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On the Social Integration of Chinese Immigrants in Post-handover Hong Kong: Rethinking the Making of the Hong Kong Person

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Abstract

As China-Hong Kong integration deepens, a local identity asserted to be culturally superior to and exclusive of the mainland Chinese is mobilized in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). This paper contributes to the attendant debates by presenting a unique case of politics of belonging therein, where “cultural” differences are constructed, increasingly so in “ethnic” terms, amid processes of internal migration. I discuss how the hegemonic discourse of local belonging is a corollary of the “neoliberal governmentality” of the city-state. It defines the parameters of social inclusion in terms of labor market integration and in particular contribution to the global economy. The underlying class assumptions are reflected in the exclusion from local belonging of Chinese immigrants, whose long-standing socioeconomic marginalization is conflated with, and glossed over by their constructed cultural inferiority. Such assumptions are also gendered, as Chinese immigrant mothers struggle to participate as worker-citizens in the society and to make claims for their “deservingness” to belong. On this basis, I argue that the “cultural” differences between mainlanders and Hongkongers should be better understood as constituted not by “ethnic” differences but by the way class and gender differentiate access to participation and belonging. Implications for the SAR are discussed.

■ **Key words** : China-Hong Kong relations, Hong Kong identity, Mainland Chinese immigrant women, citizenship, politics of belonging, class and gender

Introduction

With the ascent of China as a global economic power, it is believed that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Hong Kong or SAR

hereafter) can only benefit as its integration with China deepens. To the contrary, a few years from the 20th anniversary of China's resumption of its sovereignty, Hong Kong is mired in what is called the "China-Hong Kong conflict" (*zhong gang mao dun*), of which one of the manifestations is the ever-more flagrant discrimination against mainlanders in the territory, whether they are transient migrants or immigrants. In response, the Chief Executive C. Y. Leung, in a question-and-answer session in the Legislative Council in March, 2015, called for Hongkongers not to "talk about anything that could hurt the harmonious relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China."

This paper contributes to debates about the on-going tension between mainlanders and Hongkongers in the SAR by problematizing the "ethnic" construction of their presumed "cultural" differences. It illuminates how class and gender differentiate economic and social participation, qualify citizenship, constitute the supposed cultural inferiority of Chinese immigrants, and include/exclude different categories of mainlanders in/from local belonging. I first outline how I conceptualize the different dimensions of citizenship and the way they interact and impinge upon social inclusion, as well as the class and gender implications of neoliberalism in this respect. After a brief description of the history and context of China-Hong Kong integration, I revisit the rise of the hegemonic discourse of local belonging in colonial Hong Kong and discuss how its celebration of the self-sufficient and competitive Hong Kong person establishes the normative standards of citizenship and delineates the parameters of social inclusion. This epitomizes a "neoliberal governmentality" (Rose, 1999) inherited and accentuated by the SAR. Under such circumstances, Chinese immigrants, given their long-standing socioeconomic marginalization, are constructed as culturally inferior. At a time when entrepreneurial and professional capitals are actively courted by the SAR, which seeks to maintain its competitiveness in the global economy, the class assumptions inherent in its social integration strategy become more entrenched. Such assumptions are at the same time gendered, I demonstrate how this is so by presenting the narratives of Chinese immigrant

mothers derived from a qualitative study of their involvement in children's education in Hong Kong. Entering the territory for family reunion, the aforementioned immigrant mothers find themselves in structural conditions that delimit their participation in the society as entrepreneurial worker-citizens. They negotiate the boundaries of social membership through their educational involvement, in order that their "deservingness" to belong can be asserted. On this basis, I argue that class and gender differentiate access to participation and belonging, and are constitutive of the increasingly ethnicized "cultural" differences between seemingly homogenous categories of mainlanders and Hongkongers. I remark upon the implications for the social integration of Chinese immigrants before I conclude the paper.

Conceptual Framework

This paper explores the social integration of Chinese immigrants into Hong Kong society, and the politics of belonging therein, primarily from the perspective of citizenship. Here, citizenship is defined as a form of membership in a political and geographical community expressed in different dimensions, pertaining to one's legal status as a citizen; the relationship between individuals and the state (i.e., defined in terms of the rights and obligations of the citizens); different forms of participation in the society; and one's sense of belonging to the society (Bloemraad et al., 2008, pp.154-157). All these dimensions of citizenship interact and bear upon the incorporation of immigrants into receiving societies.

As an ideology and/or a policy strategy, multiculturalism recognizes how cultural inequality vis-à-vis the majority in a society circumscribes the participation of minority groups in the mainstream society and undermines their capacity to act as viable citizens, hence full social members (Kymlicka, 1995, 2001). Championing the accommodation and celebration of diversity, multiculturalism holds out the promise of both formal and substantive equality, i.e., equality of economic, social and political

participation, thus facilitating social integration and social cohesion. However, multiculturalism is challenged by the rise of neoliberalism (see, e.g., Soysal, 2012), as exemplified in policy choices adopted in advanced capitalist economies which nowadays emphasize the deregulation of the market, a smaller government, reduced social spending, and the privatization of public services. Neoliberalism valorizes the self-reliant, self-sufficient citizen equipped with human capital to be invested in the market, as opposed to the emphasis of the postwar welfare state on citizens' rights to a basic standard of living and on public responsibility for their wellbeing (Brodie, 1996, cited in McLaren & Dyck, 2004, p. 42). In this sense, the rise of neoliberalism recalibrates the relationship between the individual and the state. It redefines the foundation of "good" citizenship in terms of the fulfillment of the civic duty to reduce one's burden on the society (Ong, 1996; Soysal, 2012). This is emblematic of the kind of "neoliberal governmentality" (Rose, 1999) that relies on the "self-regulating and enterprising" subject rather than a citizen making claims on the state. From a neoliberalist standpoint, then, policy and programs geared towards substantive equality and social integration are economically inefficient, to the detriment of the global competitiveness of the nation-state.

