

NEW MOBILITIES IN ASIA



Avital Binah-Pollak

Cross-border Marriages and Mobility

Female Chinese Migrants
and Hong Kong Men

Amsterdam
University
Press

Cross-border Marriages and Mobility

New Mobilities in Asia

In the 21st century, human mobility will increasingly have an Asian face. Migration from, to, and within Asia is not new, but it is undergoing profound transformations. Unskilled labour migration from the Philippines, China, India, Burma, Indonesia, and Central Asia to the West, the Gulf, Russia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand continues apace. Yet industrialization in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and India, the opening of Burma, and urbanization in China is creating massive new flows of internal migration. China is fast becoming a magnet for international migration from Asia and beyond.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	9
Introduction	11
Gender and im/mobility	15
Marriage-related migration	19
Cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men	22
Chapter outline	26
Methodological issues	29
1 The Hong Kong-China Border: A Space of Confinement and Movement	35
The border as a theoretical concept	35
Policy making of distinction between the mainland and Hong Kong	41
Winds of change: Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty	44
The border between Hong Kong and mainland China: A specific type of boundary	50
2 Motivations for Crossing Borders	59
Policy and im/mobility	61
A-lin's narrative	64
Suzhi and im/mobility	66
' <i>In order to move up, you need to move elsewhere</i> ' (Vertovec, 2009: 1)	68
Hong Kong as a desired destination	72
The HKID: The significance of institutional mobility	75
Desire for and consumption of Hong Kong's high 'quality' commodities	80
3 'Same as Before, Living as a House Wife'	89
The metaphysical level: A gendered impact on the gap between the rural and the urban sector	90
The structural level: ' <i>nan zhu wai; nu zhu nei</i> '	95
The individual level: Social gatherings and social relations as empowering strategies	102
The geographic level: Transnational ties	108

4 Hong Kong's Education: A Bridge to the 'First World'	115
The gap between rural and urban education in mainland China	116
Quality (and) education	121
Education and caretaking in everyday life	135
5 New Voices in Hong Kong: Local Identity Formation	147
After the handover: Hong Kong people's (growing) sense of belonging	150
What can 'we' do?	156
Urban Resistance	161
Concluding Thoughts: Home Is not where the Heart Is but where it Wants to Be	167
Inclusion and Exclusion	167
Mobile identities	169
From border to boundary	171
Bibliography	175
Index	191

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1.1 Hong Kong returns to Chinese sovereignty propaganda poster	48
Figure 2.1 <i>Bu pingdeng</i> ('Not equal')	64
Figure 2.2 Shops in Sheung Shui and mainland shoppers	86
Figure 2.3 Mainland traders at the Shenzhen train station selling Hong Kong commodities	87
Figure 4.1 'Clever and pretty, healthy and lovely'	125
Figure 4.2 'Do a Good Job in Family Planning to Promote Economic Development'	126
Figure 4.3 My daughter's English homework at the kindergarten	136
Figure 4.4 My daughter's math homework at the kindergarten. She rarely received more than two stamps	137
Figure 4.5 A spreadsheet provided to the parents about the preparations for mid-term examinations in the kindergarten	138
Figure 5.1 The poster of the Tiananmen demonstrations' outcome in the artists' apartment at Woofar Ten	149
Figure 5.2 'Fighting for freedom', 2013	162

4 Hong Kong's Education: A Bridge to the 'First World'	115
The gap between rural and urban education in mainland China	116
Quality (and) education	121
Education and caretaking in everyday life	135
5 New Voices in Hong Kong: Local Identity Formation	147
After the handover: Hong Kong people's (growing) sense of belonging	150
What can 'we' do?	156
Urban Resistance	161
Concluding Thoughts: Home Is not where the Heart Is but where it Wants to Be	167
Inclusion and Exclusion	167
Mobile identities	169
From border to boundary	171
Bibliography	175
Index	191

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1.1 Hong Kong returns to Chinese sovereignty propaganda poster	48
Figure 2.1 <i>Bu pingdeng</i> ('Not equal')	64
Figure 2.2 Shops in Sheung Shui and mainland shoppers	86
Figure 2.3 Mainland traders at the Shenzhen train station selling Hong Kong commodities	87
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Figure 4.5 A spreadsheet provided to the parents about the preparations for mid-term examinations in the kindergarten	138
Figure 5.1 The poster of the Tiananmen demonstrations' outcome in the artists' apartment at Woofar Ten	149
Figure 5.2 'Fighting for freedom', 2013	162

Table 1	One-Way Permit holders entering Hong Kong by gender (these numbers are comperatives, i.e. the number of males entering for every 1000 women entering)	22
Table 2	Number of marriages with brides from the mainland and grooms from Hong Kong	23

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Introduction

Between 2010 and 2011 I lived with my family in Sheung Shui, a town in the New Territories, Hong Kong, which is approximately a ten-minute train ride from Shenzhen, China. A short time after my five-year-old daughter began to attend a local kindergarten I discovered that most of the other children's mothers were rural mainland Chinese women who had immigrated to Hong Kong after marrying local men. Almost every day, the marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui met for a Cantonese breakfast after bringing their children to kindergarten or school. Following breakfast, they usually spent their mornings together until it was time to pick up the children from the kindergarten and return home. One day I was invited by Wang Jian, a mother from the kindergarten, to join the group for their daily breakfasts. Usually our meetings continued in the afternoons, and nearly three times each week we had dinner together at one of the mothers' homes. The fathers were usually absent from these gatherings; most of them worked long hours and came home late, while others worked night shifts or were employed far from Sheung Shui and only returned home in the weekends.

Since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, the social, political, and economic situation in Hong Kong has changed dramatically. The intensification of cross-border activities and growing political interference from China's central government have resulted in a significant amount of discrimination against mainlanders in Hong Kong. As a result, mainlanders are often labelled as 'outsiders' and 'intruders' in Hong Kong (Yau, 2010). These views have been widely manifested in the media which tend to emphasize a range of negative aspects of mainland China and mainland Chinese immigrants, commuters, and tourists. On 1 February 2012, for example, an advertisement comparing mainland women who cross the border to give birth to locusts was published on the front page of the *Pingguo bao* (*Apple Daily*), a popular local newspaper in Hong Kong (*Pingguo bao*, 2012). That same week, a video of a loud argument between a local passenger and a mainland mother who was giving a snack to her child on the Hong Kong subway train was uploaded to YouTube, attracting more than one million views in only a few days.¹ The video received hundreds of offensive comments, among them 'Mainlanders have no manners', 'they are all farmers', and 'they are not welcome in

¹ Eating and drinking is not allowed on MTR trains or platforms, and there is a HK\$2,000 fine for those who do.

Hong Kong' (Languagelover7, 2012).² In the fall of 2014, Hong Kong people's concerns reached a critical point, and large demonstrations which were later named 'The Umbrella Movement,' took place from 28 September 2014 until 15 December 2014. 'The Umbrella Movement' which will be further discussed in Chapter Five signified Hong Kongers' deep concerns about their city's future. These concerns were in the context of Beijing's interference in Hong Kong's social and political affairs.

Considering young Hong Kongers' growing discontent and as a result the heightened social protests over the past few years, the contemporary Hong Kong context creates significantly more social and political tension than it had earlier. This tension further fuels anti-mainland sentiments among different groups within Hong Kong society, especially the younger generation. A survey conducted in 2017 among secondary school pupils in Hong Kong demonstrated that four out of ten participants (nearly 41 percent) did not think Hong Kong should continue to integrate with the mainland. In fact, the participants attributed the tense relations between mainland China and Hong Kong to Beijing's 'intervention' and 'meddling' (Yeung, 2018). The growing disappointment and alienation and increasing tension between mainland China and Hong Kong have a significant influence on the everyday lives of the mainland marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui, all of whom experienced social marginalization. While at the same time, as a result of the dramatic rise of China as a global power, the marriage migrants have become in recent years less critical of mainland China and more critical of Hong Kong and as a result less 'different' and less marginalized.

What were these women's motivations for leaving mainland China? Why did they marry men from Hong Kong? How does social class matter for understanding the women's motivations for migration as well as their experiences as marriage migrants? How has the increasing political tension between mainland China and Hong Kong influenced the women's experiences? How are they negotiating the social and cultural boundaries they encounter in their everyday lives? How are the growing cross-border interactions influencing Hong Kongers' local identity? What influence do these marriages have on Hong Kong's social and political situation, and what made these changes possible? These questions underlie this book, which

2 In recent years, in reaction to Hong Kong's local population's protest against mainland China, there has also been protests by mainlanders against Hong Kongers. For example, in 2013 after Hong Kong locals named mainlanders 'locusts', a Beijing University professor called Hong Kongers 'dogs' on prime-time television. In my conversations with educated urban mainland Chinese people, they often expressed negativity about Hong Kong, such as claiming that Hong Kong people 'only care about money and that they don't have any *wenhua* ('culture')'.

examines the complexities and consequences of cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men.

