
Researching Migrant Chinese Families in Hong Kong: Changing Perspectives and Methodologies

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Sam Wong

Hong Kong has experienced tremendous social and political transformations over the past three decades. The 1997 Question, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998 and the outbreak of the deadly virus, SARS, in 2003, have all touched the nerves of every family in the territory. How these families respond, and adapt, to these drastic changes has, therefore, sparked considerable interest among both local and overseas academics. Numerous attempts have been made to offer insights into conceptualising “Hong Kong families”, pioneered by Mitchell (1972), Wong (1972) and Lau’s thesis on “utilitarianistic familism” (1977) to recent studies by Lee (1992), Skelton (1994), Ng (1994), Wong (1996), Lui and Wong (1998), Lui et al. (1998), Chu and Chan (1999), Shae and Ho (2001) and Chow (2001).

Despite their contributions, these studies have two shortcomings. Theoretically, “Hong Kong families” is a generic term. It comprises families of different characteristics, ethnic compositions and cultural structures. The cultural backgrounds and social needs of the migrant families from mainland China and the South Asian families in Hong Kong, Keezhangatte (2006) argues, can be different from that of the established Chinese families in Hong Kong. We, therefore, need to deconstruct the term and look into the diversity,

dynamics and complexity of different families. Methodologically, how “Hong Kong families” is researched has not been adequately explained or explicitly discussed in the studies. As research methodology provides perspectives into what questions are asked, how target groups are approached and why certain sampling strategies are deployed, how “Hong Kong families” are investigated, therefore, deserves closer scrutiny.

In addressing these limitations, this chapter will focus solely on mainland Chinese migrant families in Hong Kong (hereafter “migrant families”). These families are characterised by at least one parent or child who was born in the mainland and who emigrated into Hong Kong for reasons of family reunion. The length of resettlement was less than seven years during the period of research.¹ This chapter draws on my extensive review of literature about the migrant families—ranging from governmental reports, research by the non-governmental organisations, journal articles to Master’s and PhD dissertations—from the early 1980s to mid-2000s. My research objectives are to unfold how these families are conceptualised, what units of analysis have been used and what research methods have been deployed.

I will make three arguments in this chapter. Firstly, I will suggest a shift of thinking about how migrant families have been understood over the past three decades. The dominant social

S. Wong (✉)
University of Liverpool, Rm 507, Roxby Building,
Chatham Street, Liverpool, L69 7ZT, UK
e-mail: s.wong@liv.ac.uk

¹ These parameters fit into the Hong Kong government’s definition of new arrivals from Mainland China, and they are used in most research by local NGOs and scholars.

adjustment agenda and the human capital- and information-deficit models in the 1980s and early 1990s have been under challenge by three emerging perspectives in the late 1990s. They are rights-based citizenship, gender and empowerment and social capital building. Secondly, I will show that the unit of analysis is also changing. On the one hand, the heterogeneous needs of different migrant groups, such as children, teenagers and married female migrants, are more specifically targeted. On the other, family, as an intact and harmonious entity, has been questioned by the rising interest in the power dynamics within families between gender and across generations. Research has become more area-specific and now pays more attention to the influence of locality. Thirdly, I will illustrate with examples that research methodology in investigating migrant families has become more diverse and complex. In challenging the influential positivistic and quantitative research, an increasing amount of research has been conducted in terms of ethnography, participatory action research, longitudinal study and discourse analysis. New qualitative research methods, such as drawing, diary taking, “photovoice” and workshops, have been attempted to engage the migrants and to explore the multiple realities of their everyday lives in the host society. Triangulating quantitative and qualitative data and deploying different sampling methods to reach less-accessible migrants are also a few new trends.

This chapter will explain that these changing perspectives and methodologies in conceptualising migrant families are affected by both domestic conditions and international situations. The increasing dissatisfaction with the government’s assimilation policies, the rising discrimination against new arrivals and the politicalisation of the welfare and migrant issues have forced local academics and NGOs to re-examine the “social adjustment” agenda. The emergence of competing ontologies in the international academic world, such as social constructionism and postmodernism, in response to new social challenges in the 1960s and 1970s, has offered alternatives to research methodologies and methods. I will argue in this chapter that these changing

perspectives have significant implications on policy making and service delivery. While some NGOs take a more political stance to strive for migrants’ full citizenship, the government has initiated social capital building programmes to foster community trust and networks. New strategies, such as mentor systems, are also introduced to reach previously marginalised migrants.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: it adopts a historical approach and traces the changing conceptualisation of migrant families at three stages: the 1980s, the early and mid-1990s, and the late 1990s and mid-2000s. It will then discuss the diversity and complexity of research methodology and methods in approaching the families. The chapter will conclude by highlighting the policy implications and significance of these changes whilst suggesting a few limitations of this study.

Changing Perspectives

Research on mainland Chinese migrant families in Hong Kong can be roughly divided into three stages: the 1980s, the early and mid-1990s, and the late 1990s and mid-2000s. The temporal analysis will show the changes of migrant research from being apolitical to political in nature; from viewing migrants as a homogeneous entity to diverse and competing groups; from moving away from the social adjustment agenda to multiple concerns, such as rights and empowerment, and from solely quantitative methods to a wide range of qualitative and participatory tools.

1980s: One-Way Permit Quota System and Social Adjustment Policies

The British and Chinese governments agreed to replace the “touch-base” policy with the “one-way permit quota system” (OWP) in 1983. This scheme was devised to facilitate families with immediate members (spouses and children) residing on the mainland to be reunited in Hong Kong. This scheme was operated by the mainland authorities which governed the exit of mainlanders

to Hong Kong for settlement (Task Force on Population Policy 2003). This practice helped change the nature of Chinese migrants settling in Hong Kong. In 1981, 58% of immigrants were male and 42% female, but by 1991, the proportion of males dropped to 39% while the females rose to 61%. The numbers of children settled in Hong Kong increased too, rising from 30% to 40% of the total influx (Lin 1998).

The colonial government maintained its minimal interventionist policy towards Chinese migrants. It believed that mainland migrants would easily be assimilated into the Hong Kong mainstream society since they were Chinese and they had family members in Hong Kong. This “social adjustment” agenda was echoed with the study by Hong Kong Council of Social Service in 1985. This quantitative research identified the social, economic and psychological problems faced by the migrants in the adaptation process and highlighted the urgent needs of migrants in four aspects: housing, medical, employment and education.

