational

sphere, I think it's going to become a more and more mainstream language, for example, I think the closest I can assimilate it to is Russian. It's not the traditional, you know, French, German, Italian, European languages, I think we're looking further afield and I think a lot of people recognize the importance of Chinese in the coming century, so it's going to be an asset to them.

We're trying to give them a bit of a head start, so by the time the school brings on Chinese proper, by that time I believe in the senior school, they're talking about it. They're at Mary Erskine's and Stewart Melville, and along with St George's and I believe George Heriot's and also Merchiston [all independent schools in Edinburgh] are all pushing Chinese into the mainstream curriculum and I believe even the council schools are now doing so.

I was speaking to George Reid [*a Quality Improvement Officer in the Children and Families Department at City of Edinburgh Council, with special responsibility for supporting community language schools*] and he was mentioning that I think Firrhill [*a state secondary*] and another large school are now seen as the council's pilot projects for Chinese, and if it's successful they will push it out more into the other schools, and I think that's the main thing, that by coming here they have a little bit of a start, and they can move on from it. It's easier for them to learn at school than here, but I think we can still work in tandem with the school, as a bit of extra tuition.

Mark was relatively unusual in the amount of time he devoted to voluntary service to the community school, compared with many other parents who simply delivered their children to class, then left before returning to collect them two hours later. It may also be significant that he was born and brought up in Scotland, while other parents emigrated from Hong Kong as young adults. Therefore, his perspective may be slightly different. However, it seems to point to a recognition of the changing status of Chinese from the language of a marginalized immigrant group, to a world language of increasing importance. It is interesting that Mark's analysis of the role of the Chinese community school makes no reference to the ethnicity of pupils or teachers. Although he mentions that his wife speaks Mandarin and Cantonese with their children at home, the future role which he envisages for the Chinese school, as offering extra tuition in Chinese language, places it within the same category as a provider of private tutoring, open to all, rather than a space for the transmission of "cultural heritage". However, it should be stressed that this is his vision of how the school may be in the future, once more mainstream schools have begun to teach

Chinese. At the moment, most of the pupils do not learn Chinese except at the Chinese community school.

### **Conclusion**

During a brief visit to Hong Kong in April 2007, I met up with Calum, a Scottish-born Chinese man who had been my near contemporary at the same independent school in Edinburgh in the early 1990s. When we meet in a hamburger restaurant near the Swiss bank in Central, where he now works, I comment on the fact that Calum is wearing a tie with a pattern of the Scottish saltire flag. He laughs that it is mere coincidence that he is wearing it that day, but the truth is he does feel very Scottish, having grown up with Scottish friends, studied Scottish history in school and gone on field trips around the country when he was younger. People say he speaks Cantonese with a Scottish accent, too. Although Calum has a permanent job in Hong Kong, and is fairly settled there with his Chinese-American wife and their small son, he still thinks about returning one day to Edinburgh, as he thinks the education he had was excellent, and he would love to enrol his son at the same school.

In view of these strong ties to his birthplace, Edinburgh, I ask Calum what brought him to Hong Kong. It is a long story and he cites various reasons. The immediate push came from his failure to find the job that he wanted in management or the UK banking sector after he graduated from the University of Edinburgh. Calum had a good degree and ascribes his difficulties in finding employment to a combination of prejudice from London-based employers against graduates from universities outside the South East of England, and a “glass ceiling” limiting the chances of British Chinese people. (This is counter-intuitive given the statistics on high levels of employment for British Chinese people, but Calum claimed that many British-Chinese young people shared his perception.) At this point Calum’s father offered to come out of retirement to open a restaurant business with him in Edinburgh, a well-tryed and reliable means of earning a living, but Calum declined, not wanting to be a further financial burden on his parents. Instead he sought work in Hong Kong for four reasons: firstly, as a fluent English speaker with some Cantonese he would be at an advantage in the job market over Hong Kong Chinese people with less good English; secondly, low taxation meant that he could earn more; thirdly, there would be no “glass ceiling” over an ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong, so his prospects of career advancement were greater than in London; and finally he could

take advantage of free housing when he first arrived as his grandmother was still living in family-owned property in the New Territories.

According to Calum, his parents are delighted with the choices he has made, not only his success in a lucrative career, but especially his decision to marry a Chinese-American woman who speaks Cantonese and so is able to talk to her mother-in-law. The couple also care for Calum's grandmother in Hong Kong. By contrast, he says that his mother is deeply disapproving of his younger brother who chose to take a temporary job in Japan, teaching English, which they saw as a low-prestige and unstable profession. Their mother was also upset when her younger son dated Japanese girls.