Set in the context of post-handover Hong Kong where neoliberalism defines the parameters of social inclusion, this paper is concerned with the interactions between three dimensions of citizenship - the relationship, or social contract, between individuals and the state; economic and social participation; and one's sense of belonging to the society. It examines how such interactions impinge upon the social inclusion of Chinese immigrants, in particular Chinese immigrant mothers. This is considering how, in the residual welfare state of the SAR, unpaid reproductive labor needed for the sustenance and renewal of productive labor (Hochschild, 2000) is left primarily to women in the so-called "private" sphere of the home. As Yuval-Davis (1997) points out, this in effect excludes women from full citizenship, given that their unpaid reproductive labor is unlikely to be recognized as contributing to the "public" sphere of the global com-

petitive economy.

Gender is not the only axis of difference that qualifies citizenship. As Bloemraad and colleagues (2008) contend, studying the relationship between immigration and citizenship reveals not only legal borders in operation, but also the construction and maintenance of social boundaries of gender, as well as class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, etc. What this implies is that boundaries of social membership are necessarily fluid and open to negotiation between the individual and the state, in a way shaped by hierarchies of gender, class, etc. (Stasiulis & Bakan, 1997). On this premise, I present the narratives of Chinese immigrant mothers in the latter half of this paper. I look into their negotiation of boundaries of belonging and meanings of citizenship, a process structured by the intersecting conditions of immigration policy, the labor market, and the institutional organization of childcare and schooling (cf. Deeb-Sossa & Mendez, 2008). In doing so, I elucidate how class and gender delimit their economic and social participation, fail them as neoliberal citizens, are constitutive of the constructed cultural inferiority of them as Chinese immigrants, and leave them vulnerable to exclusion from local belonging. On this basis, I underline why it could be problematic to understand the cultural differences and the on-going tension between mainlanders and Hongkongers in ethnic terms, not least when this tends to homogenize the category of “mainlanders” in which structural inequality is glossed over.

Context

Hong Kong has always been a migrant society. British occupation in 1842 was followed by the unrestricted, transient flow of migrants across the China-Hong Kong border until 1949. After the Chinese Communist Party’s establishment of the People’s Republic of China, there had been continual influx of Chinese immigrants into the territory, fleeing political unrest and economic impoverishment, and providing much-need-

ed labor for the ex-colony's industrialization. With the localization of the Chinese population in the territory, by 1971 Chinese immigrants began to be legally defined as distinct from the "Hong Kong belonger" (Ku, 2004). The latter is entitled to the rights to enter the territory and of permanent residency, which is definitive of legal citizenship in the city-state. Full illegalization of border-crossing without one-way permits (OWPs) issued and regulated by the Chinese authorities were in place in 1980. Despite this, mainlanders continued to smuggle or to be imported as labor migrants into the territory in the 1980s and 1990s (Law & Lee, 2006). At the same time, with China's economic reform from 1978 onward, north-bound trans-border population flow provided experience, talent, and investments for the nascent Chinese industrialization and market economy in the 1980s (Lui & Chiu, 2009).

Relative political stability and continued economic growth under post-war colonial governance, as well as the rise of a local sense of belonging from the late 1960s onward, contributed to the increasing cognitive and emotional distance between Hongkongers and China (Mathews et al., 2008). The June 4th Incident in 1989 and the subsequent mass panic about the handover in 1997 helped intensify this. Also, with Hong Kong establishing itself in the "developed" capitalist world, from the 1970s onward Chinese immigrants began to be constructed in cultural, and not only in legal terms, as different from the earlier settlers and their offspring, self-identified as "local" or "native" Hongkongers. Then, with political-ideological distinctions (liberal-capitalist vs authoritarian-communist) intertwined with socioeconomic disparity across the border, mainlanders were seen as a threat to the local economy and social order (Ku, 2004). "New immigrants" (*xin yi min*) became, and is still a pejorative label: being addressed as such is to be ascribed with cultural inferiority in terms of, for instance, one's incompetence in English language and Cantonese (the mother tongue of the locals), as well as one's supposed lack of "taste" and civic-mindedness (e.g., "*they* don't queue" and "*they* spit"). With the rise of China as a global economic power and territory-wide promotion of national identification, Hongkongers appear

to have become more receptive to national symbols and cultural icons (e.g., the national flag, the Great Wall), just as mainlanders begin to espouse the kind of capitalistic values that characterize the ex-colony (Ma & Fung, 2007). Despite this, as Hong Kong's economic integration with China deepens, trans-border flow of people and capital turns south-bound, and the relations between mainlanders and Hongkongers goes south.

On the one hand, the introduction of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) and the Individual Visit Scheme,¹⁾ both launched in 2003, helped rejuvenate the then stagnating local economy by facilitating access to the mainland market and bringing into the territory consumer capital. In the same year, geared towards the maintenance of the global competitiveness of the local economy, the Capital Investment Entrant Scheme (CIES) and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals (ASMTS) were launched to attract the settlement of investment and talent, especially from the mainland. This was followed by the introduction of the point-based Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS) in 2006. On the other hand, the perceived increasing dependence of Hong Kong on mainland capital and markets paralleled mounting grievance of the locals. Certain goods or services, public (e.g., school places) or private (e.g., infant formula) come at a short supply. Consumer prices as well as rental and property prices soar (see, e.g., Wang, 2013; A. Wong, 2012). Communities are demolished or evacuated to accommodate land acquisition and infrastructure projects geared towards regional integration. The perceived distributive injustice appears to have catalyzed protests and campaigns against, for instance, the presence of simplified Chinese characters (adopted in mainland China) in place of traditional Chinese characters (adopted in Hong Kong) in urban space (e.g., street notices, restaurants, hotels), or that of parallel import traders serving the mainland market. Flagrant discrimination is directed against mainlanders in the territory, transient migrants or immigrants alike. Discrimination against mainlanders is not new to the city-state, however, except that until recently,

it has long been considered as unproblematic in the absence of a discourse and a policy of multiculturalism committed to substantive equality. This, as explained as follows, is a product of neoliberal governmentality, which fails to recognize how structural inequality restricts the social integration of minorities.