The study was a landmark in Chinese migrant research. It was credited for taking a holistic perspective on migrant issues. It had tremendous influence on subsequent research in the early 1990s. That said, it has been criticised for narrowly defined migrant issues as merely adjustment problems. It, Lee (1997) argues, indirectly supported the colonial government’s technical-residual welfare model. This model places emphasis on incrementalism—social welfare should not affect the free economy and undermine individual work incentives. The colonial policy was to “maintain the Chinese tradition” which treated poverty as a personal matter which

should be dealt with within the family system (Lee and Edwards 1998, p. 27). Underpinning this model also lies the value of economic rationality that welfare expenditures should fall within the confines of economic growth.

Early 1990s–Mid-1990s: Split Family Phenomenon

The daily quota for one-way permit was 75 in 1983, but it increased to 105 in 1993 and 150 in 1995. From 1983 to 2001, there were a total of 725,000 new arrivals admitted under the OWP scheme, which was 10.8% of the population of 6.72 million in 2001. From 1997 to 2001, mainland new arrivals under this scheme were equivalent to 93% of the population growth in the host society (SOCO 2003).

The negative impact of the quota system gradually emerged in the early 1990s. Because of the quota, children and spouses are separated under the one-way permit scheme, and the discrepancy in the times of arrival in Hong Kong between mainland children and their parents gave rise to separated families. Table 37.1 shows that 94.5% of couples were separated between Hong Kong and China for more than 10 years in 1998 in Guangdong province.

This has caused great disruption to the lives of the migrant families. Men in Hong Kong have to look after their young children because their wives remain in China. Young children are left on their own at home during the day in situations where their fathers hold on to a full-time job. On other occasions, female migrants join their husbands before their children, so they leave children

Table 37.1 The length of separation between married couples under the one-way permit scheme

Year	Guangdong province			Other provinces		
	Separated more than 10 years (%)	Separated less than 10 years (%)	Total number	Separated more than 10 years (%)	Separated less than 10 years (%)	Total number
1998	94.5	5.5	17,587	8.9	91.1	1,924
1999	95.0	5.0	17,286	3.0	97.0	4,892
2000	66.8	33.2	19,365	3.4	96.6	6,078
2001	27.4	72.6	9,417	6.4	93.6	8,626

Source: Task force on population policy (2003, p. 54)

in the care of grandparents or other relatives in the mainland. This immigration policy has been accused of encouraging smuggling and corruption. Wang and Wong (1999) show their concern that many children and mainland wives, including some who were advanced in their pregnancy, risk their lives by placing themselves in the hands of “snake-heads” who smuggle them in for a high price. They are also in debt since they paid corrupt Chinese officials in order to jump the queue.

While a few NGOs started challenging the quota system and urging the Chinese government to reduce the years of separation on humanitarian grounds, migrant studies in Hong Kong in this period remained preoccupied with the adjustment agenda. Research by YMCA (1995), Chan (1996), the Boys’ and Girls’ Club Association of Hong Kong (1996) and Sham Shui Po District Council (1997) all placed emphasis on the adjustment problems in schools among young new arrivals. The study by YMCA, for instance, pointed out the difficulties of young migrants in finding schools, the big age gap between migrants and their fellow students, their poor performance in English subjects, and the psychological impact associated with the admission to lower forms. Research also looked into the problems faced by female migrants (e.g. Hong Kong Federation of Women’s Centre 1999). Emphasis was placed on their psychological adaptation and help-seeking patterns. The solutions, these studies recommend, were to enhance the existing adjustment programmes and to improve access to social services.

While these studies are appreciated for acknowledging the different needs of the young and the middle-aged migrants, they have been criticised for being uncritical about the underlying assumptions of the information-deficit model. The model asserts that migrants lack sufficient knowledge about social services and providing them with more information is effective in breaking the barriers. Adjustment, from this perspective, is merely a matter of time. In addition, migrants are sometimes to blame for prolonging the adjustment problems. On separate occasions, YMCA (1995), the Boys’ and Girls’ Club Association of Hong Kong (1996) and the

Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Kwun Tong Integrated Service Centre (2000) pinpointed that migrants were too passive and reluctant to use existing social services:

New immigrants have little understanding of Hong Kong before their migration, and adjusting to all aspects of life immediately after their arrival is not a simple task ... Very often, their problems were not being tackled immediately due to their *ignorance on community resources*. Furthermore, their *low eagerness* in seeking help has created even more difficulties to their adjustment of new life (p. 22, my emphasis).

Surveys suggest that the median family incomes amongst Chinese migrants were only 40% of that of their local counterparts (HKSAR 1998). In explaining the income gaps, the human capital-deficit model was often cited to “justify” the earning differential between established residents and new arrivals. Study by Lam and Liu (1993) suggests that, as the manufacturing sector shrinks and the service sector expands in Hong Kong, more domestic-specific human capital is required of the workers. A large portion of the human capital of immigrants acquired outside Hong Kong renders no economic value in production in the host society. In response to the challenges, the government attempted to strengthen family relationships by subsidising the integrated family service for new arrivals. Family development programmes, such as family adjustment courses, childcare services and women’s groups, were introduced. Orientation programmes, for example, community orientation tours, were intended to facilitate the integration of the new arrivals into the society. Employee-retraining schemes were also promoted to assist migrants’ entry into the labour market.

Late 1990s to Mid-2000s: Politicising “Migrant Problem”

The worsening poverty situation, the rising discrimination against migrants, the reduction of welfare benefits and the controversial reinterpretation of the Basic Laws in the late 1990s have forced a few social workers and academics to

rethink not only the effectiveness of the government's assimilation policies but also social work practices.

The Gini coefficient, an indicator to measure income inequalities, has been persistently rising. It hit a record high at 0.533 in 2007 (Ming Pao 2007). The Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) explains that the forces of globalisation and economic restructuring, the economic recession after the Asian Financial Crisis and the government's residual welfare model are the causes of social polarisation—the development of financial activities has created a high-income managerial and professional middle class with high-consuming power while the diminishing manufacturing industries and the growth of service industries have put manual workers into a low-wage labour market.

While the poor working class families as a whole suffered from economic downturn, the government cut the welfare support to Chinese migrants in order to reduce heavy financial deficits during the economic recession in 1998. The government imposed strict restrictions on their eligibility for social welfare benefits. Increasing the number of years of residence in Hong Kong to seven years as an additional criterion for applications resulted in poor newly arrived migrants becoming no longer entitled to benefits. Apparently, at least 10% of the 54,000 newcomers are affected by this change each year (Ming Pao 2004).