Calum's case demonstrates how British-Chinese people may make a success of their competence in two languages, and two cultures. Their Western education and fluency in English can be huge assets in the globalized job markets. On the other hand, some other expatriate British Chinese young people spoke of the emotional tensions of not quite fitting in to Hong Kong society. A loose group, formed through membership of a UK-based internet discussion forum for British Chinese people, meets once a month for drinks in the busy district of Lan Kwai Fong, Central Hong Kong. When I went along to the April 2007 meet-up there were 98 people on the guest list, a fairly typical number, mostly of people in their twenties or thirties, some settled in Hong Kong and others just passing through on holiday or searching for jobs. The meeting itself is mainly social but also serves as a networking opportunity and place to exchange advice on job-seeking. Conversations with various people during the event proved that there was no single pattern for British Chinese coming to Hong Kong but for none of them was it a straightforward move back to a place where they could feel at home. As Jack, a man in his twenties, put it, looking Chinese and speaking Cantonese were not enough to make one feel at home with Hong Kong Chinese people: "They don't understand our humour – British sarcasm – or why we're so into football. And they don't understand the British drinking culture either." For Jack, the British Chinese monthly meet-ups were a chance not only to socialize generally, but also to meet new dates. Language was an issue here, as he told me "If you date a local girl there comes a point where you don't really understand each other."

The case of British-born Chinese moving back to Hong Kong is a complex story of people making best use of their cultural resources – particularly language skills, and bilingualism – for their careers. However, I have tried to show throughout

this chapter that there are also complicated manoeuvres in intimate, family relationships when members of the same family speak different languages. For real trust and ease in relationships between people, even speaking the same language may not be enough, as British-born Jack found when he tried to date Hong Kong Chinese girls. Forms of behaviour, humour and expectations of family responsibilities must be matched for people to feel comfortable together. British-Chinese parents may succeed, through great effort, in producing children who are bilingual, but it may be beyond their abilities to make them truly bicultural.

In the past, there has been great ambivalence around the importance of speaking Cantonese, or indeed Hakka, the first language of a large number of immigrants who came to Scotland from specific parts of the New Territories including Sha Tau Kok. Parents cared enough about their children studying their language to establish the Chinese schools, and there is a sense that a person is not properly Chinese if he does not speak the language. In addition, there are emotional and psychological costs of not speaking the same language as one's family. On the other hand, Chinese people in Scotland have taken a more instrumental approach, as for many years, being a speaker of a Chinese language has been a disadvantage for many practical reasons. Not speaking English has denied people the possibility of choosing any other work than catering. It leads to everyday frustrations with tasks such as going to the doctor or claiming housing benefit. For these reasons, Scottish Chinese families have prioritized mainstream school subjects over Chinese language classes.

Now, however, with the economic rise of China, speaking a Chinese language has become a positive asset and British-born Chinese children are increasingly likely to study Mandarin instead of Cantonese. This process of language shift demonstrates a culture of flexibility and entrepreneurship whereby British Chinese families do not hang on to past practices but are ready to adapt to changing circumstances and seize opportunities. This has been apparent in the shift in the younger generation towards fluency in English, and now in the shift from Cantonese to Mandarin as the desired second language. To a certain extent, languages are chosen because of their emotional or moral value, but in general, parents are happy for their children to learn a particular language for practical reasons. This is shown by the fact that they encourage the children's use of English despite the emotional cost of weakened ties between the generations, and encourage the use of Mandarin despite its sometimes negative cultural connotations.

## **Conclusion**

## Conclusion

In this project, I set out to learn more about the inter-generational relationships between immigrant parents and their children in Scotland, by observing how Hong Kong Chinese parents engage with the challenge of bringing up their Scottish-born children. Using ethnographic research methods including participant observation and interviews, my aim was to describe the decisions and choices which families made as they were forced to reflect consciously on how, and what they wished their children to be taught. First, I wished to show how the category of “Chinese ethnicity” was applied by Scottish Chinese people to those patterns of inter-personal behaviour, moral values, and cultural practices, which they wished to pass on to their children. Secondly, I wanted to engage with recent debates in the anthropology of China which have pointed to a collapse in filial piety and corresponding growth of individualism within Chinese families. The study of ethnic Chinese families living in the West would enable me to contribute a comparative case to the discussion. Thirdly, I sought to explore what Brubaker calls “group-making”, through the ethnographic description of collective activities such as language classes, handicrafts, and festival celebrations, all of which brought together previously disconnected people under a common claim to ethnic belonging. This study would be conducted against the political backdrop of multiculturalism, and the active promotion of Chinese language and culture as a global project of the Chinese government. I also include in the category of “group-making activities” work in the catering trade as a shared experience of Chinese immigrants and of their British-born children and the construction of ethnic group boundaries in the choices made by parents regarding childcare.

### **Cultural orientations in time**

In this concluding chapter, I turn to a theme which I have touched on but not yet developed in the thesis, and which draws together issues from the earlier chapters: that of time-orientation as a cultural characteristic. In the article referred to in the introduction to the thesis, Wickberg (2007) suggests that Chinese people overseas have both forward-looking and backward-looking reasons for “doing ethnicity” and seeking to reproduce inherited cultural forms from the place of origin following migration: “immigration and settlement stimulate a need to redefine oneself and one’s family in ways that will adapt to the new environment yet be consistent with one’s values, if possible” (2007: 178). In other words, cultural transmission is both



about being true to the remembered, or imagined past, and also about preparing oneself and one's children with the habits and skills, which might be needed in an imagined future.