This book aims to expand the discussion of cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men by shifting the focus from discussions about the border as a physical barrier to discussions of situations where movement and confinement interact and define each other (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013: 195). In these situations, the Hong Kong-China border is perceived and examined less as a physical barrier and more as a social-political symbol and discursive resource. My first argument in this book is that cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men have a significant influence on the Hong Kong-China border as well as on Hong Kong's society. The family as an institution has long played a major role in Chinese social life, and marriage is recognized not only as an important institution, but also as a space where individuals 'define and cultivate their own virtue' (Alford and Shen, 2004: 236). By examining the women's motivations for migration and lived experiences in relation to the discursive, political, economic, and social circumstances of mainland China and Hong Kong, I demonstrate how their marital practices are causing the expansion of the border and even influencing Hong Kong's social, economic, and political situation. I also discuss what these changes are and what made them possible. The phenomenon of cross-border marriages serves as an example of how different forms of migration and transnational activities can cause the expanding and blurring of physical, social, and political borders. My second argument is that young Hong Kongers' growing discontent and Sheung Shui marriage migrants' changing views of Hong Kong and their recent identification with Hong Kong as a *Chinese* city have created significantly more social and political tension. In this context, young Hong Kongers are searching for different ways to exhibit a unique local identity. Third, I argue that despite China's tremendous economic growth, the women in my study were eager to pursue *their* dream in Hong Kong because of its legacies of the colonial past – the same past that the Communist Party is currently aiming to overcome. Under the 'One Country, Two Systems' principal, Hong Kong continues to have structural and institutional differences from the mainland. As a result, while mainland China's globalized cities fail to provide institutional mobility to their rural migrants, Hong Kong provides the women with the social and institutional mobility they desire. In this sense, Sheung Shui marriage migrants' desire to immigrate to Hong Kong and their perceptions about its advantages are influenced by hegemonic discourses that are based on the structural dichotomy between urban and rural, centre and periphery, and modernity and tradition.

I situate cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men within two main scholarly fields: marriage-related migration and labour migration. 'Marriage-related migration' is regarded as an umbrella term describing migration for the purpose of marriage, to be reunited with a spouse, and any other situation where marriage is a significant factor in the migration process. However, Piper and Roces (2003) have argued that studies should not regard marriage migration and labour migration as two distinct categories, because in many cases women and men can become wives or husbands as a result of labour migration. The marriage migrants I came to know in the border town of Sheung Shui had met their Hong Kong spouses while working as labour migrants in Guangdong Province. They were young rural women who left their homes in their late teens to work in China's developing Special Economic Zones (SEZ). The area's proximity to the Hong Kong-China border was one of the main reasons they were able to meet Hong Kong men, who often travelled to Shenzhen as part of the close economic ties between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta. In other words, they became wives (and marriage migrants) because of their earlier decision to leave their homes and become labour migrants. Therefore, following Piper and Roces' (2003) idea, their marriages to Hong Kong men and immigration to Hong Kong are intertwined with their labour migration narratives.

I borrow Susan Ossman's definition of serial migration to shed light on the importance of the women's paths. Ossman defines 'serial migrants' as people who have immigrated once, and then moved again to a third homeland. In her book Osman argued, 'in our haste to trace the trajectories of goods, people, or ways of life we may fail to perceive that a specific pattern of mobility may be as critical as culture, language or national origin in shaping individual subjects and ways of life' (Ossman, 2013: 1). The women I came to know in Sheung Shui were/are serial migrants who have lived in three different spaces and crossed several borders. In this sense, they are identified by their movement across borders. However, while Ossman emphasizes the path that people have taken regardless of their origin or destination, in this book I emphasize the women's origin and destination, as they both prominent parts of their changing subjectivity. This theoretical framework, which is based on a gendered analysis of mobility processes and considers women's migration paths, lays a theoretical background for understanding the complexity of the phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men.

Gender and im/mobility

Variables such as race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and gender are markers of difference that influence people's motivations and ability to immigrate, as well as their experiences at their new destination. Among these variables, gender is significant for understanding different processes related to mobility. For example, it is often argued that women face more restrictions on mobility, and their travel patterns differ from those of men. Although the numbers of women and men migrants have been similar, until the 1970s studies on migration focused primarily on men, while women were presumed to play a passive role as companions (DeLaet, 1999: 13; Mahler and Pessar, 2003). Since the 1980s, there has been a rise in the number of studies concentrating on the predominance of women in migration trends. These studies have mostly focused on the household and workplace, neglecting the role of border regimes and the role of the state in the gendered lives of migrants more generally (Mahler and Pessar, 2003: 819). The deletion of gender from the social and economic dimensions of migration and globalization processes (e.g. Handlin, 1951; Portes and Bach, 1985; Basch, Glick Schiller and Blanc, 1994; Glick Schiller et al., 1992) created a dichotomy in which the gender analysis of globalization was mapped in such a way that the global came to equal masculine and the local, feminine (Freeman, 2001: 1008).

Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that gender is not simply a variable in the analysis of global phenomena, but rather a set of social relations that organizes migration patterns. This means that beyond documenting or emphasizing the presence of women migrants, there should also be 'an examination of how gender relations [which are exercised in relational and dynamic ways] facilitate or constrain both women's and men's immigration and settlement' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 3). Yet, the attempt to 'compensate' for the absence of women in the study of migration has in most cases amounted to studies 'about migrant women', without any significant changes in favour of a gendered analysis of migration itself (Freeman, 2001; Mahler and Pessar, 2003).

Beginning in the 1990s ethnographic studies have begun to focus on the local context in order to highlight how global processes influence the lives of female migrants. Studies began to focus on labour migration, especially from poor and/or rural areas to large cities (Ong, 1991; Parreñas, 2000; Gaetano and Jacka, 2004; Jacka, 2006); the trafficking of women (Kempadoo, 2001, 2004; Siddharth, 2009); marriage migration (Charsley, 2012; Constable, 2005; Newendorp, 2008); and the commercialization of intimate relations (Constable, 2009; Zheng, 2008). These studies tended to emphasize the local practices of female migrants and contributed to the understanding that

gender and class have a crucial impact on both motivations for migration and the everyday experiences of female migrants.

However, these local analyses of global processes have only partially contributed to the formation of a gendered understanding of migration processes because they continued to portray the local as feminine and as contained within – and thus fundamentally defined by – the global, which is considered masculine. In response, Freeman has called for a different kind of analysis:

What is called for as well, then, is a feminist reconceptualization of globalization whereby local forms of globalization are understood not merely as effects but also as constitutive ingredients in the changing shape of these movements. A feminist reconceptualization of this sort requires a stance toward globalization in which the arrows of change are imagined in more than one direction, and where gender is interrogated not only in the practices of men and women in local sites but also in the ways in which both abstract as well as tangible global movements and processes are ascribed masculine or feminine value. (Freeman 2001: 1013)

Freeman argues that the understanding of migration processes requires the exposure of the interfaces between global forces and processes that take place at the local level. In other words, studies should aim to create a dialectical relationship between concepts that are perceived as dichotomous, such as global/local, masculine/feminine, production/consumption, and the formal/informal sectors of the economy (Freeman 2001: 1009). One example of this new kind of analysis is Nicole Constable's (2009) research on commercialized intimate relationships and mail-order brides, which refers to changes in the patterns of both local and global processes. Constable's study challenges the dichotomies of private/public, intimate/impersonal, emotional/material, love/money, local/global, and culture/nature. Constable argues that the commercialization of sexuality, intimacy, and marriage is not simply one of the consequences of globalization: rather, globalization offers opportunities to define new relationships and redefine spaces that can change and go beyond norms and gender-conventional spaces (Constable, 2009: 58). Such analyses that consider processes that take place at the local level as a part of global phenomena rather than a result of them, contribute to the creation of a more flexible analysis of the relationship between gender and migration (Freeman 2001: 1012).