NGOs reacted strongly to this “anti-migrant” measure, especially when the rising discrimination against new arrivals had caused deep concern. A survey by the Hong Kong Psychological Society (1997) showed that local residents tended to believe that Chinese migrants were “bad” in nature. Fifty-four percent of respondents thought migrants brought bad influences to Hong Kong, and 55% believed that migrants were themselves to be blamed for their poverty. While this anti-migrant sentiment can be linked to the rising Hong Kong indigenous identity resulted from the 1997 Question (Wang and Wong 1999), Lee (1997) argues that this atmosphere is unfavourable to assimilation because this provides “a social foundation for the exclusion of new

immigrants” when more and more Hong Kong people are concerned with the protection of their own territorial rights (p. 3, personal memo). The reduction of migrants' social benefits will further victimise the migrants by perpetuating the general prejudice that migrants are a financial burden on the host society and thus do not deserve assistance.

Some Legislative Councillors repeatedly urged the government to set up a Commission on New Arrivals and establish a Reception Centre for New Arrivals, but the government rejected the suggestions, claiming that migrants speak the same language and share a common origin and history with Hong Kong people (Paper for the LegCo Home Affairs Panel Meeting, 20 December 1995). The notion of sharing culture and values, however, caused uneasiness. Fung and Hung (1999), for example, suggest that “social workers have paid too little attention to their unique situation and the emphasis of existing social services has been mainly on the aspect of social adjustment” (p. 53). The Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) also points out that social adjustment is a “value-laden” concept, implying that migrants' assimilation into the host society is “normal and rational” (p. 3). The power inequalities between social workers and migrants, some academics warned, would create further dependency.

The politicalisation of the migrant issues has reached an explosive level in the case of the right of abode. Before the handover, the British and Chinese governments agreed that mainland children who were born of Hong Kong parents would automatically get the right of abode in Hong Kong after 1997. The Hong Kong government was worried about an influx of a large number of mainland children to Hong Kong after the handover, so it passed the Right of Abode Ordinance to fill the “loophole” in June 1997. It sets three criteria: first, only children born at the time that one of the parents became Hong Kong permanent residents enjoy right of abode in Hong Kong; second, children born out of wedlock do not have right of abodes; and third, children adopted out of Hong Kong do not enjoy the same right. Human rights activists and legal experts questioned the

change of law and initiated legal action to seek clarification in the courts. In January 1999, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal ruled that the Immigration Ordinance violated the Basic Law and right of abode should not be restricted by the time of the birth of the child.

The government claimed that the estimated number of first and second generation of mainland children eligible to enter Hong Kong according to the ruling of the Court of Final Appeal was 1.67 million. It also claimed that the government needed HK \$710 billion to help the newcomers. Although these figures were heavily criticised by scholars, the general public panicked and supported the government by asking the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) in Beijing to reinterpret the Basic Law. In June 1999, NPCSC overturned the ruling of the Court of Final Appeal, deciding that, in cases where at least one of the parents of these mainland children had obtained permanent resident status by birth or residence at the time of birth of the children, they had to stay in China to wait for the one-way permit to Hong Kong. The row about the right of abode later led to an arson attack on the Immigration Department in 2000 which caused several deaths of immigration officers and the arrest of a number of mainland migrants. The relationships between migrants and the locals, according to the Society for Community Organisation (2001), hit rock bottom.

Three Emerging Perspectives

In response to the rapid sociopolitical transformations, research on Chinese migrants has become more diverse and dynamic. Three main perspectives have gradually emerged in the late 1990s and mid-2000s. They are rights-based citizenship, gender and empowerment, and social capital building. It needs to be stressed that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and the later sections will show that the rising sensitivity to gender, for example, can also be found in the citizenship and social capital perspectives. The

backgrounds and the nature of these perspectives are summarised in Table 37.2.

Rights-Based Citizenship

Migrants from the mainland are often considered as “victims”, “deserving poor” and “dangerous objects” in the media. According to Lan (2003), this reflects “the underlying racist, sexist and classist bias of the Hong Kong society as part of an ethnic project against mainlanders” (abstract page). Although migrants are not generally regarded as “racially” distinct from local people, Sautman (2004) warns that many of them considered the new arrivals as “a notch lower on the SAR ethnic hierarchy” (p. 125).

The lower social status that migrants “enjoy”, Chan et al. (1999) explain, relates to the hegemony of economic rationality. Notions, such as citizen rights and social equalities, are often side-stepped in Hong Kong society. Since residency rights are often linked to economic values, Leung (2004) points out, the SAR government is successfully “turning the human beings living or seeking to live in Hong Kong back into workers” (p. 110). While foreign elites are welcome to work and live in Hong Kong and their spouses and children can automatically enjoy full residency rights, mainland migrants struggle to prove their usefulness to the society.

In challenging migrants’ second-class status, some social activists and academics believe that the solution is to secure migrants’ full citizenship. This resonates with Sautman’s idea that the marginalised should enjoy “equal access to the full spectrum of political rights and the attainment of those other rights that pre-condition a voice in the ordering of a democracy that permeates everyday life” (Sautman 2004, pp. 133–134). Ku and Pun’s book, “Remaking Citizenship in Hong Kong” (2004), has provided a significant theoretical foundation for citizenship in the Hong Kong context. It states that

The notions of participation, rights, membership, belonging, and difference are no longer abstract formal concepts but sites of intense contestation ...