This sense of social connection or social obligation might arguably be demonstrated through an expression of responsibility for the proper transmission, and maintenance of cherished cultural forms. I have shown throughout the thesis that Scottish Chinese parents make strenuous efforts to ensure that their children are conscious of their identity as Chinese by descent, and this often means encouraging them to participate in activities which look backwards towards past cultural forms. These rather varied forms of cultural practice all, I suggest, form the substance of "cultural reproduction" between generations, and indeed between co-ethnic peers, and are some of the material from which Scottish Chinese people derive a sense of belonging to an ethnic group, or groups.

Many of the examples I have given in the thesis relate to practices which might easily be described as ersatz, invented tradition (Hobsbawm et al., 1992): this would include the revived craft of Chinese knotting from Taiwan, or the somewhat ad hoc celebrations of Chinese New Year. I have argued that even language use can fall into the category of "invented tradition", as in the case of children from Hakka- or Cantonese-speaking families studying Mandarin as a foreign language: although Mandarin is not their mother tongue, it is associated ideologically with an authentic Chinese ethnicity, with which it is becoming more and more desirable to align oneself. Lindholm (2008) has pointed out that, in the process of globalization and post-modernity, the quest for authenticity has probably become more pervasive and compelling in many societies. For Lindholm, this is in fact a consequence of modernity, of urbanization and the separation of many people in the world from the places and communities where their forbears had lived for many generations. Because of migration, whether rural-urban or international, says Lindholm, the search for a historical connection, and imagining of an idealized past is all the stronger. I hope to have shown in the preceding chapters that, despite their seeming superficiality, these activities hold real meaning for the participants, marking a strong desire to be "authentic" and thus feel a sense of belonging to a group, albeit a group which is clearly fleeting and transitory.

In a highly polemical text written before many of the social transformations in post-reform China took place, Jenner (1994) argued that Chinese society was condemned to immutability, because of the cultural tendency always to look to the

past, leading to a fatalistic and cyclical view of human experience. This he contrasts with the Western habit of looking to the future, in the belief that change is always possible. In Jenner's analysis, China's prospects for the future are extremely bleak, as a result of what he terms "the tyranny of history: perceptions and thought patterns from the past [which] bind living minds" (1994: 1). One question which arises from this in relation to my work in Scotland is whether the creative adaptation of Chinese immigrants to new cultural practices in Scotland is held back because of a cultural tendency to hold fixedly to past beliefs and behaviours. This, of course, rests on the assumption that there is such a thing as a "Chinese culture" which exerts an influence over Hong Kong immigrants to the West as much as to the mainland Chinese about which Jenner seems primarily to be writing. This fixed view of culture may be identified both among immigrants themselves and from outside observers, both politicians and those public sector workers who implement multiculturalist policies, and sometimes also academics.

Anthropologists including Watson (1977) have been criticized for dwelling too much on ethnicity and "culture" in their work on Chinese immigrants to Britain, at the cost of understanding first the significance of other group characteristics including class and age on the experiences of individuals and communities, and secondly at placing too much weight on the continuing influence of the culture of origin and neglecting the capacity of migrants to adapt and change to life in a new cultural environment (Tam, 1998: 84-5). This has led to new academic interest in cultural hybridities and the shaping of new British cultural identities, particularly by the children and grandchildren of immigrants. I fully accept that the "culture" which is passed on in the Scottish-Chinese families I studied is as much defined by their class status, as with their ascribed ethnicity, and have shown this in Chapter 1, where I discussed the shame of British-Chinese children associated with their parents' work in the low-status catering trade. Moreover, the experiences of "groupness" for a young Chinese Scot like Chris, the postman's son, will clearly be very different from those of his Chinese-born grandparents, since the majority of Chris's friends are white Scots, while his grandparents have lived and worked all their lives with other Chinese immigrants.

This said, I have shown that many of my informants hold on to ideals of what it means to be true to "Chinese culture", and for this reason it may be valid to hold on, at least provisionally to the assumption that there is such a thing, if only as an ideal to be aspired to. On this basis then we may consider Jenner's particular

argument that the model of the patrilineal family, defended and promoted by successive rulers in China over centuries, continues to exert a hold over the minds of Chinese individuals, in spite of the many changes which have taken place since the early twentieth century. Jenner remarks on the repressive effect of this enduring model on the lives of Chinese women, who continue to take a subordinate role in society as well as the home, regardless of Communist campaigns for gender equality. And central to the continuity of the family, he argues, is the backward-looking practice of filial obedience, according to which the individual is compelled to spend his adult life repaying his parents and elders for the care that they gave to him in his youth. These “closed circles of obligation” leave little if any room for personal innovation, choice or independence as the entire system – which is replicated in the quasi-familial relationships between teachers and students, bosses and workers, and government and people – depends on conformity for its continuation.