In the past two decades, the studies that have contributed to a gendered understanding of migration processes have focused primarily on female

labour migration. Since the 1980s, women from developing countries (especially in Asia) have increasingly migrated to developed countries and regions, usually to work in export-processing regions or as domestic workers. This growing pattern of migration has been framed as the 'international division of reproductive labor' (Parreñas, 2000). This division of labour enables global production by providing a cheap and disposable labour force, thus creating 'a gendered and radicalized world order' (Yang and Lu, 2010: 16). The first major theme discussed in studies of female labour migration is the degree in which women can exert agency and their ability to influence their own fate. For example, in her study on Philippine domestic workers in Hong Kong, Constable (2007) shows that, although many of the women experience great difficulties living away from their families and in many cases suffer from poor employment conditions, they are not docile or passive. The women are conscious of their actions, and strive to resist in their own ways and for their own benefits. Aiwah Ong (1991) demonstrates that, although they are regularly exploited by contracting services and factories, Chinese female migrants still experience feelings of personal freedom since they live as single women in dormitories, have more consumer power, and are able to delay marriage. The female migrants' feelings of personal freedom described by Constable (2007) and Ong (1991) are also attested by studies on rural-to-urban female migrants in mainland China (e.g., Gaetano and Jacka, 2004; Jacka, 2006). According to Gaetano and Jacka (2004: 4), the migrants' experiences lead to a feeling of independence and empowerment, especially since they had left the authority of their parents or in-laws behind.

In addition to discussions about the exertion of agency by female labour migrants, studies have also focused on the politics of labour identity. In her study of women factory workers in Shenzhen, Pun Ngai (1999) argues that three major factors influence female migrants' new social identity inside the workplace: the urban/rural dichotomy, regional disparities, and gender inequalities. Based on a study of rural domestic workers in Beijing, Sun (2009) shows that, although most rural migrants leave home to escape their rural identity, their geographical mobility usually does not help them shed rurality. Instead, in their new urban surroundings they become more 'rural' and less 'civilized.' Images of the poor rural migrant are part of a hegemonic discourse based on a structural dichotomy between 'centers and peripheries, knower and known, and the independent and the dependent.' This structurally unequal relationship means that those who migrate to the 'center' from the 'periphery' (for example, less developed provinces) become subalterns in the city, and are almost always considered to have low *suzhi*

(‘quality’)³ (Sun, 2009: 618). Sun further argues that class differences and the rural/urban dichotomy are not sufficient for understanding the low social position of labour migrants, highlighting the migrants’ body as a major site of subordination: ‘The subordination, peripheralization, and exploitation of the rural migrant by her urban employer is a result of the numerous ways in which the migrant body is made to take on a subaltern and outsider status’ (Sun, 2009: 638). This analysis sheds light on important questions I discuss throughout this book: Which social and cultural boundaries did Sheung Shui marriage migrants carry with them after immigrating to Hong Kong? Have these boundaries ‘moved’ with the migrants – does physically crossing the Hong Kong-China border necessarily mean that social and cultural boundaries have been crossed as well, and to what degree?

The transnational turn within migration studies helps shed light on these types of questions. ‘Transnationalism’ is defined as ‘the processes by which migrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement’ (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc Szanton, 1992: 1). In other words, instead of focusing on the integration of female migrants at their destination, more attention is being paid to the women’s feelings of belonging to two or more destinations (Altink and Weedon, 2010). In this sense, the place of origin and the symbolic baggage it carries continue to impact the immigrant’s experiences at their destination. This analysis is highly important for understanding Sheung Shui marriage migrants’ experiences in Hong Kong as well as the marriages’ impact on contemporary Hong Kong’s social, economic, and political situation. First, while Sheung Shui marriage migrants reported that they were eager to shed their ‘rurality’,⁴ they continued to be viewed by many Hong Kongers as ‘mainlanders’ and

3 During the 1980s, the Chinese government attributed China’s failure to modernize to the *suzhi di* (‘low quality’) of the population, especially in rural areas (Anagnost, 2004: 190). As a result, China introduced the policy of ‘Raising the Quality of the Population’ (*tigao renkou suzhi*). The policy’s main aim has been to improve professional skills and academic and educational achievements in order to advance China’s position as an economic power in the global arena and create a strong China in relation to the Western countries. Over the past three decades, the term *suzhi* has become a major component in contemporary China’s governance and society, and it has had a significant influence on rural migrants’ motivations for becoming labour migrants and on rural migrants’ experiences in the city. The term and its implications will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

4 Anagnost (2004) argued that while the middle-class urban family strives hard to build ‘quality’ into their child in order to become a neoliberal subject, rural migrants struggle to reach the city in order to escape rurality (Anagnost, 2004: 192). Similar to China’s labor migrants who move to China’s cities with the hope to increase their ‘*suzhi*,’ Crossing the political border between mainland China and Hong Kong, Sheung Shui marriage migrants hoped to cross the social and cultural borders as well.

were usually placed at the margins of Hong Kong's society. Second, Sheung Shui marriage migrants often described belonging to both mainland China and Hong Kong. The marriage migrants continued to communicate with their mainland Chinese family and friends on daily basis, even after they had received their Hong Kong Identity Card and permanently settled in Hong Kong. Furthermore, even after their permanent immigration to Hong Kong, Shenzhen continued to be a significant part of their journey. Most of the women spent many years living and working in Shenzhen before meeting their spouse, and they considered it a familiar place and often missed it. The close distance between Sheung Shui and Shenzhen enabled them to travel to Shenzhen on regular basis, for shopping, getting a haircut, visiting a favourite restaurant, or meeting friends and relatives. While these transnational ties supported them emotionally, they also enhanced their sense of belonging to the mainland. The fact that they kept a strong attachment to the mainland has caused the blurring of the social, cultural, and political border between mainland China and Hong Kong, eventually challenging the idea of Hong Kong as a separate entity, both in mainland China and in Hong Kong.

Marriage-related migration

In the early 1990s the phenomenon of marriage-related migration was relatively scarce. With the increase of transnational activities, there has been a dramatic rise in transnational and cross-border marriages around the world. In East Asia, for example, the phenomenon rarely existed in the 1990s, but by 2012 foreign brides comprised between 4 and 35 percent of newlyweds in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan (Kawaguchi and Lee, 2012). Migration-related marriages in East and Southeast Asia are usually characterized by three typical features: An exceptional gender disparity as men from wealthier regions tend to marry women from developing or poorer regions, a relatively low socioeconomic status of the local men compared to the local population, and a large age difference between the husband and wife (Constable, 2005; Jones, 2012; Jones and Shen, 2008).

Since the field of marriage-related migration is relatively new, no conclusive conceptual system has yet been developed (Charsley, 2012). These types of marriages are often described as transnational marriages, cross-border marriages, marriage migration, or migration-related marriages. In the volume *Transnationalism Marriage: New Perspectives from Europe and Beyond*, Charsley (2012) emphasizes the importance of establishing a decisive

conceptual system to describe this marriage pattern. For example, she makes a clear distinction between transnational and cross-border marriages. She argues that transnational marriages can be related to any type of marriage that crosses national boundaries, while cross-border marriages are specifically linked to ethnic diversity. In other words, the important distinction that Charsley makes is between inter- and intra-ethnic marriages (2012: 14-15).

Williams (2012) agrees with Charsley (2012) that transnational marriages can involve any type of transnational activity. Yet, she situates cross-border marriages 'on a continuum between those that are firmly transnational and those that are clearly not' (Williams, 2012: 33). As opposed to emphasizing the importance of ethnicity as a central aspect for defining 'marriage-related migration', Williams highlights the lack of formal status or citizenship of one or both partners as an important factor, as well as differences in class, interests, or status (24). Yang and Lu (2010) also argue that the phrase 'cross-border marriage' emphasizes geographical, national, racial, class, gender, and cultural borders. Following Yang and Lu (2010) and Williams (2012), in this book I use the term 'cross-border marriages' to describe marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men. This term highlights the idea that, although both partners share a similar ethnic background, the mainland wives cross political, social, and cultural boundaries.