The Hong Kong Person as the Neoliberal Citizen

As of 2011, 93.6 percent of the 7.1 million population were of Han-Chinese ethnicity (Census and Statistics Department (CSD), 2012a). A “migrant society,” Hong Kong boasted strong multi-ethnic presence in its early colonial days. By the early post-war era, with the influx of immigrants from all over China, it was a Chinese multilingualism and multiculturalism that characterized the local cultural scene (Lim, 2006), until its eclipse by the rise of a local sense of belonging and subsequently that of a hegemonic urban Cantonese-Hong Kong culture in the 1970s (Ibid.). It is premised upon the “Hong Kong experience” of achieving security, control, and affluence via the long route (Lui, 2003). Such experience is characterized by the endeavors of individual families to strategize for self-sufficiency and socioeconomic advancement, and to buffer against adversity in lieu of an institution of social insurance. Such experience should be understood against the postwar context where the colonial government refrained from committing to comprehensive and long-term social policy (notwithstanding the social reform under Sir MacLehose’s reign) and derived its legitimacy primarily from the relative political stability and sustained economic growth of the city-state (Goodstadt, 2013; Scott, 1989). In this sense, the celebration of an individualist orientation, flexibility, and industriousness as the distinctive traits of the Hong Kong person in the hegemonic discourse of local belonging is arguably a function of the neoliberal governmentality of the colonial state: That is, the Hong Kong person quintessentially embodies the self-reliant, self-sufficient “good” neoliberal citizen who makes minimal claims on the society.

In view of the above, failure to socio-economically advance was, and is still, widely regarded as an issue of unequal rewards for unequal ability and effort in a land of “openness and opportunities,” rather than one of social injustice (T. Wong, 1995). Such a social ideology, in turn, shields the government against pressure for social redistribution. To address structural inequality that obstructs the social integration of minorities is rendered a non-issue. Economic integration is therefore the *de facto* strategy of social integration (Nagy, 2014, p. 165). This explains why discrimination against Chinese immigrants, which as shown in the next section impedes their socioeconomic advancement and inclusion in local belonging, has been considered unproblematic until recently.

With the popularization of a human rights discourse that followed the June 4th Incident in 1989, the Equal Opportunities Commission was established in 1995 to help redress inequality of participation in the public sphere as a result of discrimination against sex, disability, and family status. The Racial Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) was not put in place until 2009. Nonetheless, it excludes from its protection Chinese immigrants, except for those from non-Han Chinese backgrounds, owing to the former’s assumed shared Han-Chinese ethnicity and shared language with the locals (Lo, 2007, p. 438). A paradoxical situation thus ensues: compared with ethnic minorities such as foreign domestic workers and South Asians, Chinese immigrants are advantaged in terms of their eligibility for permanent residency, access to labor rights (e.g., minimum wage), or their children’s learning and achievement in Chinese language in local schooling. However, this seeming racial privilege in citizenship entitlements does not translate into protection from discrimination against their alleged cultural inferiority vis-à-vis the locals.

From the perspective of multiculturalism, the Equal Opportunities Commission’s intention to revise the RDO to cover mainlanders under its protection in 2014 promises the rectification of how discrimination against Chinese immigrants compromises their integration into Hong Kong society. Yet, the focus on combatting discrimination, as in the Chief Executive’s call for “harmony,” risks sidestepping the class and gender

assumptions inherent in the SAR's social integration strategy. Put in another way, the constructed cultural inferiority of Chinese immigrants, which explains why they are discriminated against, should be better understood as a consequence of structural inequality rather than cultural differences. This is explained in the following two sections. I first revisit the rise of the hegemonic discourse of Hong Kong identity and highlight the way its class assumptions underpin local politics of belonging, and then present the narratives of Chinese immigrant mothers derived from a qualitative study of their educational involvement. I illustrate how citizenship is negotiated at everyday level, the dynamics of which cannot be reduced to cultural differences and ethnic conflict. I then further underline how class and gender differentiate access to economic and social participation, qualify citizenship, and include/exclude different categories of mainlanders in/from local belonging.

Interrogating the “Cultural” Differences and “Ethnic” Conflict between Mainlanders and Hongkongers

Discrimination against mainlanders in recent years is often directed at their “differences” from Hongkongers in terms of behavior in urban space (e.g., whether they squat, litter, or pull luggage cases en masse; see, e.g., Chin, 2012) or political ideologies (e.g., whether they espouse liberal-democratic values such as the rule of law and freedom of speech). Most relevant to the discussion that follows is the repeated construction of mainlanders as an economic liability that would eat up public resources and sink the city. This is evident in the construction of anchor babies, born in Hong Kong by pregnant mainland women accused of straining local hospital service supply, as “locusts” in 2012. A similar concern about mainlanders seizing public resources and welfare benefits was behind controversies respectively sparked by the Equal Opportunities Commission's decision in 2014 to consult the public about revising the RDO to cover mainlanders under its protection; by the Hong Kong Court

of Final Appeal's (CFA) ruling in 2013 that mainland new arrivals should be eligible for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) after one year of ordinary residence, rather than seven (as stipulated in 2004); and by the government's decision to dispatch HK\$6,000 as a one-off give-away indiscriminately to every Hong Kong permanent resident in 2011. Mainland immigrants in particular repeatedly have their "deservingness" as citizens disputed, a trend that is arguably pioneered by the SAR government in 1999. Then, it triggered a territory-wide panic by estimating an influx of 1.67 million of Chinese immigrants that would presumably follow the CFA's ruling that children born to permanent residents of Hong Kong, including those whose mainland-born parents had not yet attained permanent residency at the time of their birth, should be entitled to the right of abode (E. Chan, 2000). All these represent a throw-back to the popular caricature of the mainland immigrant as a lazy, greedy country-bumpkin, personified by the character Ah Chuan in the TV drama *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* (1979), who is definitive of everything the Hong Kong person is not (Ma, 1999).