This is clearly pertinent to my research, and relates to the work of Yan and Fong with which this thesis engages. Yan (2003, 2009) has argued strongly that the younger generation of mainland China have broken free of the circles of obligation and are quite clearly innovative in their choices of spouse, their homes and their attitude to material possessions. In a different way Fong (2004, 2007) has pointed out that while Jenner may be right that the model of the patriarchal family does endure, at least as an ideal, we have to question its power to enforce conformity, given that the parents in her study seem simultaneously to wish their children to be obedient and filial, and to exhibit the qualities of independence and self-motivation which they will need to succeed in the contemporary job market.

I would like to use what remains of this concluding chapter to discuss how my data from Scotland may fit in to the proposed model which categorizes “Chinese culture” as being orientated towards the past, in contrast with “Western culture” which looks more to the future. I will ask how fair it might be to characterize the Hong Kong Chinese families I encountered in Scotland as bound in the tyrannical grip of their history and cultural background. I discuss the extent to which my data show them to be tied to the past and the obligation to reproduce a burdensome net of relationships, and how much migration has allowed people to free themselves from past beliefs and practices, looking forwards and embracing change.

## **Custodians of the past**

When bringing up children, many Scottish Chinese parents felt obliged to draw on models which they described as “the Chinese way” and which they saw as intrinsically suited to their families, because they were of Chinese descent. When asked specifically about their ideas of “good parenting”, many Scottish Chinese parents spoke in terms which would suggest they were wedded to past notions of filial obedience and stereotypically Confucian moral values.

I have given evidence to show that immigrant parents in particular are still very concerned to preserve their authority over their children, often out of fear of real or imagined dangers which might await the children once they leave the protection of the family home, and they often do that by preventing others from entering the family circle. This was true of Tommy (Chapter 2), the father of teenagers who drove them to and from school each day, and would escort them home personally from nights out in town with their friends. Tommy’s behaviour echoes Jenner’s observation that the past-orientated principle of familial authority can lead to suspicion and lack of trust towards anyone who is not a member of the closed family circle (1994: 115), and there were further examples of this in the way that restaurant or takeaway owners would rarely hire an employee – whether to work in the business, or as a carer for their children – who was not a relative or someone well-known and trusted by the family. However, these examples of fear and suspicion of strangers could as easily be put down to the experience of migration and the huge vulnerability of living and working as an immigrant with very little social support.

Similarly, the cultural value of hard work was still important to my informants, of various ages. In Chapter 4, I described how Lily boasted of being one of the most hard-working members of her extended family, and I argued that this contributed to her sense of belonging as a valued daughter-in-law to her ex-husband’s parents. In Chapter 1, I explained that many of informants did indeed express the view that diligence was a specific trait of Chinese ethnicity, and this was one reason why they preferred to hire Chinese workers for their restaurants. Diligence may be characterized as a “Chinese” cultural value but is clearly a quality which can enable immigrants from any place of origin to surmount difficulties in order to achieve a level of prosperity in their adopted country. What I am emphasizing here is that Chinese Scots themselves identified this as an aspect of ethnicity, thus marking themselves out once again as a distinctive group.

Parents such as Phoebe and Lydia (Chapter 6) openly expressed a desire that their children should grow up with what they identify as “Chinese” moral values, such as respect for their elders, and a level of self-discipline which is expressed in avoiding alcohol and working hard. British-born Chinese children have in many cases also internalized this ideal and think of giving as an expression of a healthy relationship between themselves and their parents. Often the actual gifts would be obviously ritual in character: Jason (Chapter 1) would transfer £50 a month to his mother’s account although both of them knew that she did not need the money and would probably return it to him in the form of new clothes or other gifts. Family obligations remained meaningful for some migrants, particularly the older generation, and it was precisely because they took them so seriously that they felt bad about being unable to keep to them. For instance, Lily’s parents (Chapter 3) saved very little money over the years because of their gambling and smoking habits. As a result, they could never afford to return to Hong Kong for a visit, and would actually have been ashamed to go back to their village with so little to show for their years of work overseas. It took two decades before Lily and her brother decided to pay for their air fares, thus making it possible for their parents to attend a ten-year lineage reunion in the village, an opportunity which they were delighted to accept. Being able to tell their peers that their children had paid for the journey was in itself a triumph and signal of their success as parents and as lineage members.