Scholarly work about migration patterns has mostly emphasized the economic aspects of migration and neglected marriage for, or as a result of, international migration (Kofman, 1999). Studies that do focus on marriage-related migration have tended to emphasize the negative aspects associated with these marriages, such as the relationship between transnational marriages and the trafficking of women and children; sex work; 'Mail-Order Brides'; domestic violence; and convenient or 'fake marriages' for the purpose of obtaining a visa or citizenship. In many cases, marriage and migration within national boundaries is often associated with the victimization and marginalization of women as well (Uberoi and Palriwala, 2008). Uberoi and Palriwala carefully suggest that 'without discounting the ubiquity of the abuses', other aspects of marriage migration should be considered 'beyond "victimization"', and that there should be a 'balanced and context-sensitive consideration of [the] changing dynamics in the nexus of marriage and migration' (2008: 23). They argue that these aspects include a possible change in gender roles within both the new family and the sending society and natal family, economic stability, escape from persecution, and even increased autonomy. In other words, different contexts of transnational activities generate different experiences, and in certain contexts marriage migration can be a means for achieving geographic, social, and economic mobility. A significant

contribution to the study of cross-border marriages is the volume *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia* (Constable, 2005). The studies in the book explore the perspectives, motivations, and experiences of the men and women involved in cross-border marriages, and it views these marriages as a result of both local and global processes. Another significant contribution is its focus on the depiction of women as having an active role, without neglecting their limitations and the 'different degree of agency' they exhibit (ibid.: 3). Constable suggests that, while we are used to thinking about these marriages as upwardly mobile for women, they should instead be viewed as 'paradoxical hypergamy': in most cases the women's economic status improves dramatically after marriage, but their social position in the receiving society and their husband's family is relatively low (ibid.: 10).

In general, gender relations can be labelled, measured, and analysed in diverse ways and at different levels of abstraction. In academic literature, 'gender order', 'gender regime', 'gender culture', and 'gender model' are some of the terms used to describe relationships between men and women (Grimrud, 2011: 3). While these concepts highlight an overall system or power structure, they tend to neglect individual practices (Forsberg and Stenback, 2017). The concept of a 'gender contract' recognizes power relationships in men's and women's everyday practices (Hirdman, 1991). According to Hirdman's analysis, gender contracts function at three levels: the metaphysical, which includes cultural ideas; the structural and institutional, such as in work or politics; and the individual, between men and women in relationships and the domestic sphere (Hirdman, 1991: 78). While previous studies about marriage migration have not emphasized the importance of the gender contract as an organizing concept, the pattern of gender relations which I have identified reveals the 'gender contract' between Sheung Shui marriage migrants and their spouses. As I further discuss in Chapter Three, since these marriages involve mobility, I have added a geographical dimension to this analysis (Valentine, 2007).

In China, marriage-related migration is considered a relatively new phenomenon (Fan and Huang, 1998: 231). Even though statistically marriages with non-mainland Chinese account for no more than one percent of all annual registered marriages in China (National Bureau of Statistics China, 2012; Friedman, 2010: 11), they are important for understanding social and economic processes in contemporary China. These types of marriages include marriage across vast geographical distances within mainland China, such as with a spouse from a distant province (Fan and Huang, 1998; Davin, 2016); marriages between different ethnic groups (Freeman, 2005; Schein, 2005); marriages between mainland wives and western expatriates (Farrer,

2008, 2013); marriages across the Taiwan strait (Friedman, 2010, 2012); and marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men (Choi and Cheung, 2016; Choi and Fong, 2018; Choi, Cheung, and Cheung, 2012; Lau, 2008; Lin and Ma, 2008; Newendorp, 2008, 2010; Ornellas, 2014; So 2003). Since Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, about one third of all marriages registered in Hong Kong have been between mainland women and Hong Kong men. As I demonstrate throughout this book, the high number of cross-border marriages is a result of unique social and political changes on both sides of the border. While I place significant emphasis on the ‘marriage’ aspect of this migration pattern, I also emphasize the unique socio-economic structure and specific context of the border that this phenomenon is a part of.

Cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men

Until the late 1970s, most mainlanders who immigrated to Hong Kong were young single men who entered Hong Kong illegally after escaping the political and social turbulence in China. Since the 1980s, on the other hand, most mainland immigrants to Hong Kong have been women who entered legally through the One-way Permit scheme (OWP) (Ornellas, 2014: 49). Table 1 illustrates that since the mid-1980s the number of mainland men entering Hong Kong has declined and that most OWP holders from mainland China were women who moved to Hong Kong to join their spouse.

Table 1 One-Way Permit holders entering Hong Kong by gender (these numbers are comperatives, i.e. the number of males entering for every 1000 women entering)

	1986	1996	2006	2014
Males	673	493	579	491
Females	1000	1000	1000	1000

Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2015: 26

Table 2 illustrates the number of marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men since 1991. The rise in the number of cross-border marriages since the late 1980s can be attributed to the signing of the Sino-British declaration in 1984 and Hong Kong’s return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2015: 45). The decline

in the number of marriages since 2006 is most probably a result of two major circumstances. First, China's economic development and as a result the general improvement of women's position in society, as well as the increasing educational and employment opportunities available to rural women (Wong, 2016). Second, the increasing political tension between Hong Kong and the mainland has caused growing resentment towards the immigration of mainland Chinese into Hong Kong. Although the total number of cross-border marriages has decreased in recent years, since 2014 their percentage of the total number of marriages registered in Hong Kong has remained steady at around one-third.

Table 2 Number of marriages with brides from the mainland and grooms from Hong Kong

Year	Marriages where grooms are Hong Kong residents and brides are from the Mainland (registered in HK)	Total marriages registered in HK	Percentage of cross-border marriages
1991	590	36126	0.16
1996	2215	35354	6.2
2001	5169	31346	16.5
2002	7724	30439	25.3
2003	10185	33629	30.3
2004	13126	38983	33.6
2005	16775	39882	42
2006	18182	45870	39.6
2007	15978	43265	36.9
2008	14206	42911	33.1
2009	13751	46987	29.2
2010	15400	44944	34.2
2011	16506	49420	33.4
2012	16930	51465	32.9
2013	15737	46587	33.7
2014	15266	47492	32.1
2015	13123	43497	30.1
2016	12303	41608	29.5

Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2018)⁵

5 I chose to show the data from 1991 because then we can see the beginning of the increase in the number of cross-border marriages. Then I chose to show every year since 2001 so that the readers can get a sense of the variations in the number of marriages which took place during the time the book mostly refers to.

Because these marriages comprise such a high percentage of marriages registered in Hong Kong each year, this phenomenon has a tremendous influence on Hong Kong's society. For this reason it has caught the attention of different scholars in recent years. The first theme discussed in these studies on cross-border marriages between mainland China and Hong Kong is the female migrants' everyday experiences in Hong Kong both before and after receiving permanent residency (e.g., Choi and Cheung, 2016; Choi and Fong, 2018; Lau, 2008; Newendorp, 2008, 2010; Ornellas, 2014). Newendorp's study (2008), based on ethnographic work conducted between 2001 and 2002 at a social welfare centre in Kowloon, focuses on the difficulties experienced by marriage migrants while trying to adapt to their new environment in Hong Kong, where they are often treated as 'outsiders'. In a later article based on new interviews with some of the same women conducted a few years later, Newendorp (2010) demonstrated that, as opposed to the somewhat passive description of the migrant women in her previous study (2008), her new findings demonstrate that some of the women had gained positions of responsibility, were taking pleasure in their jobs, and were focusing on their new employment as a positive way to characterize their life experiences in Hong Kong. Newendorp concluded that the women's workplace provided a 'way' into Hong Kong society. More recent studies tend to focus on the influence of increasing anti-China sentiments on marriage migrants' integration into Hong Kong. For example, Wong, Ng and Chou (2017) stress the female migrants' mental health and need for social services. As part of the discussion of marriage migrants' everyday experiences and the integration process, studies also focus on shifts in the identity of female migrants. For example, Lau's (2008) study centred on the different themes and practices that the marriage migrants need to learn to 'acquire' their new identity. Lau maintains that after immigrating to Hong Kong, the women go through a process of losing their 'mainland identity' and gaining a local one.

So (2003) examines the phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men from a different perspective. His main intent is to understand Hong Kong men's motivations for marrying women from across the border. The first reason he has discovered is related to Hong Kong's demographics: statistical data demonstrates that for the past few decades there has been an imbalance in the gender composition of the population of marriageable age in Hong Kong. So argues that as a result of the massive flow of mainland immigrants into Hong Kong during the 1970s the gender ratio increased from 109.2 males per 100 females to 115.8 males per 100 females. He further argues that not only do men outnumber

women, but migrants from the mainland are in a disadvantaged position in Hong Kong and it is easier for them to find wives in the mainland than in Hong Kong (So, 2003: 525).