The above attests to how mainlanders, in particular mainland immigrants, have been "ethnicized" as the culturally inferior "Other" to the seeming "fictive ethnic unity" of Hongkongers (Lo, 2007, p. 432). This, however, masks the long-standing socioeconomic marginalization of Chinese immigrants in the territory. In the 1980s and the early 1990s, mainlanders continued to be smuggled or were imported into the territory as labor migrants when cross-border socioeconomic disparity remained vast. On top of their ascription with cultural inferiority, as caricatured in the shape of Ah Chuan, these border-crossing mainlanders entered the local labor market disadvantaged in cultural capital when they did not speak English and/or Cantonese and when their professional qualifications and work experience were not recognized (e.g., W. Lee, 2004). Discrimination also stemmed from accusations that they seized job opportunities from the locals (Law & Lee, 2006). All these explain their socioeconomic marginalization and struggles for upward mobility, a trend that would persist into the post-handover era (Chiu et al., 2005). It is no

wonder that, despite their rising level of educational attainment (CSD, 2012b, p. 33), as of 2011 mainland persons having arrived in the territory for less than seven years remained over-represented in lower-paid, lower-status positions as sales and service workers (38.1 percent, compared to 17.5 percent of the whole working population excluding foreign domestic workers) and as workers in elementary occupations (27.3 percent, compared to 13.3 percent of the whole working population excluding foreign domestic workers). They were at the same time under-represented in positions of managers, administrators, professionals and associate professionals (13.3 percent, compared to 39.0 percent of the whole working population excluding foreign domestic workers) (CSD, 2012b). Unsurprisingly, their median monthly income from main employment was only around 60 percent of that of the whole working population (excluding foreign domestic workers) (\$7,500 and \$12,000 respectively; CSD, 2012b). The duration of residence does not seem to make a difference in this regard (CSD, 2012b; Chiu et al., 2005).

The long-standing socioeconomic disadvantage of Chinese immigrants as described above is both a cause and a consequence of their cultural marginalization, and vice versa. It encourages misrepresentations of them as dependents on public assistance, despite confounding statistical evidence (e.g., Lam, 2015; Law & Lee, 2006, pp. 229-230). This, in turn, reinforces the construction of them as culturally-inferior slackers and a liability to the society. Presumably, they are anything but the kind of self-reliant, competitive protagonist celebrated in the hegemonic discourse of Hong Kong identity: one who works hard to take advantage of the supposedly abundant opportunities in the territory en route to socioeconomic advancement. They are failed as “good” neoliberal citizens, hence excluded from local belonging.

As noted earlier, local grievances about perceived distributive injustice mounted amid the influx of capital from the north. Resentful sentiments are mobilized in the civil society against the transient consumers and the privileged few who commit their entrepreneurial investment or talent to the local economy. Unfortunately, this appears to have diverted

public attention further away from the socioeconomic disadvantage of a much larger population of Chinese immigrants who continue to be unfavorably evaluated against the normative standards of citizenship as defined by the Hong Kong person. This suggests that the society remains blinded to the fact that the industrious, self-sufficient, and competitive Hong Kong person is very much a hero who found oneself at the right time in the right place (Lui, 2003): In the 1950s and 1960s, it was the rapidly industrializing economy benefitting from cheap labor from China and favorable conditions in the international economy. From the late 1960s onward, it was the rise of the service economy, which offered “expanded room at the top” of the occupational and social hierarchy (Wong & Lui, 1992). That was the same time when the hero must transcend class barriers in achieving social mobility, while many others from equally humble backgrounds failed (Wong & Lui, 1992; T. Wong, 1995). Put in another way, the eulogized “Hong Kong experience” is a historical construction of a bygone era. It reflects only the perspectives and values of those privileged few who succeeded in that era. It is not the experience of those manufacturing workers displaced in the 1980s and 1990s because of de-industrialization. It is not the experience of those middle classes feeling at risk in the early post-handover period, which witnessed unprecedented economic downturn and property market slump.

The hegemonic discourse of local belonging is, therefore, laden with class assumptions. That it continues to define the parameters of social inclusion is symptomatic of the legacy of colonial governance, one which is characterized by a residual welfare state that counts on the Hong Kong person, the quintessential neoliberal citizen, who does not burden the society. The “new public management” put in place just before the handover in 1997, which introduced comprehensively the market logic into the provision of public services and the welfare sector (Chen & Pun, 2007; Goodstadt, 2013), simply accentuates the neoliberal inclinations of colonial governance. What is notable is how the discourse of the “spirit” of the Hong Kong person has been conveniently mobilized by the SAR government at times of economic adversity in the early 2000s.²⁾

In doing so, the valorization of the “self-regulating and enterprising” citizen who exploits one’s own resourcefulness in navigating global economic vicissitudes is reaffirmed. In this way, the privatization of social services such as education, the continued in-attendance to labor rights, and the emphasis on targeting and selectivity in welfare policy (E. Lee, 2005), to name a few, is rationalized. The latter has been particularly effective in constructing recipients of public assistance as an “underserving” economic liability and in demarcating the boundaries of local belonging. Because of this, socially-disenfranchised self-identified Hongkongers would rather not apply for CSSA in order to differentiate themselves from Chinese immigrants.