Table 37.2 Changing perspectives to conceptualising Chinese migrants in Hong Kong

Periods	Sociopolitical contexts	Research perspectives	Key research
1980s	One-way permit quota system introduced; 75 Mainland migrants allowed to settle in Hong Kong every day	Social adjustment agenda and assimilation policies dominant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Migrants are assumed to share similar cultural and social values with the host society – Adjustment is seen as a matter of time – Migrants require special assistance, such as housing and schooling 	Hong Kong Council of Social Service (1985)
Early to mid-1990s	Daily number of migrants to Hong Kong increased to 105 in 1993 and to 150 in 1995 Split family phenomenon caused concern	Idea of assimilation and social adjustment remain influential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More focus on different needs of female migrants and young migrants in adjustment – Human capital-deficit and information-deficit models prevail in explaining migrant problems and earning differential 	YMCA (1995), Chan (1996), Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centre (1999)
Late 1990s and mid-2000s	Rising discrimination against migrants Rising poverty due to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998 and the outbreak of SARS virus Politicising welfare and migrant issues Reinterpretation of the Basic Laws by the National People's Congress Standing Committee in 1999 Arson attack on the Immigration Department in 2000, causing several deaths of immigration officers and the imprisonment of a few migrants	(1) Rights-based citizenship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Challenge social adjustment agenda and hegemony of economic rationality – Strive for migrants' full social and political citizenship – Advocate for legislating anti-discrimination laws on grounds of ethnicity and gender to protect migrants (2) Gender and empowerment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Migrants, especially female, are constrained by patriarchal and other social institutions, such as "good mother" discourse – Deconstruct migrant "families" and look into power and resource distribution within families and between generations – Tackle gender inequalities by empowerment and raising consciousness by group participation (3) Social capital building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Concerned with weakening social bonding, trust and norms of reciprocity – Government promotes "Community Investment and Inclusion Fund" – Programmes introduced to help migrants build networks and trust by group participation 	SOCO (2003), Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) Hong Kong Integrated Family Services for New Arrivals Project (2005), Chun (2005) Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (2002), Choi (2001), Wong (2007)

Source: Own research

Citizenship is understood also as a lived practise by which agency, subjectivity and embodied struggles from below expand the space of participation and resistance. By engaging with concrete and everyday experiences, we highlight the notion of a lived citizenship that unfolds the subjective experiences of social exclusions along the lines of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and that contests and negotiates the meaning of state power, rights, laws and social participation (pp. 12–13).

SOCO (2003) and the Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) are the two most active NGOs in this aspect. In helping migrants to secure full social and political citizenship, they believe that legislation and raising migrants' awareness are paramount. They argue that social discrimination against migrants has prohibited the new arrivals from "integrating" into society and from seeking employment. The government should, therefore, create legislation to combat ethnic and gender discrimination. The government should also provide training programmes for migrants, so that they fully understand their rights to employment, participating in trade unions and collective negotiation. They also argue that the government should respect the International Human Rights Acts and acknowledge migrants' rights to housing, education and family reunion.

Wong's ethnographic research (2007) illustrates how NGOs deploy the notions of "rights" differently to help migrants secure access to resources. In his case studies, three NGO groups adopted different approaches to advocating rights. The female-only neighbourhood group in Mongkok stressed migrants' rights (also known as "ethnic citizenship"), highlighting their status and needs as new arrivals in the host society and their demands for extra help. The against-family-violence supporting group in Tsuen Wan, in contrast, focused on the migrants' Hong Kong citizen rights, suggesting that the migrants should enjoy the full rights and responsibilities granted by the Basic Law, as the Hong Kong born did. The mutual help community-currency group in Wanchai adopted a mixed approach, celebrating both migrants' ethnic status and Hong Kong citizenship. It considered these two identities as

compatible and useful in maximising migrants' control over social and political resources. Acknowledging the significance of securing migrants' rights, Wong warns that, without fully understanding migrants' subjectivities and everyday interactions, the explicit promotion of rights can have negative impact on their livelihoods. Overemphasising migrants' citizen rights, for instance, can make migrants deprived of special rights that new arrivals can enjoy. Claiming dual rights maximises migrants' access to resources, but not all migrants feel comfortable with their mixed identities. Visible collective action may also risk damaging their community reputation and social networks (p. 177).

Gender and Empowerment

The gender-sensitive perspective calls for the deconstruction of migrant "families" and challenges the mainstream assumption that migrant families are a homogeneous entity. It advocates a micro-approach to understand how resource and power are distributed within the families, and how gender roles are produced and reproduced in their neighbourhood.

The gender approach places emphasis on migrants' lived experiences and the negotiation between their private lives and participation in public sphere. It highlights the hierarchical power relationships based on generation, age and identity (Choi 2001). For example, in his research on female migrants' cross-border marriage, He (2006) underlines the fact that the gender perspective enables him to examine the subjective experiences of Chinese immigrant women through their journey of marriage and migration. Tsuen Wan Caritas Community Centre (1999) conducted a qualitative study, exploring the complex motivations about why mainland women were willing to marry Hong Kong men. This study challenges the mainstream perception that mainland women use marriage to secure financial stability. Instead, it underlines the social norms and institutions, such as age and parents' wishes, in shaping their decisions.

Gender studies can be separated from feminism, but the gender perspective to migrant research in Hong Kong often shows an “integration of a feminist perspective” (Ho 2006, p. 98) because female migrants are considered as being suppressed by the patriarchal structures. A study by Hoi and Chan (2006) shows that female migrants tend to suffer from family violence because they have been constrained by the “good wives” discourse. Being a good wife, they should place the interests of their families, husbands and children above their own. A female interviewee in their case study admitted that she had been physically attacked by her husband and her son. She internalised the violence by suggesting that her son imitated his father’s violent behaviour and believed that violence is the only way to resolve problems (p. 118). Fung and Hung (1999) explain that power inequalities within migrant families result in female migrants’ lack of financial abilities and over-reliance on their husbands, which place them in a position of subordination.

The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (1998) interviewed 2,210 women to compare and contrast the perception of social status between local and migrant women. Table 37.3 shows that female migrants tend to agree that their career achievement should not be higher than that of their husbands, and also shows their preference for male children to female in order

Table 37.3 Comparing perception of social status between local and migrant women

Statements	Agree (%)	
	Local women	Migrant women
1. Wives’ career achievement should not be higher than their husbands	20.4	37.6
2. Women receive respect from their family and relations only if they have male children	14.2	30.2
3. Wives can reject their husbands’ demand for sex	76.5	47.2

Source: The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (1998, p. 26)

to gain social status. The traditional gendered stereotypes come along with low self-esteem among the female migrants. A study by the Hong Kong Federation of Women’s Centre (1999) discovers that female mainlanders have lower self-esteem and higher expectations of marriage. They also lack sufficient skills in emotion management and support networks.

Findings such as these have caused alarm about the vulnerability of female migrants in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (1998) suggests that migrant wives’ over-reliance on their husbands causes problems, arguing that their husbands may not be a “good” guide for their new environment and that external assistance is necessary. Fung and Hung (1999) claim that it is men, specifically the husbands of migrants, who are responsible for the existing gender inequalities. They suggest that women’s lack of financial independence is the root cause of their subordinate position, both before and after their arrival in Hong Kong. Their husbands have the absolute power to manipulate the relationships.