A second explanation for Hong Kong men's motivation to marry women from across the border is related to the social position of the men (So, 2003). Hong Kong men who marry mainland women are usually working-class. According to So, Hong Kong working-class men find it easier to marry a mainland wife since 'they have much more to offer to rural mainland Chinese women than they can offer to Hong Kong women of similar age and education' (*ibid.*: 524). In addition, Hong Kong men believe that mainland women are 'more stable, less sophisticated, and less picky than Hong Kong women, and thus would give them a greater sense of control and security' (*ibid.*: 525).

While the dramatic disparity in the sex ratio might explain marriages that took place during the 1970s and the early 1980s, they fail to explain why the number of cross-border marriages spiked during the late 1990s after Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty. Based on the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (2012), while an imbalance in the sex composition continued to exist at the end of the twentieth century, it was certainly not as acute as it was during the 1970s and the 1980s. Moreover, like the studies focused mostly on the implications of the marriages on the women's everyday lives and on Hong Kong society, So (2003) did not explore the social, economic, or political context of the mainland Chinese side of the border.

My ethnographic data and its analysis both differ from and mirror the existing scholarship on cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men. While I have adopted some of the concepts which were used in previous studies about mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong in order to examine the everyday experiences of the women, I do not focus on the women's integration process or their desire to integrate *per se*, but rather on their everyday experiences as a strategy to cross borders. I explore how migrant women's lived experiences are interwoven with social class and ethnicity. Further, I focus on the interactions between political, social, and cultural boundaries to provide a more complex understanding of the women's changing subjectivities, the changing nature of the Hong Kong-China border, and the changing nature of Hong Kong itself. Thus, this book explores the social, economic, and political conditions that encouraged the women to leave their rural homes in their late teens, immigrate to one of China's coastal cities to become labour migrant and as a result meet their future spouse and immigrate to Hong Kong. Following Freeman (2001), I

hope to expose the crossing points between the marriage migrants' local practices and the structural conditions, their mobility constraints and opportunities, as well as their actions as (mobile) agents. I focus on both the physical and symbolic journeys of mainland women who marry Hong Kong men and highlight the different meanings that mobility and immobility have in contemporary China and Hong Kong. One of my main goals is to understand the different ways the women negotiate the Hong Kong-China border in their everyday lives. The changing 'nature' of the physical and symbolic border between mainland China and Hong Kong is an important component of this examination.

The phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men raises questions about im/mobility, identity, and belonging. As my fieldwork progressed, my understanding of these concepts changed accordingly. Relativism is often used to reduce or emphasize the importance of specific situations or experiences. The idea of relativism is obviously not new, but it helps raise important questions about our understanding of marriage migrants' motivations and experiences. I started my fieldwork with the idea that Sheung Shui marriage migrants are victims: victims of a structure which drove them to leave their homes at a young age and migrate to a faraway destination; victims of a new society which marginalizes them; victims of a certain type of gender contract which leaves them in the domestic sphere. However, as my ethnographic work progressed these perceptions gradually changed. Throughout this book I describe and discuss these changes and argue that not only are these women not victims, but they have found ways to negotiate the boundaries they encountered. Their immigration to Hong Kong has had a significant part in the changing nature of the Hong Kong-China border and of Hong Kong itself.

Chapter outline

This book is structured to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men mainly from the wives' perspectives. The major principal of the methodology is holism, which is the understanding that all of the properties of a given system cannot be explained or understood by looking at the individual pieces; rather, the individual pieces can only be understood by looking at the whole. In other words, to understand the perspectives of Sheung Shui marriage migrants I pay significant attention to the 'wider world that both impacts upon and transcends the phenomenon' (Horst and Miller, 2013: 18).

The women's journey is situated in a unique social and political context that is influenced by conditions on both sides of the border. The border between mainland China and Hong Kong is treated not merely as a physical border but also as a social and cultural boundary. This kind of analysis recognizes that people and cultures exist on both sides of the border and that the border is constantly negotiated by the people and commodities that cross it.

This introduction has focused on two major theoretical issues: marriage-related migration and the relationship between gender, migration, and im/mobility. Although I regard this migration pattern as 'marriage-related migration', the women's marriages to Hong Kong men are linked to their experiences as labour migrants. By discussing these topics, I create a theoretical ground for presenting my ethnographic data and discussing the motivations and experiences of the women. While the main purpose of this theoretical grounding is to analyse the ethnographic data, one of the book's main goals is to highlight important theoretical issues such as the position of borders within migration studies, the relationship between gender and migration, and the different meanings of im/mobility in contemporary China, Hong Kong, and beyond.

Another important aspect of understanding these marriages is the Hong Kong-China border, which the text moves back and forth across. Chapter One focuses on the unique characteristics of this border, starting with a discussion on the border as a theoretical construct. I then review some of the historical events that have defined the relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland and have influenced and shaped the uniqueness of this border. I explore the physical and symbolic aspects of the border: how it acts as a resource, and how it may constrain the wishes, dreams, and activities of those wishing to cross it.

Chapter Two focuses on the marriage migrants' motivations for crossing the border. I argue that in order to understand the women's motivations for marrying Hong Kong men and immigrating to Hong Kong, their motivations for leaving their homes in China's rural areas should be considered as well. While the women did not consider their marriages a means to a calculated end, the institutional constraints on mobility on the mainland side of the border highlight the effect of the marriages in providing the women with a desired mobility that was out of their reach in mainland China. Unlike the case of rural migrant workers, the women's cross-border marriages enabled them to gain legal status in Hong Kong, which entitled them to social privileges and to 'building quality' into their children. The significance of obtaining a Hong Kong Identity Card is related to how Hong Kong was envisioned by the women before and after crossing the border, as well as to

how 'the other side of the border' was mediated by the Chinese state and other social agents. Chapter 2 also discusses the marriage migrants' views that, although the economic gap between mainland China and Hong Kong has decreased dramatically over the past two decades, many of the cultural and social gaps continue.

Chapter Three closely introduces the group of marriage migrants I came to know in the border town of Sheung Shui. The pattern of gender relations which I have identified reveals the 'gender contract' between Sheung Shui marriage migrants and their spouses. I discuss the three levels in which these gender contracts function: the metaphysical, the structural, and the individual. I begin with the metaphysical level, which includes cultural myths and representations. Then I discuss the structural conditions and emphasize the link between gender, space, and economics. Last, I focus on the individual level and demonstrate how the marriage migrants' everyday experiences in Hong Kong reflect their changing subjectivities. I focus on their social gatherings with other mainland marriage migrants such as joint breakfasts, afternoon gatherings with the children, and playing the Chinese tile game of Mahjong. The chapter reveals that, as opposed to their previous dynamic experiences as labour migrants in Shenzhen, most of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants do not work outside their homes, and their children's schedules are the major anchor of their everyday activities. This social structure leaves them in the home sphere, at the margins of Hong Kong's society. In other words, their place of origin and the symbolic baggage it carries, continues to influence marriage migrants' experiences in Hong Kong.

Chapter Four focuses on the centrality of the children's education in the lives of these mothers, who regard Hong Kong's educational system as a desired destination and a site that will have a significant impact on their children's future. As part of their pursuit of 'higher *suzhi* ("quality")', the mothers dedicated a significant amount of time to their child/ren's schoolwork and other learning activities, and these activities played an important role in their everyday lived experiences.

While Chapters Two, Three, and Four present the women's perspective, Chapter Five focuses on the struggle, disappearance, and reappearance of a Hong Kong local identity vis à vis the growing number of cross-border activities. Since this book focuses on cross-border marriages, it might have been more reasonable to focus on the views that the spouses hold about mainland China. Just as the men were mostly absent from the marriage migrants' lives, however, they were also relatively absent from the field. That being said, when I had the opportunity to interview one of the spouses,

I often heard their discontent with the political and social situation in Hong Kong, and these voices are heard throughout the book. The voices which were very prominent in the field were those of Hong Konger artists and activists, who in most cases perceived the mainlanders as intruders. I present rich data to show that while the Chinese authorities are constantly emphasizing the idea that Hong Kong is an inseparable part of China, young Hong Kongers strive to maintain the border as a rigid divide. In this sense, the actions of the young activists were not and could not be separated from the mainland marriage migrants' everyday lives, even though they belonged to two separate social groups.