Gendering the Neoliberal Citizen, Gendering the Hong Kong Person: What Chinese Immigrant Mothers Tell Us

When parameters of social inclusion are defined in neoliberal terms, social integration hinges upon economic integration. This is reflected in the fact the immigration of mainland Chinese has always been contingent upon their value in the labor market and that it has operated in tandem with, and in the service of local economic development (Law & Lee, 2006). With the SAR’s development into a knowledge economy and the challenges brought about by economic globalization, migrant admission schemes have been tailored for attracting professional and entrepreneurial capitals investible in the global market. According to the Chief Secretary for Administration’s Office (CSAO, 2015), in 2013 there were 8,017 quotas allotted under ASMTTP and 332 under the point-based QMAS (p. 27). At the same time, since its launch in 2003 and up to the end of 2013, the total number of approved CIES applications, whereby applicants are expected to commit to no less than HK\$10 million in permissible investment assets, reached 20,649 (Ibid., p. 28). In contrast, between 2003 and 2013, the number of OWP holders who entered the territory primarily for family reunion, whether they were spouses or children, ranged be-

tween 33,865 and 55,106 per year (Home Affairs Department, 2007, 2012, 2014). This suggests that mainlanders admitted via ASMT, QMAS or CIES remain the privileged few. Yet, the eventual settlement of these migrants is set to be made ever easier (CSAO, 2015, pp. 28-31) in the close future. In the words of Pun and Wu (2004, p. 142), citizenship has turned into a device designed for the SAR's flexible capital accumulation in order that its competitiveness in the global economy can be maintained (cf. Ong, 1996).

For those mainlanders entering the territory without the kind of capital coveted by the SAR, public programs intended to encourage labor market integration teach them to become self-responsible and "contributing" citizens (Newendorp, 2006). This reflects the assumptions of the cultural incompetence of these Chinese immigrants in being self-regulating and enterprising citizens. These are precisely the assumptions that underlie the discrimination against them and undercut their labor market participation, which results in their socioeconomic marginalization and tends towards their exclusion from local belonging. Nonetheless, one should be reminded that immigrant women OWP holders enter into the territory under circumstances different from that of their male counterparts. The construction of cultural inferiority of Chinese immigrants thus shapes participation in the society, capacity to act as citizens, and belongingness in a gender-differentiated manner.

As elaborated as follows, women OWP holders enter into the territory primarily for family reunion. They are expected to be disproportionately burdened by a local welfare regime that looks to the family to cater to the needs and interests of individuals in lieu of the state (Goodstadt, 2013), in a way specific to the gendered context of China-Hong Kong migration. This, together with the structural conditions of the labor market and the institutional organization of childcare and schooling, prevent these Chinese immigrant women from regular participation in paid employment and from being worker-citizens (McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Newendorp, 2010). Likewise, the accumulation and investment of their human capital in the competitive global economy is

restricted. From this perspective, when compared to their male counterparts, these women are likely to find it more difficult to live up to the aspirations of “entrepreneurial citizenship,” and hence be more vulnerable to exclusion from local belonging (Newendorp, 2006). Nevertheless, the accounts of Chinese immigrant mothers as presented below illustrate how they negotiate the boundaries of social membership and endeavor to re-define themselves as “deserving” citizens through their involvement in children’s education. The complex claims-making of these mothers underscores how access to participation in and belonging to Hong Kong society is differentiated along not only class but also gender lines. This explains why it could be unhelpful to understand the barriers to social integration of Chinese immigrants in terms of their cultural differences and ethnic conflict with Hongkongers.

The study

Findings presented below were derived from semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted between 2009 and 2010 with 24 Chinese immigrant mothers with children attending school from primary five to secondary four level (US equivalent: 5th - 9th grade). Mothers were recruited from Parent-Teacher Associations and community organizations. Seventeen came from working class families, whereby class is measured in terms of their and their husbands’ (for married mothers) occupational class. Mothers were aged from their mid-20s to their early 50s, and had settled in Hong Kong from the early 1990s onward; their duration of residence ranged from two to over 20 years.

The interviews were initially designed to investigate mothers’ involvement in children’s education, which is central to the norms and practices of motherhood in Hong Kong (Wong & Chan, 2012). These norms and practices have been promulgated under education reform as key to the nurturance of neoliberal learn-citizens, hence the long-term wellbeing of the society in the globalized, knowledge-based economy. Narratives of immigrant mothers’ educational involvement thus provide the lens through which one could examine how this dimension of mother-

hood offers opportunities for cultural assimilation, as well as access to “deserving” citizenship and local belonging (cf. M. Kim, 2013). Specifically, the meanings made of educational labor were found to be mediated by mothers’ engagement with ideological norms of citizenship and belonging and how this informed their construction of their positioning in Hong Kong society as a mother, an immigrant, and a citizen (cf. McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Newendorp, 2006). Because of the focus on education, findings yielded in the study did not allow the presentation of a complete picture of the whats, whys and hows of mothers’ cross-border migration. This delimits my ability to address issues related to remittances and marital relations.

The findings presented are not intended for the purpose of generalization, but for shedding light on how meanings are made in context. I was fully aware of how my presence as a “native” Hongkonger inquiring of one’s engagement in children’s schooling factored in immigrant mothers’ (re)presentation of themselves during the interviews. I fully acknowledge my privileged perspective in constructing the accounts presented.

The gendered context of cross-border migration

With the increase in cross-border marriages following China’s economic reform and the ensuing increase in cross-border population flow since 1978, the quota of OWPs was lifted from 75 to 150 per day in 1995, primarily granted for the purpose of family reunion. By 2013, cross-border marriages constituted almost 40 percent of locally registered marriages, with around 75 percent of which involving mainland females and male permanent residents in Hong Kong (although the incidence of the reverse is on the rise) (CSAO, 2015). Female spouses are thus over-represented among new arrivals from the mainland (CSD, 2012b).³⁾

In East Asian countries like Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, the immigration of international brides is in part a response to bridal shortage salient among the rural and urban poor (Kim & Oh, 2011). In a similar vein, the influx of mainland wives into the territory is perceived as a result of an expanding pool of relatively socioeconomically-disadvantaged men,

including former immigrants who have been granted permanent residency, who are unfavorably positioned in the marriage market (So, 2003). At the same time, like the aforementioned East Asian countries, the fertility rate in Hong Kong, a rapidly aging society (with 4.7 working age persons per elderly in 2014), has been persistently low (1.1 as of 2013) (CSAO, 2015). This has alarmed concerns about the decline of labor force participation and its ramifications for the society's economic development and competitiveness. The OWP scheme is therefore positioned as the major source of population growth and valuable human resources in the SAR (Ibid. pp. 3-6, pp. 21-23).