This school of thought is particularly critical to the government’s adjustment policies and employment strategies. The government is criticised for reinforcing women’s roles as mothers and wives at home on the one hand and encouraging female migrants to participate in the labour market on the other. Ho (2006) argues that increasing female participation in the labour market does not automatically raise their social status at home and in society since martial hierarchy and male dominance in the labour market have not been tackled. Their increasing financial contributions can only enhance marital tension and their workload at home. As a result, some migrant women may “prefer[s] to return to the position of subordination if their husbands were able to take up the breadwinner role” (p. 237).

There is, however, a danger in narrowing down gender to women issues and mistakenly making a dichotomy between “men as oppressors” and “women as victims”. The gender issues around Chinese migrants in Hong Kong are far more complex. The role of masculinity, fatherhood and men’s perceptions of childcare is important in

understanding gender interactions within families. Choi (2001) shows that the rivalry between female migrants and their mothers-in-law can have negative impact on their well-being. Wong (2001) conducted a qualitative study, interviewing nine men who married women in the mainland. He finds that men felt useless if they had to stay home to look after their young children when their wives were away. Apart from gender relationships within families, research by the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association touches upon the gendered living space in migrants' neighbourhoods (2004). It highlights the fact that female migrants are more likely to suffer from sexual harassment because of multiple tenure and overcrowding.

The solution to gender inequalities, the Hong Kong Integrated Family Services for New Arrivals Project (2005) and Chun (2005) propose, is empowerment through group participation. The Hong Kong Integrated Family Services for New Arrivals Project defines empowerment as a "process which helps individuals, groups and community foster a sense of confidence through participation" (p. 4). Chun highlights three dimensions of empowerment: psychological empowerment, empowerment at group level and empowerment at the community level. The first level of empowerment is related to self-confidence and a sense of control and competence. The second level stresses social network building and mutual support from the groups. The third dimension highlights the liaison between organisations and share of resources to support one another. Comparing female migrants' interpersonal skills and confidence in communication before and after group participation, Chun has portrayed a rather rosy picture about the positive correlation between public involvement and empowerment. She, however, plays down the downside of empowerment that may have negative impact on their lives.

Social Capital Building

Social capital is generally regarded as resources generated from social interactions (Edwards

2004). It is measured by quality and density of social networks, norms of reciprocity and levels of social and public trust.² Ng and Hils (2000) suggest that Hong Kong society as a whole seems to fit into the "social capital lost" story. They use the term "dwindling social capital" to describe the situation:

Hong Kong society, as a whole, seems to fit into the "social capital lost" story which shows a picture of collapse of trust and reciprocity. Increasing divorce, accelerating family disintegration and an increasingly individualised society are blamed for the problems (p. 24).

The study on social capital by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (2002) also illustrates a grim picture: nearly 80% of respondents have not involved themselves in community-related activities, and 64% suggest that not even one neighbour can be trusted. This report makes an alarming conclusion: weakening social networks will create strong reliance on the government in the long run (p. 99). Wong (2004) conducted a social capital survey and asked 1,502 households three questions: (1) How many relatives can lend you money? (2) How many relatives can introduce you to a job? (3) How many relatives can you trust? His research finds that poor groups have significantly lower social capital than non-poor groups. This study covers all poor people in a generic term, but the findings have significant implications on poor mainland migrants in Hong Kong.

In his 2001 policy address, the Chief Executive of the Special Administration Region of Hong Kong declared the setting up of a HK\$300 million "Community Investment and Inclusion Fund". It aims to:

²Another approach to social capital is social network theory. Ronald Burt (2001) and Nan Lin (2001) suggest that network characteristics, relations and locations are the key elements in determining the access to, and use of, social capital. This perspective represents the 'minimalist view of social capital' (Ostrom and Ahn 2003, p. xxvii) which focuses on network features and plays down other forms of social capital, such as trust and institutions. Biggart and Beamish (2003) challenge this approach for structural determination without paying enough attention to 'the realm of meaning, interpretation and individual agency' (p. 450).

promote community participation, mutual assistance, support and social inclusion provided through strengthened community network in the community. This will in turn help reinforce the sense of belonging in the community, enhance the social networks of individuals and families, broaden the support base available to assist them to resolve their problems and address common concerns. These community networks, strengthened relations, sense of belonging, and willingness to provide mutual aid form the foundation of social capital (Health, Welfare and Food Bureau 2002, p. 4).

As a matter of fact, researchers have used the concept of social networking in the 1990s to examine migrants' help-seeking patterns. For example, Tong (1998) explores social networking and psychological support between female new arrivals in migrants' groups. Nevertheless, an increasing number of academics embrace the notion of social capital because it means more than social networks and touches on other social elements, such as trust, reciprocity and participation. Tang (2002), for instance, examines the social capital formation of new-arrival students. He finds that social capital among migrant children is not evenly distributed, and the differences lie in "their family and ethnic background" (p. 147). Wong (2007) uses social capital to capture the fluidity of migrants' associational lives. A female migrant in one of his case studies actively participates in various "modern" and "traditional" types of institutions: migrant group and clan association, church and temple, supermarket, and local fish and meat market. Her involvements in multiple institutions underscore the constant negotiation of time and space but are often constrained by poverty and social discrimination (pp. 133–137).

Choi (2001) examines female migrants' social capital building in two clan associations in Hong Kong. She finds that: "Chaozhou women who migrated to Hong Kong before the 1970s seem to have found their integration a less painful process compared with those who arrived in the 1990s ... many new migrants arriving after the 1990s have been settled by the government in new towns where a coherent ethnic community is absent" (pp. 293–294). Social capital also highlights the significance of public engagement and "bridging" social capital in fostering trust in divisive

communities. The Boys' and Girls' Club Association of Hong Kong (2001) and Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council (1998) use games and activities to enhance mutual understanding between young new arrivals and local people, but the effectiveness of the policies has not been properly analysed.

Changing Units of Analysis

The changing perspectives come along with a re-examination of the unit of analysis in researching the migrants. One of the changes is to break the myth that migrants are a homogeneous group and to shed light on the heterogeneous needs and interests. Another change is to view migrant families as a contentious place, where resources and power are constantly competing and negotiating between gender and across generations, rather than as a harmonious entity.