My concluding thoughts revolve around three main theoretical implications. First is the complexity of processes of belonging and exclusion in a new destination. On the one hand, Sheung Shui marriage migrants experienced social isolation in their everyday life, which was closely related to Hong Kong people's fear of their city's future. On the other hand, the legal citizenship granted them many of the social benefits that they lacked as rural *hukou* (registration status) holders or rural labour migrants. Furthermore, despite the fact that they are confined by social and cultural boundaries, the marriage migrants also manage to negotiate these obstacles in their everyday lives. Hong Kong's social benefits, especially the education system which allows them to build 'quality' into their children, contribute to their feelings of belonging. Second, I examine the complex and changing meanings of im/mobility as an interpretive construct, and its implications for anthropological studies of migration. Last, I discuss the changing 'nature' of the Hong Kong-China border for the migrant women, their children, and for Hong Kong people more generally.

Methodological issues

Like other anthropological studies, this study began when I realized that the phenomenon of cross-border marriages between Hong Kong men and mainland women was a manifestation of unique socio-political circumstances, and became eager to learn more about it. After my daughter began to attend a local kindergarten in Sheung Shui, I was invited to have breakfast with several mainland marriage migrants whose children attended the same kindergarten. I quickly realized that Sheung Shui was in fact a fascinating site for an anthropological enquiry. The group I spent most of my mornings with from that first time onwards included six women, but often other marriage migrants who lived nearby also joined. All of the women were

originally from mainland China; they were between the ages of 33-40, had completed nine years of education, were married to a Hong Kong man, and had one or two children. During the period I conducted my first fieldwork, between 2010 and 2011, most of the children were of kindergarten age. In many of the public and private kindergartens in Sheung Shui, a half day of kindergarten lasted between 9 AM and 12 PM, and a full day ended at 5 PM. Mainly due to financial reasons, all but two families sent their children for half days of kindergarten. Most of the mothers' day was dedicated to taking care of their children; only during the few hours of the morning sessions did they have time away from them.

Almost every morning after they brought their child/ren to the kindergarten, the women went to have breakfast together, and it soon became my everyday habit as well. We often went to a traditional Cantonese tea house and spent between one to three hours eating, drinking, and chatting. These breakfasts were an important part of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants' schedule and at the restaurant we usually encountered other groups of mainland marriage migrants who also met there for breakfasts.

As my research progressed it became clear that the particularity of the (border) town of Sheung Shui enabled me to witness the significant changes Hong Kong has undergone in the past few years, and to unravel the complexities of the Hong Kong-China border. The changing 'nature' of Sheung Shui, from a residential space to a research site, brought up a challenge: How would my decision to explore the phenomenon of cross-border marriages influence my relationships with the mainland marriage migrants I had come to know? How could I become an ethnographer? While numerous studies have been written on the meaningful friendships that often emerge during the ethnographic process, and on the complexities that such relationships often bring with them (e.g., Coffey, 2002; Rabinow, 2007[1977]), few studies explore what happens when friends become informants. As opposed to being an outsider researcher who enters the field, Taylor (2011) wrote about being an 'intimate insider' – a situation that 'reshapes the researcher's role in and experiences of her own culture and those within it' (Taylor, 2011: 3). Although I did not know the marriage migrants for a long time before I began my 'official fieldwork', our personal circumstances as migrants, women, and mothers brought us closer and, similar to Taylor (2011), I often felt like an 'intimate insider'. As an ethnographer, it was not an easy task to balance between my personal commitment to the women and my professional interest in their everyday lives as a scholar. Yet, after discussing my planned research with several of the women, I was glad to discover that they were actually quite enthusiastic about the research and were seeking

to contribute. Coffey (1999) has pointed out that friendships should be regarded as a positive contribution to ethnographic studies:

Relationships we create in the field raise our awareness of the ethnographic dichotomies of, for example, involvement versus detachment, stranger versus friend, distance versus intimacy [...] Friendships can help to clarify the inherent tensions of the fieldwork experience and sharpen our abilities for critical reflection [...] They do affect the ethnographer's gaze and it is important that that should be so. (Coffey, 1999: 47, cited in Taylor, 2011: 4)

My attempts to balance between my personal relationships with the marriage migrants and the endeavour to learn as much as possible about their everyday lives is in many ways similar to the dilemma of balancing personal and professional circumstances mentioned in Goldstein-Gidoni's (2012) study about Japanese housewives:

Only in retrospect, and only after allowing myself the removal of what I have come to see as the artificial border between the personal and the professional, could I realize the relevance of my own personal experience as a young mother to my 'professional' interest. (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2012: 21)

My changing role from a friend to an ethnographer also highlights the fact that my preliminary position in the field enabled the birth of this study. Similar to Connie Sutton's (1998) discussion of never choosing motherhood as a topic of research, I often felt that the field 'chose me'. My personal circumstances, mainly the presence of my daughter, was most probably the main reason I was invited to breakfast for the first time. Yet, my daughter not only enabled me to enter the field, but she also played a key role in the study. In retrospect, the marriage migrants' children were a key element in their everyday lived experiences and were very important for understanding their motivations for migrating across the border and settling in Hong Kong permanently. As I further discuss in Chapter 4, Sheung Shui marriage migrants' reaction to my parenting methods was different from the reactions I received from Beijing mothers (Binah-Pollak, 2014). In this sense, their personal parental ambitions were reflected not only in their educational practices but also in their perceptions of my parenting and education methods.

During her fieldwork in extreme conditions of poverty and infant mortality in Brazil, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993) never excluded her daughter from

the research, even at times when it became emotionally difficult for her daughter. Similarly, Poveda (2009) discusses the idea of offspring as research collaborators. While an ethnographer's personal circumstances are often relevant to the professional endeavour, conducting participant observation with children also entails certain problems that are not present in other research settings (Poveda, 2009). Over the course of my fieldwork, I often felt situated between these two descriptions. On the one hand, the presence of my daughter made it much easier to attend the afternoon gatherings, learn about the local kindergarten, and discuss their everyday dilemmas as mothers with the marriage migrants. On the other hand, it was difficult for my daughter to learn Cantonese, make friends, and adjust to Hong Kong's strict education system. Overall, she experienced hardships in Hong Kong, but still continued to be part of the fieldwork and the research.

The phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland Chinese women and Hong Kong men is linked to several different sites. I therefore conducted multi-sited ethnography and followed 'the thread[s] of cultural process' (Marcus, 1995: 97). In a comparative study about pregnancy in Japan and Israel, Ivry visualized pregnant women's experiences 'as a social path, a journey with stations' (Ivry, 2010: 22). Following the ideas of Marcus (1995) and Ivry (2010), I traced the 'route' of the women and 'followed' it. This route included ethnographic work among two major social groups, Sheung Shui families and young Hong Kong activists and artists.

The study is based on ten months of fieldwork conducted in Hong Kong and Shenzhen between 2010 and 2011. In addition, I conducted shorter stretches of fieldwork in 2012 (one month), 2013 (one month), and 2015 (two weeks). The ethnographic work included participant observation and interviews (informal, unstructured, and semi-structured) of families that included a mainland wife, a Hong Kong husband, and one or more children. Most of my informants were families who lived in Sheung Shui, a town in the New Territories, Hong Kong. Studies about cross-border marriages between mainland China and Hong Kong often describe the women as 'mainlanders'. For example, Newendorp (2008, 2010) refers to the women in her study as 'mainland immigrant wives'. As opposed to many of the mainland marriage immigrants who reside in Hong Kong's relatively poor districts, the women I came to know in Sheung Shui did not experience concrete financial difficulties. In this sense, they were not a 'representative group' of 'mainland marriage migrants' in Hong Kong. However, the term 'Sheung Shui marriage migrants' that I use throughout the book challenges 'mainland marriage migrants' as a fixed term, and it situates social class as an important factor in the analysis. Further, the term 'Sheung Shui marriage

migrants' also signifies the importance of legal citizenship, and underlines the women's mobility pattern as a journey. The second part of my fieldwork included participant observation and interviews with young Hong Kong social activists and artists. Through their daily activities, this group of young Hong Kongers strived to preserve the social and cultural boundaries between Hong Kong and mainland China by emphasizing Hong Kong's unique local identity.

Like the journey of the marriage migrants, my ethnographic inquiry did not have a specific starting or ending point. After leaving the field I continued to maintain 'thick' communication with key informants through email, Facebook, and We Chat online chats. The longitudinal nature of my study enabled me to witness changes in the women's everyday practices in Hong Kong, which proved to be very meaningful for my understanding of their experiences as wives, mothers, and migrants. The conversations and interviews with the women were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, and conversations with the social activists and artists were conducted in English. Unless mentioned otherwise, the names used throughout this book are pseudonyms.