Unlike mainland Chinese and international brides respectively married to men in Taiwan and Korea, mainland wives in Hong Kong are entitled to permanent residency upon seven years of ordinary residence and need not qualify for legal citizenship through performing the "authenticity" of their marriages and/or committing to domesticity (e.g., M. Kim, 2013). Yet, commitment to domesticity of newly-arriving Chinese wives is reflected in the Population Census. Over half of the population of female mainland persons having arrived in the territory for less than seven years have been classified as "economically-inactive" home-makers, a trend consistent over the years. This is more or less doubling the percentage share of their male counterparts and that of the entire local female population respectively (CSD, 2012b).

It is common for the immigrant mothers I interviewed to engage in "home-making" beyond their first seven years in the territory. Twenty-one of the 24 mothers were full-time homemakers at the time of the interview.⁴ For instance, Jade had stopped working once married while still on the mainland, citing that her earnings while working on the mainland were negligible when compared to that of her husband. She also believed that she did not "have a very high [standard of] culture. If you work outside, people will look at your experience and appearance and judge if you're a cultured person. I should only learn cooking skills to make food for the kids and that's it."

The above is testament to how cultural marginalization, intertwined

with the disadvantage in the labor market of Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong, is at the same time gendered. This is given that “making food for the kids,” the apparent option outside of paid employment, is more than often expected of women rather than of men. The same can be said of Carmen. Unlike Jade, who felt ashamed of her relatively limited educational experience, Carmen was a trilingual (Putonghua, Cantonese, and Russian) high school graduate. Yet, when expressing her desire to work to her husband, who ran a shipping company, she was mocked with the comment “what kind of job can *you* do?”, and was told that all she had to do was “to manage the home properly.” This does not only show how cultural marginalization is constitutive of immigrant women’s limited labor force participation, but also how gendered assumptions are constitutive of their assumed inferiority.

One would be mistaken to claim that the over-representation of female new arrivals from China among the “economically-inactive” is simply a product of patriarchal ideology and discrimination. This is considering that six mothers in the sample were better-educated than their husbands, and that three were doing regular part-time work to support the family when their husbands were either unemployed or underemployed. Husbands in these families would likely find it more difficult to claim patriarchal privilege on the grounds of their wives’ supposed lower educational standard and that of cross-border socioeconomic differences (cf. W. Wong, 2004). Despite this, it appears that these mothers have been systematically channeled into unpaid reproductive labor in a way shaped by patriarchal structures and institutions external to the family (Ibid.).

Once married, it could take up to ten years before these mothers were granted OWPs. Before OWPs were granted, some of them often traveled cross-border via two-way permits (TWPs) to tend to their children. The hassle and toil that this entailed eventually put them off paid work before settling in the territory. After settling, their commitment to domestic and childcare responsibilities became interlocked with their disadvantage in the labor market, as immigrants but also as women. In 2011, the labor force participation rate of mainland persons having arrived

in Hong Kong for less than seven years was 43.4 percent (female) and 60.3 percent (male) respectively; the corresponding figures for the whole local population read 49.6 percent and 67 percent (excluding foreign domestic workers). This is in part a consequence of Chinese immigrant women's relatively low level of educational attainment (although it has been on the rise) (CSD, 2012b). Yet, across class and educational backgrounds, immigrant mothers reported to have experienced difficulties, or believed that it was difficult to find jobs beyond the "4Cs" occupations--cleaning, catering, caregiving, and cashiering. These were the low-paid, casualized positions which their acquaintances or retraining programs most often directed them to. De-industrialization means those who used to work in factories could not return to their old trade, whereas those who used to be teachers or accountants in China did not have their qualifications recognized in the territory.

In view of the above, committing full-time to domesticity and child-care made sense to the mothers. This is not least when considering the severe shortage of public or subsidized childcare services, which is symptomatic of the neglect of care policy in a residual welfare state that sees care as primarily the responsibility of the family (read women). For instance, as the Society for Community Organization (SOCO) reported in 2010, for 300,000 children aged 6-12, there was only a 5,500 quota (and 1,540 for full subsidy) for NGO-provided paid after-school care programs. It is therefore not surprising to see that, of the whole local female population, the labor force participation rate of women with child-caring responsibilities was only 57.8 percent, or 20.9 percentage points lower than that of those without child-caring responsibilities (CSAO, 2015). In addition, help from the extended kin (who were on the mainland) was not always available for immigrant mothers. Furthermore, mothers risked being sued for child neglect or abuse if they left their children under 16 unattended at home while at work.

The above discussion testifies to the way immigration policy, the labor market, and the institutional organization of childcare (and schooling, as made clear below) differentiates access to participation in paid

employment, hence worker-citizenship. This operates along not only class (given that these immigrant mothers did not enter the territory via schemes that target their imputed human capital investible in the global economy), but also gender and cultural (in terms of the constructed cultural inferiority of Chinese immigrants) lines.

Failing to live up to worker-citizenship

When discussing their childbearing and mothering role in Hong Kong, the majority of the mothers bemoaned the “waste” of their talent or credentials, and their failure to “upgrade” themselves. They felt “idle” and “useless.” For Haley, who used to have a relatively developed career in the retail industry, “spending the whole day at home caring for the kids’ meant the family loses financially, because you’ve not made any money at all. Actually it’s not exactly a loss, because you don’t really do anything.”