To be fair, migrants have already been treated as a heterogeneous group in the early and mid-1990s. The psychological adaptation and social needs of the new-arrival children and the middle-aged women, for example, were researched separately. However, migrants have been deconstructed in a more complex manner since the late 1990s. Instead of targeting the "usual suspects", such as children, teenagers, young adults and housewives, Lam and Song (2002) deliberately focus on migrants who gained places at universities in Hong Kong. They explain that researchers tend to focus on the less-advantageous migrants and the successful ones are "rarely researched and reported" (p. 206). Ho (2006) sheds light on heterogeneity and complexity by breaking migrant couples into four types according to economics roles. They are traditional couples, dual-earner couples, working wives and non-productive husbands and families on welfare (p. 260). She examines how these different migrant couples make decisions in their everyday lives. Wong (2008) differentiates migrants by their identities and rural/urban backgrounds (see Table 37.4). The first group considered themselves as mainland Chinese with a strong rural identity. The second group has a strong Hong

Table 37.4 Discrimination amongst Chinese migrants

1. **Chinese/rural identity** mainly came from rural areas; skins are darker and accent stronger. Age gaps between them and their husbands and children are wide. Owing to their social backgrounds and physical characteristics, they encounter difficulties in hiding their migrant identity or switching their identity from one to the other
2. **Hong Kong/urban identity** may be as poor as the first group, but their city and urban background before migration makes them believe that they are superior to the first group. They have a stronger Hong Kong identity and thus accuse the first group of bringing shame to migrants as a whole because of their reliance on social benefits and lack of education
3. **Hong Kong–Chinese/urban identity** is mainly “coping poor”. Families are more intact, husbands have stable jobs and they do not need to rely on social benefits. They also have more knowledge and resources, so they use their identities flexibly in different circumstances

Source: My work

Kong, urban identity, and it tends to discriminate against the first group because they are largely illiterate and rely on social benefits. The third group possesses hybrid identities, and members view themselves as both mainlanders and Hongkongers. The significance of this research is that discrimination against migrants can come from migrants themselves. Merely improving the relationships between the migrants and local people is, therefore, inadequate and ineffective in combating discrimination.

While migrants’ general needs, such as psychological needs, school performance and social networking patterns, were the research focus in the early and mid-1990s, their specific needs and concerns have received attention in the late 1990s. For instance, reports suggest that an increasing number of teenagers in Wong Tai Sin have used drugs. In order to examine if this trend has influenced the teenage migrants, Wong Tai Sin Integrated Service for Young People (1999) conducted a special study on young new arrivals’ attitudes towards drugs. This study suggests that while the majority of young migrants have not experienced drugs, they have very limited knowledge about them.

Research on migrants has long been area-specific, because most studies are sponsored by the NGOs and the sponsors want to know how migrants behave in their own areas. Research showing its interest in area specificity in the late 1990s and early 2000s has, however, different reasons. It pays more attention to the influence of locality because the physical environments play a significant role in migrants’

everyday lives. For example, He (2006) conducted a longitudinal study on cross-border movement among female migrants. He purposively selected migrants living in Sheung Shui because he argues that Sheung Shui is close to the border and these migrants are more intense in their cross-border interactions.

The unit of analysis has also moved away from the ideal that a migrant family is an intact and harmonious entity. Instead, the gender perspective deconstructs “families” and calls for a micro-approach to look into the tension and conflict within families and to examine power dynamics and resource distribution between gender and across generations over time and space. Research by Choi (2001) is a good example.

Changing Methodologies

New perspectives need different research methodologies, methods and sampling strategies to tell and investigate migrants’ stories. Since the emerging perspectives, mentioned earlier in the section “Changing units of analysis”, are characterised as anti-positivist, dynamic and power-sensitive, the methodologies have to meet a number of criteria. Firstly, they believe that knowledge is co-constructed between stakeholders. Secondly, they aim to give power back to the marginalised and use the research methods to voice their concerns. Thirdly, they focus on process and context, rather than problem and outcome. Lastly, they celebrate “thick description” and embrace “value involvement” (Flick 2006).

Four key methodologies have gradually emerged in assisting the development of the perspectives in the late 1990s and mid-2000s. They are ethnography, participatory action research, longitudinal qualitative study and discourse analysis. Table 37.5 provides a summary of the characteristics of each methodology.

Ethnography is defined as “the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting” (Brewer 2000, p. 6). Methods of data collection, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews and personal documents, are commonly used in ethnography. Tang (2002) and Lan (2003) both adopt ethnography in understanding different groups of migrants. Tang uses observations and interviews to capture how social capital shapes new-arrival students’ school performance and adaptation to new environment. Lan’s research touches upon the less-accessible migrant sex workers in Hong Kong. She uses her position as

a part-time interpreter for the police and immigration department to conduct a covert study. By talking to 400 mainland sex workers and two pimps and through participant observations, she aims to “light the unheard of voices of mainland migrant sex workers” and to “unwrap[s] the complexity of experience and resistance” (abstract page).

Participatory action research stresses that research is a learning process. It is intended to engage with participants and to empower them through games, exercises, activities and campaigns. It also inspires researchers to reflect critically on their own roles in the research process (Denscombe 2007). The Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs Association of Hong Kong conducts a participatory action research on migrants’ perceptions on private and public space in 2004. A method called “photovoice” is deployed. Ten new-arrival women and their children in the project were entrusted with automatic cameras. They were asked to take pictures of their own living environment and their daily lives. They were required to explain the

Table 37.5 Changing research methodologies

Methodological approaches	Assumptions	Methods	Common elements	Examples
(1) Ethnography	Study of people in the fields to capture social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting	Participant observation, interviews, stay in the field for a long period of time	Oral history, comparative studies, everyday lives, social practices, purposeful and snowball sampling strategies	Tang (2002), Lan (2003)
(2) Participatory action research	Research is a learning process, intended to engage with participants and demonstrate advocacy	Community map drawing, photovoice, diary writing, workshop		The Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs Association (2004)
(3) Longitudinal qualitative study	Trace the changes of migrants’ perceptions and subjectivities over a number of issues over time and space	Make several interviews and observations over a long period of time		He (2006), Wong (2007)
(4) Discourse analysis	Understand the mechanisms and power structures in constructing knowledge	Review newspapers and articles to conduct content examination		Lan (2003)

Source: Own research

places they liked and disliked. The project leaders suggest that the aim of this method is “not of counting things up but of drawing on the community’s active lore, observations and stories, in both visual and oral terms”. They find that it serves as “a powerful medium of expression for marginal groups who are not capable of using authoritative means of presentation and expression such as writing” (p. 145). A visual simulation modelling workshop was also organised. By using models, the participants could express their opinions on the meaning of “democratic urban space” and their preferred living environment and neighbourhood (p. 144).