1 **The Hong Kong-China Border: A Space of Confinement and Movement**

One of the first themes that emerged during my ethnographic work was the centrality of the Hong Kong-China border in the women's migration narratives and everyday experiences in Hong Kong. Although the women managed to cross the political border between mainland China and Hong Kong and gain legal citizenship in Hong Kong, their geographic move did not affect many of the social and cultural boundaries they 'carried' with them. In this book, the border is not treated as a separate entity or merely as a product of the phenomena that take place at and across it; instead, the border itself is perceived as also producing the social, political and economic context that reconstitutes those phenomena. My main goal in this chapter is to show that the Hong Kong-China border is a very specific type of border and that it is undergoing a process of (re)negotiation.

The border as a theoretical concept

It is commonly agreed that borders have a fundamental impact on the way millions of people live, work, and travel throughout the world. The global increase in the number of borders and the different forces that have created them and nurtured their growth has led scholars from different disciplines to study the phenomena that take place at borders, and to explore the various ways borders help us understand local and global changes (Wilson and Donnan, 2012: 1). Scholarly work about borders is typically divided into two major categories: studies on physical borders, and studies about the border as an image. While studies about the implications of physical and international borders are often situated in the fields of geography and political science, the study of symbolic borders is commonly associated with anthropology and sociology.

The study of symbolic borders only began in the late 1960s, when anthropologists started exploring the concept of ethnic identity. The way groups of people such as the 'Nuer' (Evans-Pritchard, 1940) or the 'Tikopia' (Firth, 1957) were presented in early anthropological studies made it seem as if these were isolated groups that existed in separate worlds (Hannerz, 1997; Donnan and Wilson, 1999). In most cases, the borders themselves were not the main topic of research, but were instead assumed to be defining and

encompassing the cultures and groups which were the central focus of study.⁶ Moreover, the border was usually not considered a variable in the analysis and was not compared to borders elsewhere (Donnan and Wilson, 1999; Wilson and Donnan, 2012: 7-8). The main reason for this was that these studies emphasized local conditions, in keeping with the anthropological tradition of focusing primarily on the local cultural context (Wilson and Donnan, 2012). Fredrick Barth's 1969 edited volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* marked a significant shift from a focus on societies that are encompassed by borders to a focus on the meaning of the borders themselves. Barth acknowledged that, although members of specific ethnic groups cross borders and interact with members of other groups, they still manage to maintain their identity. Barth understood that the physical border itself was not the sole reason for an ethnic group's identity: his main concern was the 'ethnic boundary that defines a group and not the cultural stuff that it encloses' (Barth, 1969: 15).

The endeavour to understand ethnic groups' identities lead to the conception that borders are symbolic as well as physical (Wallman, 1978: 205). In her study of ethnic groups in Britain, Wallman (1978) argued that, since borders are symbolic, they respond to changes between internal and external systems, and that a border's size, quality, and significance will change according to the situation and through time. Wallman maintained that the social border also has two kinds of meanings: a structural one, which she named the 'interface' between two social systems; and the identity line between 'us' and 'them', or the boundary that marks the end of one social system and the beginning of another and can therefore mark members from non-members and non-members from members. In other words, this identity line is the point at which, or the means by which, members of the group can be identified. While the interface marks the change, the identity marks the significance given to that change and expresses the participants' relation to it (Wallman, 1978: 206-207).

Following Wallman's idea, Bauman argued in his famous work *Thinking Sociologically* (1990) that, amongst all distinctions in people's relations with others, the distinction between 'us' and 'them' stands out the most. According to Bauman, these two categories signify totally different attitudes between 'emotional attachment and antipathy, trust and suspicion, security and fear, cooperativeness and pugnacity' (Bauman, 1990: 40). Tilly

6 The Diffusionists were an exception, since they were interested in understanding the similarity of certain traits among different cultural groups (Hannerz, 1997; Donnan and Wilson, 1999).

(2004) has also defined social boundaries as the intention of a group to differentiate itself from other groups. According to Tilly, a social boundary is 'any contiguous zone of contrasting density, rapid transition, or separation between internally connected clusters of population and/or activity' (Tilly, 2004: 133). Building on Bauman's argument (1990), Tilly is interested in understanding the reasons for the close connection between who 'we' say we are, and which others we identify as 'not us'.

The preoccupation with social and cultural boundaries has become more apparent since the end of the twentieth century, when studies have increasingly reduced the importance of state borders, suggesting that their status is in decline (O'Dowd, 2010; Bauman, 2011). In *The Condition of Post Modernity*, David Harvey (1990) describes the set of processes, mainly technological innovations, that have caused the cost of and time required for traveling to contract, and as a result have made the world 'smaller'. This approach rests on post-modernist conceptions that time and space are narrowing, that there has been an increase in the number of immigrants around the world, and that social institutions that were previously perceived as superior have lost their power. This idea is also based on the analysis of historical events and processes such as post-colonialism, the fall of the Iron Curtain, the expansion of the European Union, the rise of ethno-national groups, the rise of the neo-liberal economy, new political orders, and new relationships between developing and developed countries. In sum, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the perception that the 'nation-states era' has given way to 'post-nationalism' or a 'world beyond the nation-state' has become dominant within the field of border studies (Vila, 2000; Ohmae, 2001; O'Dowd, 2010; Wilson and Donnan, 2012).

The idea of a world 'without state borders' has resulted in expanding the exploration of the various meanings of social and cultural boundaries. Scholarly work has recruited the border as an image for understanding the outcome of two or more cultures meeting (Hannerz, 1997: 35). In a relatively early study, Renato Rosaldo (1989) reported that his everyday experiences as a migrant did not easily fit the conventional anthropological concept of culture. He argues that borders 'should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that requires investigation' (Rosaldo, 1989: 207-208). The endeavours to understand the influence of borders on the creation of culture has also led scholars to explore borderlands. Kearney (1991), for example, suggests that borderlands are more than a state/state zone where some seek to exercise control and others to evade it. Based on an anthropological study

at the US-Mexico border, Kearney demonstrates that borders challenge the ability of nation states to define the legal and cultural identities of the borderland populations (Kearney, 1991: 70). Alvarez points out that the term 'borderland' refers not only to the region adjacent to a state border, but also to the 'multiple conceptual boundaries involved – the borderlands of social practices and cultural beliefs in a contemporary global context' (1995: 448).

In keeping with these ideas, instead of treating the border as a boundary between 'something' and 'nothing', Hannerz (1997: 538) suggests that people and culture(s) should be recognized as existing on both sides of the border. Following Victor Turner's idea of liminality (1967, 1969, 1974), Hannerz argues that the border area should be viewed as a liminal zone: 'A place where cultures may become conspicuously unpacked: culture + culture rather than culture / culture' (541). In other words, a holistic anthropological approach would not limit the ethnography of state borders to the border area itself, since the border is 'linked to all individuals, groups, and organizations in which work or wish to work in a transnational manner: refugees, immigrants, tourists, international businesses and families' (Hannerz, 1997: 546).

Social scientists' growing occupation with symbolic boundaries and the intensification of movements of people around the world has led Hannerz to raise the question: 'Has this now become a borderless world?' (1997: 537). Yet, Hannerz also argues that not only is it not a borderless world, but people have also become 'more preoccupied with borders than ever'. According to Hannerz, borders are 'something to take into account, to maneuver with actively as people go about their lives; often undoubtedly constraining, but occasionally perhaps even a resource' (327). The preoccupation with symbolic borders has also been criticized by several other scholars, who claim that although state borders have changed, they have not disappeared (Paasi, 1996, 2003). Other scholars, such as Michael Mann (2007), have argued that in recent years the state form of polity is more powerful and intrusive into the lives of citizens than ever before in history. Rosière and Jones (2012: 218) have further claimed that sovereign states have recently been engaged with 'the construction of walls and fences', tightening security and implementing new restrictive immigration laws to preserve state borders, the influence of which should not be overlooked.

The discussion of whether borders are becoming more dominant or are disappearing is a direct result of the assumption that 'the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world' (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002: 302). The limiting of migration studies to mainly

'methodological nationalism' has fundamentally shaped how migration has been perceived and received within the social sciences (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003; Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2011; Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013). One important example is that within migration studies the focus has mostly been on the movements of people who cross political borders – and therefore only those who cross national borders and settle in a new state have been considered 'mobile'. Further, the focus on the tension between borders and movements has also contributed to a tendency to look at either flow or restriction (Hackl et al., 2016).