Pointing out that child-caring yields no monetary value and (therefore) amounts to doing nothing, Haley nailed the poignant fact that these mothers, too aware of their “economic inactivity” as defined in the Census, were unable to establish themselves as *worker-citizens* (Newendorp, 2010). This is despite the engagement of half of the sampled mothers in past or ongoing part-time work, temporary work or outwork (e.g., handicraft, garment-making, etc.). Moreover, to avoid the stigma of prolonged “idleness,” which would be compounded by the stigma associated with single mothers’ presumed welfare dependency, single mothers such as Liz would work even for only a little more than HK\$10 (US\$1.29) per hour, because “[t]he time is there for me to spend and so I will go [to work as a community baby-sitter despite the meagre pay]. It’s not so good for a person not to work for such a long time.”

Doing motherhood: redefining social membership

One should be reminded that working or not was never a straightforward decision to make, for the moral landscape where immigrant mothers

found themselves was much more complex. As Newendorp (2006) shows in her study, Chinese immigrant mothers negotiate their participation in the society as worker-citizens when idealized expectations of their familial commitment remain strongly influential. In a similar vein, the mothers in my study were concerned that they were expected to be worker-citizens, but they were expected to be adequate mothers as well. In fact, those currently or previously working full-time were keenly aware that they, as working mothers, were or had been “different” and “unconventional.” This suggests how paid work was perceived as what detracts from one’s commitment to mothering.

Mothers did not often link their commitment to educational labor to their restricted labor force participation. Yet, unmistakable in their accounts is how children’s schooling structured their daily routine, from homework instruction to interactions with teachers or social workers at school and in community organizations, regardless of their work status. This is despite that more than half of the sampled mothers did not study beyond junior secondary level in China, and that eight of them were less educated than their husbands. In the process, mothers engaged themselves in social networks where they could access information about their children’s school life, school choices, extracurricular activities, and parenting tips, etc. More importantly, mothers, regardless of their class, educational, and urban/rural background, learnt to distance themselves from their upbringing experience in China, whereby their working mothers rarely attended to their studies. These mothers told me how mothers in Hong Kong are expected to be always under pressure: they should teach children to memorize vocabularies and do compositions, pick them the right books, watch English language TV programs with them, and reason and communicate with them. This is what they came to learn about in meetings with teachers or social workers, in seminars, classes or activities that took place in schools, community organizations or even churches, as well as in circles of fellow mothers encountered in these sites.

Across educational backgrounds, these immigrant mothers struggled

in dealing with, for instance, homework in “liberal studies” which asked questions about local geography, or being constantly reminded by their children that their educational knowledge (e.g., English pronunciation, ways of working out math questions) acquired in China was “different” and “wrong,” i.e., inconvertible into cultural capital in the local system. However, mothers gradually came to discern the cultural hierarchy of not only educational knowledge but also that of local norms and practices of motherhood. This is evident in how mothers presented themselves as conversant with these norms and practices during the interviews.

Susie distanced herself from those days when her mother “couldn’t care less” about her studies when describing how she stayed tuned to happenings in the local education system: “Here in Hong Kong we’re talking about speed…if you can’t catch up, things won’t work.”

Yvonne attended as many talks and courses on parenting as possible. She learnt “a lot…while on the mainland, I never knew [my] language and attitudes matter for children [children’s attitudes towards learning and studying].”

Mothers could also be seen mobilizing their local knowledge in marking out the imagined boundary between them - in/of Hong Kong - and their counterparts in China. This is clear in Penny’s comment on her sister in China, who “focuses on making a living only. Two jobs leave her no time for kids. Also, insufficiently educated, she is unable to take care of the kids’ studies.”

Penny’s quote should be understood against the context of urban China where it is common for parents in average families to work full-time to finance children’s education in a highly stratified and competitive system. This contrasts with Hong Kong, where working hard to earn the child’s tuition fee is not necessarily appreciated as a virtuous sacrifice on the mother’s part (C. Wong, 2014).

Notwithstanding the above, immigrant mothers’ educational involvement necessarily subjected them to the scrutiny of those institutional actors who had the power to reaffirm the established boundaries of belonging (cf. Deeb-Sossa & Mendez, 2008). This is exemplified in the con-

frontation of Carmen, whose daughter failed her English dictation, with a school teacher:

[The teacher said], “Why not just take her [Carmen’s daughter] back to mainland China!” ... I told her/him, “You can’t talk to the kid like this. You will scare the kid.” She/He then said to my kid, “It’s useless for you to hold your mum tight! ... I’ve told your father to take you back to mainland China.” ... I did have helped her [the daughter] with revision. ... [but] the teacher kept saying, “Your daughter didn’t do any revision...!” How could I be lying...? ... I am not sure if I am up to what is expected as a mother.

Despite the middle-class background of Carmen’s family in Hong Kong, the teacher could still call upon the cultural cues of educational deficiency to cast Carmen as a suspect mother underserving of entitlements to local schooling for her daughter. The onus was placed on the father to take charge of the underperforming child, but it was Carmen who bore the brunt in having her educational effort denigrated and invalidated.

The scenario presented above suggests that cultural assimilation through motherhood (as expressed in educational involvement) does not always allow the making of claims for social rights and legitimate social membership. Also to be noted is that, when commitment to educational labor entailed the withdrawal from the labor market, mothers were essentially putting at stake their respectability as a (worker-) citizen, as single mother Hazel testified. On the one hand, she was criticized as a slacker by her daughter. On the other hand, she resented herself for failing to produce sufficiently good school achievement in her daughter, which was the reason behind her decision to exit the paid economy. In turn, this was the reason for her daughter’s misrecognition of her as a slacker: “I was so unhappy. Her [The daughter’s] exam results were so poor. I said, ‘This is not worth it.’ Had I been at work, I could at least have made several thousand dollars a month, but with you [the daughter], I can’t earn even a cent.”

Reconstructing citizenship?