Longitudinal qualitative research traces the changes of migrants’ perceptions and subjectivities over a number of issues over time and space. He (2006) examines the first year of resettlement experience of 15 Chinese immigrant women who live in Sheung Shui. He visited the women four times a year and explored how their experiences of adjustment and gender relationships change over time. He finds that the interviewees responded differently at various stages of adaptation. Wong (2007) uses longitudinal study to explore how social capital is built, transformed and destroyed before, during and after migration to Hong Kong. He gives examples to show that migrants used strong and weak ties in different circumstances (pp. 110–111).

Discourse analysis is intended to understand the mechanisms and power structures in constructing “realities” (Norman and Yvonna 2005). In analysing how the media represent mainland migrant sex workers in Hong Kong, Lan (2003) adopted discourse analysis and searched for newspapers containing keywords, such as “prostitution” and “mainland prostitute” in Hong Kong newspapers from January 2000 to February 2003. Her study suggests that the sex workers are constructed as “victims”, “dangerous women” and “erotic objects” and that implies the underlying racist, sexist and classist bias of Hong Kong society as part of an ethnic project against “mainlanders” (abstract page).

Oral History, Comparative Studies, Everyday Lives and Snowball Sampling

It is important to stress that these four methodological perspectives are mutually compatible. Most of them adopt case study and oral history approaches to understand the complexity of the migrant issues. Apart from talking to migrants, study by Leung and Lam (1999) uses the perspective of social activists to trace the development of the reinterpretation of the Basic Law in 1999. Father Kim, as one of the hunger strike participants, recorded his campaign in his diary from 5 February to 6 April in 1999.

Comparative research has also been popular in order to uncover the multiple realities of migrants’ lives in the host society. Tong (1998) compared and contrasted two self-help groups, the Caritas Community Centre in Tsuen Wan and the Society for Community Organisation. The former is inner-focused group which aims at personal development of members themselves while the latter focuses on pressure group activities and aims to bring about changes by influencing the government and the general public (p. 87). Tang intends to examine if different structures and arrangements within these organisations affect migrants’ associational lives.

Emphasising migrants’ everyday lives has also become the focus of migrant research. Wong (2007) argues that everyday cooperation by female migrants is generally not taken seriously by social workers because it does not fit into their ideal form of collective action as being visible and functional. A study by the Tsuen Wan Caritas Community Centre shows that female migrants carry out many collective activities with their friends when their children are in school (1999, p. 58). They go shopping together, chat in restaurants and visit their mutual friends. When their children are at home, they contact their friends by phone or send letters to their mainland relations. They sometimes take their children to nearby playgrounds, markets and schools where they meet friends. These activities may not necessarily be “functional”, but they are part of their collective lives. Lui and Wong (1998) therefore

argue that collective action is not necessarily “explosive and confrontational”. Migrants are involved in fluid communities and engaged in informal friendship networks, temporary groups and occasional gatherings. Individuals are not tied to only one community but may have multiple and overlapping bonds. The understanding of migrants’ daily interactions helps demonstrate that community and neighbourhood have different significance to different groups and the relations of cooperation change over time and space across migrants’ life course.

Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling strategies are common in the qualitative research. They challenge the positivist’s claim of scientific sampling methods. In contrast to probability sampling, this technique is not concerned with “estimating the probability of units being included in the sample” (Burgess 1984, p. 54). Ho (2006) adopts a purposeful sampling method in order to “insure the diversity of participants” background in terms of “age, educational level, class, migration experience, work experience, marital status and length of settlement” (p. 10). Also known as “chain referral”, “network” or “reputational” sampling, the snowball technique is characterised as taking advantage of the social networks of identified respondents to “provide a researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts” (Atkinson and Flint 2001, p. 1). Tsuen Wan Caritas Community Centre (1999) asks female migrants to introduce their friends for interview. This aims to reach the less-visible migrants, especially those who do not participate in community groups.

It is crucial to stress that not all qualitative migrant researchers consider quantitative studies irrelevant to their research. A few adopt a mixed approach which combines quantitative and qualitative data. In order to unfold multiple discriminations against migrants in job seeking, renting, school placement and utilising social welfare, the Society for Community Organisation adopted a mixed approach (2001). It first selected 30 new immigrant families from the cases of its own organisation to form a focus group. It then surveyed 570 families and interviewed six to eight cases for deeper studies (p. 3). Choi (2001)

combines the quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine how social capital is produced and reproduced within two clan associations in Hong Kong.

There have been some changes of the sampling methods in the quantitative research over the past 25 years. Owing to the lack of a complete data set in the 1980s, researchers of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service had to distribute to every migrant a reservation card on which a number was written at the immigration control border. Those who got the number which matched with the computer’s random sampling number would be selected for interview (1985). The Home Office and the Statistical Department these days have complete data sets which enable quantitative researchers to deploy more sophisticated sampling methods to seek “scientific” representation.

Discussion and Policy Implications

The section on “Social Capital Building” has explained how domestic settings in Hong Kong, before and after the handover, have contributed to the emergence of the new perspectives. We should, however, not neglect new theoretical and methodological movements in the West in the 1960s and 1970s that play a significant role in triggering off the changes in Hong Kong.

Theoretically, the three perspectives stress the resilience by giving voice to migrants on the one hand and breaking the structural barriers that constrain them from securing full citizenship, enjoying gender equalities and building social capital on the other. This understanding of the interplay between migrants’ agency and structural forces is underpinned by Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory (1984), Mark Granovetter’s notion of social embeddedness (1992) and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of habitus (1977). Despite some differences among them, they tend to agree that it is a mistake to depict agency as either under-socialised or over-socialised. The former indicates the indeterminate nature of human actions and the capacity of individuals for willed and voluntary action which is not governed by social

structure. It strongly believes that individuals are transformative agents who can challenge structural inequalities. The latter, on the contrary, argues that individual actions are predetermined and constrained by social structures. It portrays agents as passive recipients who are incapable of resisting the structures surrounding them. The notion of agency–structure interactions helps to explore everyday social interactions which link individual agency and social structure.