For the first generation of immigrants, including Lily’s parents, relationships with relatives left behind in Hong Kong and more broadly past-orientated cultural practices including lineage activities, were still alive as personal memories and in some case lived reality. However, most of my informants showed little interest in revisiting their own past, or their family histories: for example, “return” trips to Hong Kong generally involved visiting family members, but apart from that the focus of the visit would be shopping, eating and generally enjoying the amenities of the modern city, rather than paying nostalgic visits to the villages where the families originated. One young BBC man, whom I met at the meet-up in Lan Kwai Fong, told me his British-based parents and grandparents had told him he was crazy when he announced his intention to go and live in the family-owned property in a semi-deserted village in the New Territories. He was a somewhat exceptional person, a documentary film-maker who hoped to experience and also to film the last vestiges of communal life in a rural community by living for a year among the few elderly people who remained there. Others displayed a simple lack of curiosity about their

family origins. The first generation of migrants seemed to have spoken little about their lives before migration, or indeed about the circumstances in which they came to Britain, so when I asked younger people about their family histories, many of them had only sketchy information. Lily remarked to me once that her mother was a very pessimistic person and liked to indulge in long, melancholy complaints about the harshness of her life, her miserable and hungry childhood and loneliness in migration. Lily said that she would advise her mother not even to think about it, saying, “That’s all in the past, don’t think about it. You need to look to the future now”. Lily explained that many of the older generation, including her grandmother, asked to be returned to their home village for burial when they died, something which younger relatives found inconvenient because of the expense, but also rather incomprehensible, as they had heard the old people complain so bitterly about the sad times in the villages, including the starvation and suffering under Japanese occupation. For the young it was impossible to understand why anyone should want to be returned, even in death, to a place associated with unhappiness, but they would respect their relatives’ wishes.

I would argue that while Chinese Scots, both elderly and those now in young adulthood, retain some memory of “traditional” practices, such as death rituals and the ceremonials of lineage, these have already acquired more than a tinge of nostalgia and have become practices to perform quite self-consciously, outside the pattern of everyday life. As I showed with the example of Hakka, which has more or less been abandoned as a language of common use by all but the very oldest family members, Chinese Scots are quite prepared to jettison aspects of their past lives in Hong Kong, consigning them to be forgotten along with the poverty and unhappiness which many of them experienced before migration.

Returning to Fong’s (2004, 2007) work on the mental models according to which Dalian parents supposedly evaluate their children’s development as “good” children, I am suggesting that contrary to what Fong says, the Scottish Chinese parents I met have little difficulty in accepting that the values which held good in the past, in China, no longer applied in Scotland. If Fong is right, and her Dalian informants really struggled with the mismatch between their ideals of proper, moral behaviour, and the personal qualities required for their children to succeed in post-reform China, then the Chinese Scots provide a strong counter-example. As I have shown, for example in Lydia’s comments (Chapter 6) regarding the contrast of “Western” and “Chinese” cultures, many of my informants perceive a clear

dichotomy between the two cultural systems, and take it for granted that children born and educated in the West must surely become more “Western” in their values than Chinese. In this context, I am arguing, parents do not expect their children to acquire what might be termed “deeper” forms of Chinese cultural knowledge, including the often unspoken rules of proper inter-personal relationships, for example. Instead, they turn to more visible and accessible markers of ethnicity, encouraging their offspring to engage with their “Chinese” heritage through practices such as handicrafts, studying Mandarin as a foreign language and celebrating festivals. They accept that their children will become “Westernized” – indeed, many justify the family’s migration and hard work in the catering trade as a means by which the children can learn English and take advantage of job opportunities in the West – but still want them to connect in some way with Chinese culture.

I have argued that activities that seem at face value to be past-orientated recreations of tradition are in fact very present-orientated exercises in localized group-making. Many Edinburgh Chinese people choose to engage in notionally Chinese activities precisely because they live separately from a larger extended family within which they might experience a form of belonging based on blood or kin relations. The fact that groups such as the Chinese knotting class or the performers who came together to stage the New Year show might be characterized as ad hoc, transitory and therefore less “real” than a clan association in the New Territories, does not diminish their importance for the participants. At a psychological level, these group-making activities help isolated and often lonely immigrants, such as Vicky who has no extended family in Scotland, to make friends with people who share similar life histories. As the majority of Scottish Chinese restaurant workers speak imperfect and often very little English, they are largely excluded from any mainstream social activities such as sports clubs or adult education classes, and in any case, their working hours tend to make participation impossible.

The question remains of why, if their motivation is simply to socialize, should Chinese Scots choose specifically “Chinese” activities as their reason to do so. Why look to the past, and recreate cultural practices such as Chinese knotting, dance or classical music, rather than form groups which engage in activities orientated to their present surroundings: why, for instance, is the Edinburgh Chinese Golf Association apparently the only Chinese sports club? Why do Scottish Chinese mothers not form Cantonese-medium playgroups for their young children? In my

earlier discussions of knotting and of language learning, I have suggested three reasons for this.

First is simply that there is institutional support for the organizing of groups which are targeted at people from designated ethnic groups, and it is possible to attract external funding for activities which promote minority cultures in Britain. This is the reason why the Chinese New Year celebration took the form it did at the Festival Theatre in 2007: there was public funding available to stage such a show. Similarly, Chinese knotting is encouraged when class members are invited to demonstrate their craft to members of the public. Second is that there is at present a level of prestige associated with Chinese culture, and particularly the Chinese language. Clearly, for British Chinese young people with ambition to work in China or elsewhere, there are strong extrinsic, instrumental reasons for learning Mandarin. These are just some pieces of the evidence that I have given to argue against Parker's (1995) suggestion that British Chinese people prefer to "hold Chinese identity within as an inner space" because they fear racist discrimination. There are some ways of "doing Chinese ethnicity" which are easy to do in public, and be assured of a positive reception.