The discussion above sheds light on the way Chinese immigrant mothers negotiate the boundaries of membership in Hong Kong society through direct involvement in children's education. This aside, encounters in school and in the community also provided opportunities for them to counter derogatory representations of them as unproductive immigrants and idle mothers. Mothers cited opportunities to *work* (as mothers emphasized) as volunteers, such as reaching out to the needy and teaching them their cookery or handicraft skills. In Pam's words, not only did they learn to speak with "more substance" without "getting it wrong," in the process, they could also access information about opportunities of studying computer literacy, English language, etc., not for children but for themselves. All these in turn equipped mothers with the resources to claim their differences from those mothers who allegedly spent time "gossiping," "shopping," "playing mahjong," or "sleeping." This alludes to their endeavors to assert their "deservingness" as members of the society when their access to worker-citizenship is restricted. In particular, in underscoring how they utilize their skills in volunteering work and accruing cultural capital for themselves, these mothers appropriated the neoliberal discourse of self-help, self-responsibility, and value-adding in re-articulating the terms of their citizenship (cf. McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Newendorp, 2006).

Notwithstanding this, one should be reminded how these Chinese immigrant mothers were at the same time reproducing the same discourse that rationalizes the government's social integration strategy, one which emphasizes "self-responsibility" and "contribution" (Newendorp, 2006). It is the same discourse that valorizes participation in the paid competitive economy and denies the majority of these mothers belongingness as a legitimate member of the mainstream society. The assumptions of Chinese immigrants' cultural inferiority were left unchallenged, so as the exclusion of (women's) unpaid educational (and more generally caregiving) labor from the neoliberal calculus of human capital, productivity, and economic efficiency. This demonstrates how the class and gender

assumptions inherent in the construction of local belonging can be reinforced. This is likely to continue to demarcate citizenship in such a way that inhibits Chinese immigrant mothers' social inclusion. This represents an important mechanism that reproduces the social marginalization of Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong society, one which cannot be addressed and redressed when mainlanders in the territory are understood as a homogeneous ethnic category vis-à-vis the Hongkongers.

Conclusion

Hong Kong has always taken pride in its "economic miracle" and the brand of competitive individualism it exudes. Its hegemonic discourse of local belonging, however, reflects and celebrates the experience of the flexible, industrious, and self-sufficient Hong Kong person that a minimalist colonial government of a bygone era counted on. It is a discourse which encourages the individualization of the consequences of structural inequality and which renders irrelevant any social reform geared towards the substantive equality of minorities. The Hong Kong person, which establishes the normative standards of citizenship and defines the parameters of social inclusion, is thus a product of "a neoliberal governmentality" inherited by the post-handover government. This is reflected in a social integration strategy that hinges upon labor market integration and increasingly entitles citizenship rights on the basis of one's imputed human capital investible in the global economy (Ong, 1996, p. 737). Under such circumstances, mainland Chinese immigrants' long-standing socio-economic marginalization and struggles to participate in the society as entrepreneurial citizens is conflated with their assumed cultural inferiority.

With Chinese immigrants' alleged cultural inferiority increasingly constructed in ethnic terms, the society seems to have remained blinded to the class and gender assumptions inherent in the hegemonic discourse of local belonging and in the SAR's social integration strategy. With respect to this, I present the narratives of Chinese immigrant mothers

who enter the territory for family reunion rather than because they are courted for their entrepreneurial or professional capitals. I point to the way intersecting structural conditions, such as the context of China-Hong Kong migration and the institutional organization of childcare and schooling, impinge upon their participation in paid employment. Despite the pivotal role they play in social reproduction, they are left to valiantly negotiate their legitimacy as members of Hong Kong society through their involvement in children's education when their access to worker-citizenship is denied. These narratives are testament to how access to local belonging is differentiated along class and gender lines, obscured in the construction of mainlanders as a seemingly homogenous ethnic category vis-à-vis Hongkongers.

The on-going tension between mainlanders and Hongkongers represents a unique case of politics of belonging where cultural differences are constructed and reified in processes of internal migration. I elucidate in this paper how class and gender are constitutive of such differences and qualify citizenship, in such a way that includes/excludes different categories of Chinese immigrants in/from local belonging. In doing so, I throw new light on debates about the relations between the seemingly undifferentiated categories of mainlanders and Hongkongers. That is, I locate differences as structured by the class and gender assumptions of the hegemonic discourse of Hong Kong identity and how it dovetails with the neoliberal inclinations of the city-state's governance before and after 1997.

From this perspective, the "ethnic" construction of the conflict between mainlanders and Hongkongers is unlikely to inform effective measures or policies geared towards social cohesion. Calls for "harmony" are likely to encourage the society's continued inattention to the stratification within the population of mainlanders in Hong Kong, rather than social reform that seeks to redress structural inequality and its exclusionary effects in the ostensibly apolitical capitalist utopia. With this in mind, the on-going "ethnic" tension is expected to see no sign of diminishing, and the kind of "harmonious relationship" the Chief Executive clamors for

is unlikely to materialize in the close future.

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- 1) Before this scheme was introduced, one could only travel from mainland China to Hong Kong in group tours or on business visas.
 - 2) In 2002, the then financial secretary Anthony Leung recited the lyrics of the theme song of the TV drama series 'Below the Lion Rock' upon finishing his budget report. The TV drama series, first broadcasted in 1972, was lauded as the definitive representation of the social ethos of Hong Kong society as it entered into its heyday of economic affluence and prosperity. Leung's performance delivered the government's appeal to the locals' spirit of self-reliance at times of welfare retrenchment.
 - 3) The sex ratio of the population of mainland persons having resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years stood at 460 men for every 1,000 women in 2011, compared to 939:1000 of the whole population (CSD, 2012b).
 - 4) While this finding is probably a methodological artefact given the self-selected nature of the sample, this should not detract from the validity of the findings presented as follows, which foregrounds the meanings made by the mothers of their status as home-makers/absent from paid employment.

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