The agency–structure perspective has far-reaching impact on researching migration worldwide. In analysing the global trend of migration from the developing countries' perspective, de Haan (1999) argues that we need to take account of migrants' agency and attitudes and the structures within which they live. Attention also needs to be paid to the historical patterns of migration and the cultural and political contexts in which migration takes place. In his words, we also need to look into their "motivations, attitudes and [their] understanding of the structures within which they act" (p. 12).

It is not hard to find examples of local migrant research to show the influence of this perspective. In his research on new-arrival students' adaptation and school performance, Tang (2002) makes his theoretical background explicit: "this study examines the interplay between structure (the culture, opportunity structure, and social networks of the host society) and agency (of the new arrival students) in the context of immigration adaptation" (pp. 145–146, original brackets). In order to demonstrate that the process of migration is not simply personal adjustment problems, He (2006) examines the painstaking process of negotiation and migrants' subjectivities in cross-border marriage. To avoid idealising migrants' agency, researchers are aware of the role of structural forces that shape migrants' everyday practices. The Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) highlights the fact that the so-called new-arrival problem, to a great extent, results from "a continuation of the weak bargaining positioning of the workers in Hong Kong as a whole" (p. 10). Some research is particularly interested in analysing the role of institutions in linking agency and structure. Institutions are generally defined as cultural values and social

practices. In their research, Hoi and Chan (2006) discuss how restrictive social norms help reconstruct the new arrivals' self.

The diverse and complex research methodologies also result from the emergence of different ontologies in the philosophy of social sciences in the USA and the UK in the 1960s and 1970s in an attempt to challenge positivism (Norman and Yvonna 2005). Social constructionism, feminism and postmodernism, to name a few, offer alternative perspectives to how knowledge is constructed. Social constructionism, stressing the co-production of knowledge between researchers and the researched, shapes Lan's (2003) ethnographic study on mainland migrant sex workers in Hong Kong. Postmodernism, celebrating diversity and deconstruction, influences Ho (2006) to break migrant couples down into different types according to their identity and economic roles.

The changing perspectives on migrant studies in Hong Kong have significant implications for how social services are delivered. Ho (2006) suggests:

It is important for social workers to appreciate the diversity among immigrant women Each type of immigrant women presents their own risks and potentials. Social workers, in working with immigrant women, should identify their characteristics before devising intervention (p. 286).

Along with the campaigns for the change of legislation, SOCO (2003) runs workshops in order to raise migrants' awareness of their own rights. A few NGOs also realised that they were too "centre"-oriented which failed to attract migrants to use their services. More effective strategies, such as outreach and mentor systems, are then introduced to reach the less visible migrants (Au 1998).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that research on mainland Chinese migrants in Hong Kong has become more diverse and complex over the past 25 years. The previously dominant thinking, such as the social adjustment agenda and the human capital-deficit model, has strongly been challenged

by perspectives such as rights-based citizenship, gender and empowerment, and social capital building, over the past 10 years. These new perspectives have enriched our understanding of how migrants' experiences, in the process of migration, are constructed and negotiated. Migrants are no longer treated as a homogeneous entity; instead, they are deconstructed as many social groups with different characteristics, needs, subjectivities and constraints. Research has become more sensitive to multiple realities of their lived experiences and everyday lives. The new perspectives also remind us not to take the migrant "families" for granted. Family is not necessarily a haven for migrants but a site of struggle and contestation (Ku and Pun 2004). Migrant research has become more sensitive to the influence of locality. New research methodologies, such as ethnography and participatory action, and new methods, such as photovoice and community map drawing, have been experimented with in order to engage and empower the migrants. The changing perspectives have brought some impact on social provision and delivery. Mentor systems, using migrants' own social networks to provide assistance to one another, have been introduced in a few NGOs.

This chapter has also argued that the changing perspectives are attributed to the sociopolitical transformation within Hong Kong and the theoretical and methodological development in the West. Structuration theory and social constructionism are two obvious examples that have a far-reaching impact on local migrant studies.

It is necessary to clarify a few points here. The highlight of the three perspectives is intended to draw attention to the different emphasis of the new research focus. This, however, does not mean that they are mutually exclusive, and the boundaries among them are clear-cut. Social capital studies, for example, consider both the role of gender and social networks in access to migrants' citizen rights (Wong 2008). It is also not the intention to create a false impression that the three new perspectives have now got the upper hand while the social adjustment agenda focus on

migrant families and quantitative approach to migrant studies has lost their influence. The fact, however, is not so clear. Ngau Tau Kok Caritas Community Centre (2001) sticks to the information-deficit model and produces booklets about the sources of social services for migrants. Hong Kong Integrated Family Services for New Arrivals Project (2005) still consider the "migrant family" as the focus of their service provision (p. 4). These examples show that the old and new perspectives are constantly competing. It is too early to judge which perspectives are more influential than the others.

There are also a few limitations of this study. A few NGO research studies are not explicit in their research methodologies. Most of the reports are written in Chinese, and there is a risk of "lost in translation". More and more research on Chinese migrants is conducted by documentaries and films. The Radio and Television of Hong Kong has, for instance, made a lot of current affairs programmes on the new arrivals. My study, however, has skipped video analysis because it requires special research training and it can be time-consuming.

Regarding the future direction of the migrant research in Hong Kong, I want to pinpoint four aspects. First of all, there is a lack of longitudinal research (both quantitative and qualitative) on migrants' lived experiences. He (2006) has offered a good example, but the length of his observations only lasted for 12 months. This is obviously inadequate for understanding how time and space affect migrants in the process of adaptation. The research funding bodies are advised to create a favourable environment by offering longer term research contracts, such as what the UK and the EU are implementing. Secondly, while ethnography has become more and more popular in migrant studies, researchers need to expand the sites of investigation. After obtaining consent from migrants, researchers can scrutinise migrants' private and public life and follow them to go back to their hometowns in the mainland. This enables us to observe social interactions with kin and friends and that is useful to analyse the dynamics of the cross-border exchange.

Thirdly, there is an increasing number of migrants from the second generation who are willing to serve their less well-off counterparts in NGOs. They came to Hong Kong for family reunion and have benefited from receiving higher education in Hong Kong. We, however, do not know a great deal about whether these highly educated, second-generation migrants can effectively represent the needs of poor migrants. Lastly, the current debate on gender and social capital tends to sidestep the role of children. This is related to an assumption that children are dependent and passive, and therefore, their agency is neglected. More research is needed to examine their “paradoxical” role—while their presence helps their parents to socialise with others in parks, schools and clan associations, they can have a negative impact on their parents’ social capital by refusing to return to China or participate in public events.

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