A further, related reason is that many of my informants perpetuate a quite Orientalist view of the difference and even incompatibility of East and West, Chinese and Scottish cultures. They believe that, as people of Chinese descent, they have a stronger entitlement, if not obligation to engage in activities such as Chinese knotting or speaking Mandarin, even though these were not activities known to their direct forebears. I argued that for women like Lily, who have suffered disadvantage and prejudice because of her status as a poor immigrant, participating in respected activities such as Chinese knotting is a means to achieve respect, both within the family and within society at large. One example of the younger generation seeking personal pride from demonstrating their loyalty to Chinese culture might be Joanne's longing to speak fluent Cantonese, and to show her Hong Kong relatives the video clips of herself performing classical Chinese dance at the Chinese New Year show. She felt an imperative to prove herself a worthy descendant of her Chinese forebears, to be "Chinese enough" to meet the approval of her relatives still living in Hong Kong, and thus, apparently closer to their "authentic" origins. It is interesting that she should choose to do so by becoming skilled in cultural forms (especially dance and costume design) which constitute a rather elitist and tangible representation of "Chinese culture". Certainly, Cantonese is literally Joanne's mother tongue and an



everyday part of life for her Hong Kong relatives. However, classical Chinese dance was not part of the lived experience for many of the immediate forebears of my informants.

There is, then, a contrast between the attractiveness of some, supposedly elite forms of Chinese cultural practice, such as arts and language, and the rejection, or setting aside of the reality of individual past histories and ways of life. What is particularly interesting in the case of these Chinese Scots is that the cultural forms which are reproduced and celebrated are those of a broad, diasporic Chinese identity and not those specific to their actual places and cultures of origin. Because those local identities and sub-groupings are made invisible in migration, after which people come to be seen by non-Chinese as all “Chinese”, it becomes possible to lay claim to these prestigious forms of culture.

### **Living in the now**

I do not wish to claim that Scottish Chinese people think all the time about being Chinese, and about “being ethnic” in their everyday lives. During the course of my fieldwork, one of my strategies for seeking out potential informants was to approach organizations in Edinburgh which provided services to what are currently termed “black and minority ethnic (BME) people”. These included the YMCA Roundabout Centre, an advice service and meeting place for women and children, the Edinburgh and Lothians Racial (now Regional) Equality Council, and LinkNet, a mentoring project which supports students and job-seekers. At each of these places, I was told that they had virtually no ethnic Chinese clients. A young support worker at one of the organizations, who was herself Scottish-born Chinese, reflected on this apparent anomaly at some length:

They don't see themselves as an ethnic minority. When I used to work as a youth development worker we had mainly Pakistani and Bangladeshi young men, aged between 14 and 21, coming to our youth club. They would ask “what does BME mean?” and when they had to fill in job application forms, they would have trouble filling in the ethnic monitoring part, because they didn't know how to define themselves, British, Pakistani, Scottish or what. It's even more so for BBCs [British-Born Chinese].

I don't actually have many BBC friends – just a few close friends and relatives – but they don't see themselves as Chinese, they think of themselves as Scottish. I see myself as Scottish Chinese, I suppose, but then I think – does it really

matter? The people I know see themselves as Scottish, they just don't relate to issues like BME, racism and so on. They might get the odd racist comment now and then, maybe when you're at the pub, but it's not a big deal. We are quite integrated socially and have Scottish friends.

BBC young people don't want to be forced into a group which feels unnatural to them. To be honest, the sort of facilities you get at these youth clubs – maybe a pool table and a play station – well, most of the Chinese kids have that at home anyway, so they would prefer to go out with their friends to the cinema, to clubs and things.

Another factor is that Chinese parents are often suspicious about these clubs – they'll ask their children “Where are you going? Who will be there?” and if they don't know the people, they won't want the children to go there.

The local setting of post-devolution Scotland has created a social and political environment in which everyone, not only Chinese Scots, is caught up to some degree in a state of flux and confusion over cultural identity. Yet, the idea of multiculturalism seems to rest on the assumption that “they” – meaning people from non-Western societies – have culture while “we” in the West do not. This notion seems to underpin the provision of a dedicated youth group in Edinburgh for children whose parents or grandparents came from Pakistan, Bangladesh or Hong Kong. As Wikan argues (2002: 81), culture is too often equated with race.

The youth worker's observation that Chinese teenagers did not need to come to the youth club because they owned their own computers and games equipment points to the confused categories of culture and class: her potential Chinese clients felt themselves to be in a different social class from the more “needy” South Asian young people who did in fact attend the youth club. For the Scottish Chinese teenagers, when it came to leisure time, ethnicity and race were less binding characteristics than those of age and class, and their “culture” was clearly that of their present-day Scottish peers. In a similar way, it could be argued many of the smaller groups for Scottish Chinese adults – the Chinese knotting class for example, or the Chinese golf association – actually bring people together because of other aspects of their identity (such as gender, or wealth, or having time on their hands) which are more binding than their ethnicity. Ethnicity is important for membership of these groups but people need to have more interests in common to form a lasting group.

I would argue that Scottish Chinese young people are highly orientated towards their present and future lives, and frequently reject attempts by others to categorize them according to a culture which they perceive as belonging to the past, and therefore irrelevant. To a very high degree they are assimilated to Scottish youth culture and do not feel compelled to behave as members of an ethnic minority. I have referred to the fact that many Scottish Chinese children drop out of Chinese school once they enter their teens: when Dorothy tried to persuade her thirteen-year-old son to continue with his Cantonese classes, he protested, “there’s no point – we’re only playing at being Chinese.” Like those teenagers who turned their back on the BME youth club, Dorothy’s son saw no connection between Chinese culture and his present-day life.

There does appear to be a generational difference in the tendency of Chinese Scots to refer to the past or live in the present. In Chapter 3 I described the tensions which emerged when a younger generation of Chinese immigrants upset the patriarchal structure of the Chinese school’s management team, challenging the authority of older migrants by proposing a new way to run the school, more in keeping with the administrative style of British voluntary organizations. Arguably, those older people, predominantly men, are still in the grip of their history. These are the men who formed the Edinburgh Chinese restaurateurs’ associations in the 1970s according a structure with strong similarities to a New Territories lineage organization. Yet even members of that first generation insist on their independence and agency as they account for the ways they have established a new way of life in Scotland.

Many of my older informants, for whom manifestations of Chinese ethnicity were more important, like the Chinese teenagers objected to the suggestion that they, as members of an ethnic minority group, were particularly needy of help from wider society. In the preceding chapters, I have given examples such as the tendency of Edinburgh Chinese elders to play down the involvement of the local authorities in the provision of services to older Chinese people through the Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association. Without referring to the local authority funding which was in fact given for these services, they tended to stress that Chinese people themselves had taken the initiative in establishing the Association, and continued to oversee it from their positions as elected committee members. Similarly, the Edinburgh Chinese Women Association had begun as an offshoot of Saheliya, a charity supporting minority ethnic women in Edinburgh, but after a year, the Chinese

women chose to continue the group under their own management and funded by their own membership fees. These examples underline that self-reliance is an important cultural value for my informants, and one which can be threatened by the politics of multiculturalism which, while supposedly promoting equality, instead serve to reinforce the unequal hierarchy between majority and minority ethnic groups. I am arguing that many Chinese Scots would choose not to be identified as an ethnic minority in Britain – thus, to some extent, they resist one option for their assimilation to Britain’s multicultural society. At the same time, in rejecting the help which is available to migrants they also make a strong statement of their own belonging in Scotland. It is notable that very few elderly Chinese Scots choose to return to Hong Kong in their retirement, despite the fact that it could be more congenial for them to live in a totally Chinese-speaking environment. Calum’s father had a habit of reminding his sons that “we are only guests in this country [Scotland] so we must behave courteously and not make trouble”, and yet by their actions in forming associations and initiatives such as the sheltered housing for Chinese elders, many Chinese Scots of his generation assert their permanent status as British residents.

The parents in Fong’s studies (2004, 2007a, 2007b) appear to be extremely future-orientated, and encourage their children to think in a similar way, making day-to-day choices which should lead to future success in education and the job market. She shows how parents become frustrated when children seem more drawn to the present-day concerns of friendship, computer games and enjoying life as it is. Kipnis (2001) likewise describes the extraordinary lengths to which rural Chinese parents will go to ensure a better future for their children. The Scottish Chinese families in my study were less determinedly focused on hopes for the future. Adults as well as children were investing time and attention to having rich and enjoyable experiences in the present, often looking for life-enhancing experiences which did not demand great wealth: they wanted their children to play sport and have music lessons, and they themselves made time to exercise or do handcrafts.

This suggests that they are already satisfied with their achievements and, having reached a level of financial stability, they do not aspire to more. Instead, parents such as Tommy or Lily have the gentler, more modest hope of seeing their children take full advantage of the range of opportunities available to them for both study and play. Rather than forcing their children to become accountants or lawyers or dentists, the three professions towards which Scottish Chinese parents pointed their children in the 1980s (Chan 1986) most of the parents I spoke to simply want

their children to enjoy the freedom of choosing their own careers, and following their interests, on the assumption that in Britain anyone who is prepared to put in a basic level of effort can make a living at something.

I have shown some everyday examples of Scottish Chinese people hiding some of their Chinese identity from others, such as Lily's decision not to cook Chinese food when her children had Scottish friends visiting them at home, because she was afraid they would complain about the smell. Similarly, I have shown the mistrust which Scottish Chinese parents show towards white Scots when it comes to decisions about childcare, and the suspicion which I encountered when I attempted to get work in a Chinese takeaway. There is undoubtedly a level of reticence surrounding access to the private life of Scottish Chinese families, and in this respect, I would agree with Parker's argument that "being Chinese is all right in private or in Chinese-only contexts" (Parker 1995: 233). I might go further and say that the tendency to underplay more personal aspects of Chinese ethnicity is in fact an indicator of a very present-orientated approach. Maintaining past traditions, reproducing culture as something unchanging from history is set aside in the interests of living an enjoyable and individually fulfilling life in the present.

The desire of Chinese Scots to settle down to live unobtrusively in Scotland is in some ways threatened both by the multiculturalist nationalism of the Scottish Government, and also by efforts of the PRC government to enrol Chinese people in the formation of an ethnic group on a massive scale, seeking to establish a sense of global Chinese identity through its projects to promote the Chinese language in schools and universities. This of course is a project targeting non-Chinese as well as overseas Chinese, but here I have discussed the effects on Hong Kong Chinese who have previously thought of themselves as belonging to a separate "group" and for whom the integration into the larger ethnic group demands explanation.

Yet these overseas Hong Kong Chinese are very entrepreneurial people who can engage with the Chinese state's group making projects on their own terms and for their present purposes. The Edinburgh Chinese schools accept the patronage of the Chinese consulate, as the donations of textbooks and support for teacher training enhance the quality of their teaching. However, the schools are not blind to the covert political aims of the Chinese state's promotion of the Mandarin language and make overt statements of their own political neutrality. Their acceptance of help from the consulate is based on readings of what resources will be beneficial to Scottish

Chinese children in their studies now, and as they prepare for their future careers in a changing world.

### **Looking to the future**

As Stafford (2007) has suggested it may be misleading to describe a culture as orientated to either the past, the present or the future: there is no reason why people should not be attuned to any of these, at different times and circumstances, and Stafford writes of Chinese culture in particular that

this tradition stresses not only the extent to which the historical past (including the history of kin relations within and across ancestral lines) weighs upon and determines the present, but also the extent to which the future may be predictable, and in some ways even controllable (Stafford, 2007: 59)

Stafford's (2000) work in rural China and Taiwan has shown how this past history of kin relations is inextricably tied to people's expectations of what will happen in the future, because of the cultural schema of separations and reunions which Chinese people come to see as integral to the nature of social relationships: indeed, Stafford argues that the separation constraint may be a universal characteristic of human relationships. While certainly inherited ideas about proper family relationships are important, Stafford draws attention to the patterns of arrivals and departures in Chinese social life which provide opportunities for people to express their mutual dependence and relatedness. Such patterns structure the calendar year through the marking of festivals (including New Year) in which family reunions are central, and this is one way in which the future can, to a certain extent, be predicted. In the thesis, I have shown how Chinese people in Scotland have instituted their own calendar of social events, fixed points at which they can look forward to coming together with friends and family. These include not only the major festivals such as Chinese New Year, but also the smaller, more regular occasions such as the weekly classes at Chinese school. In individual family lives these fixtures included the Sunday lunches which were Lily's only opportunity to spend time with her parents when she was a child living with her grandmother in Glasgow, and they were working six days a week in the takeaway shop.

From the perspective of family histories, the cultural schema of separation and reunion gives Scottish Chinese parents confidence to send their children out into a quite unfamiliar environment, first for schooling and later employment, without

fear of losing them altogether. This interpretation differs from Yan's argument that elderly parents feel let down by children who go away from them and choose different ways of life. Quite contrary to this, Scottish Chinese parents regularly urge their children to go out and make the most of the new opportunities which they, the parents, missed out on. To do the opposite and hold the children back, for example by tying them down to work with the family in the catering trade, would now be viewed as a failure of parenting and indeed a threat to healthy family relationships. The perspicacity of this view may be seen in the stories of Lana and Jason who were able to take a far more positive, respectful view of their parents having left home. Jason said that, in the mind of his parents, "there was no question of us not going to university", and had he and his siblings in fact remained in the restaurant, there would have been disappointment and bitterness on both sides. As I showed with the story of Tommy, and his protective behaviour towards his teenage sons, parents retain a level of anxiety over what might happen to their children, particularly because of their racial difference. At the same time, he too has structured family life around the need to prepare his sons for a future at university and subsequently in professional jobs.

Finally, from the point of view of Chinese ethnicity and belonging, I have explained that the Chinese Scots in this study no longer think of themselves as the "sojourners" described in Watson's (1975) work on the early years of migration from the New Territories to Britain. Although the new Chinese school in Edinburgh may describe itself as the "Overseas Chinese/ Chinese sojourners' language school", all the evidence from their engagement with Scottish institutions shows that the families consider themselves firmly settled in Edinburgh. Nevertheless, this is not to say that, in terms of Chinese identity, they are prodigal children. Through the many examples of "doing ethnicity" which I have described throughout the thesis, the Hong Kong Chinese people of Edinburgh continue to enact their relationship to China, a performance of belonging which can be understood as something akin to the familial rituals of separation and reunion as it nurtures the relationship between people and their ancestral cultural heritage while always acknowledging that they are living overseas.

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