The idea that the nation-state is the container of major political, economic, and social processes has also influenced scholarly work which focused on how identities have been defined as a result of migration processes. Bauman (2011) has stated that migration patterns have caused modern states to move from the nation-building phase to one of multicultural belonging. Using the migration patterns of wasps as a metaphor, Bauman explained that as a result of the growing global traffic of humans, identity formation should not be understood as fixed or final:

I suggest that 'identities' exist today solely in the process of continuous renegotiation. 'Identity formation', or more correctly its 're-formation', turns into a lifelong task, never complete; at no moment of life is the identity 'final'. There always remains an outstanding task of readjustment, since neither the conditions of life nor the sets of opportunities and the nature of threats ever stop changing. (Bauman, 2011: 431)

In a seminar I taught at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich about the epistemological challenges of contemporary migration research, one of my students presented Zygmunt Bauman's article. After describing the main arguments of the text, the student asked the class to guess which of Bauman's arguments she did not agree with. The other students were confused: Bauman's arguments sounded exactly right; they fit the paradigm they had been studying as anthropology students over the previous few years: that there is a rise in global mobility, that borders are dissolving and that identities are not fixed, but rather are constantly changing. After several suggestions from the class, the student finally explained that she personally did not agree with statements like 'Today's modern states have passed from the nation-building stage into that of multicultural belonging' (Bauman, 2011: 425) and 'frontiers are crossed from both sides' (ibid.: 428). In other words, my student did not agree with the Postmodernist interpretation that 'the world is getting smaller' (O'Dowd, 2010). She explained

that in contemporary Europe nation-states, nationalism, and particularly borders are not only highly relevant for defining people's identity, but also for confining people's mobility. Furthermore, this student argued that nation-states continue to invest significant amounts of resources in building and nurturing a national identity. In fact, this argument is in line with recent events, such as the growing popularity of nationalist right-wing movements in mainstream European politics and discussions about Britain's Brexit. Academic studies have also highlighted the idea that citizenship and belonging have once again become a central element of European states' political agendas (Kofman, 1995; Langenbacher and Schellenberg, 2011; Hosking, 2016).

What convinced Hannerz (1997) and other scholars like Anssi Paasi (1996, 2012) and Michael Mann (2007) that borders continue to be such a significant part of our lives? And what made Bauman (2011) argue that borders have come to exert less influence over people's mobility opportunities? Can both of these positions be right? Are state borders disappearing, or are they becoming more dominant for defining movement? Recent political and social unrest in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond, together with the increase of mobility worldwide, has situated this issue as one of the central topics discussed in the social sciences. However, I would like to turn attention toward a different set of questions – questions that I believe will offer another perspective on the study of the relationship between borders and im/mobility. One of my main concerns is whether scholarly studies should continue to refer to *borders* or the changing nature of *borders*. Should we apply the plural tense to the concept of border? In other words, can or should we generalize our arguments when discussing *borders*? And in what ways do such generalizations influence our understanding of unique social phenomena which take place at *the* (specific) border?

One of my central goals in this book is to demonstrate that the border between Hong Kong and mainland China is of a very specific type, and that the interpretation of whether the position of world borders is enhancing or declining only conceals more than it reveals the understanding of the uniqueness of the Hong Kong-China border. In other words, Bauman (1997) and Hannerz (2011) are probably both right – but they most likely did not refer to the same *border*. In keeping with the idea that studies about borders should be less constrained by disciplinary boundaries, and that the state should be regarded as one of the major players since it has a significant role in culture and identity formation, this book pays attention to both the physical border and the social and cultural boundaries between Hong Kong and mainland China, and to how situations of movement and confinement

define each other. Instead of understanding the changing nature of *borders* in today's world, throughout this book, I explore the unique characteristics of the Hong Kong-China border: the physical and symbolic aspects of the border; its influence on the lives of the people living on both sides; the different ways people negotiate it in their everyday lives; how it acts as a resource; and how the border may constrain the wishes, dreams, and activities of those wishing to cross it. I begin by discussing the important historical events that have defined the relationship between the mainland and Hong Kong and which have influenced and shaped the uniqueness of the Hong Kong-China border.

Policy making of distinction between the mainland and Hong Kong

It is mostly agreed among scholars that Hong Kong has been linked to the mainland for thousands of years (Liu, 1997; Shang, 1999). This consensus relies mainly on archaeological excavations conducted in Hong Kong by Chinese scholars. Mathews, Ma, and Lui mention that there might be reasons to question some of these new assertions of 'Hong Kong's Chineseness' (2008: 22). Nevertheless, Mathews, Ma, and Lui also tend to follow the common claim that Hong Kong has been politically, economically, and socially connected to China for centuries. Before the handover, Hong Kong has continually enjoyed a unique political and geographical relationship with mainland China and with Guangdong Province in particular. There have been strong family and economic ties, and over the years there have been a significant movement of people from mainland China into Hong Kong and vice versa.

In 1839, the First Opium War broke out as a result of China's efforts to suppress the British opium trade. The war resulted in China's quick defeat, and in 1841 China ceded Hong Kong Island to Britain. On 29 August 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing was signed, formally ending the First Opium War. The Convention of Beijing, signed in 1860, ended the Second Opium War and ceded Kowloon, the land forming the peninsula across from Hong Kong Island, from China to Britain. This area then became a part of Hong Kong. In 1898, the Chinese and the British governments signed the Second Convention of Beijing, granting Britain a 99-year lease of the areas surrounding Hong Kong, known as the New Territories.

The terms of these treaties were harsh, and in China they received the name *bu pingdeng tiaoyue* ('unequal treaties'). These treaties demanded a

substantial amount of money as compensation from the Chinese government, the right of extraterritoriality, the opening of designated ports for trade, and the right of foreigners to live in China. The era that followed the Opium Wars and the unequal treaties is called the *Bainian guochi* ('Century of Humiliation') in China – one hundred years marked by the defeat of China by Japanese and Western Imperialism. As a result, since the nineteenth century, anti-Western nationalistic sentiment has been a continuing characteristic of China's political culture and is widely distributed among different levels of society. The embracing of a globalized market economy and the entrance of new ideas and products since the late 1970s has complicated China's view of the West but has not resulted in the abandoning of anti-Western attitudes. In this sense, the 'Century of Humiliation' has been continuously used to serve political ends (Wang, 2012).

In the early days of colonization, Hong Kong's population grew rapidly. As a result of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) breaking out in Southern China, a large number of refugees fled China and Hong Kong's population grew from 23,817 in 1845 to 86,941 by 1859 (Fan, 1974: 1). In the first three decades of the twentieth century Hong Kong's population continued to grow, in large part due to the settlement of new immigrants from the mainland. The Japanese invasion of China in the late 1930s also resulted in a large number of Chinese refugees settling in Hong Kong. An unofficial census carried out in Hong Kong in 1941 estimated that the total population was 1,640,000 – nearly double the total from a decade earlier. However, Japan's occupation of Hong Kong between 1941 and 1945 resulted in large-scale deportations and by the end of World War II, Hong Kong's population was estimated at only 600,000 (Fan, 1974: 2).

After WWII ended and the political turbulence eased, many of the people who had fled Hong Kong during the war returned home. The civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists during the 1940s also resulted in waves of migration into Hong Kong, and by 1949 Hong Kong's population reached more than 1,800,000 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 1969). Mainland immigrants continued to enter Hong Kong, especially in the late 1950 and 1960s as a result of the Great Leap forward (1958-1961) and Cultural Revolution (1966-1976); by 1976 Hong Kong's population had reached 4,402,990 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 1978). Thus the nature of Hong Kong and the composition of its population have been directly influenced by political and social events in both mainland China and Hong Kong itself, turning it into a city characterized by movement and fluidity.

The immigrants who escaped the outcomes of the Communist governments' political campaigns during the 1950s and early 1960s were welcomed into Hong Kong and treated as fellow Chinese, not as 'aliens competing for scarce social resources as they would [be] later' (Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2008: 30). During the 1970s a change in the popular mood in Hong Kong created the perception that Hong Kong was a 'land of opportunity' (Lui and Wong, 1995: 111-127). This perception became stronger as Hong Kong's economy improved in contrast to the economic situation in mainland China. The economic gap, together with the political turmoil in mainland China, helped construct China as 'an alien, backward, and chaotic "other"' (Chan, 2014: 26). These views changed the attitudes of Hong Kongers towards the mainland immigrants who arrived in the following years. The massive flow of immigrants from mainland China during the late 1970s was considered a threat by the colonial government and the local population. Although the local population comprised mainly immigrants and refugees, they were relatively hostile towards the new inhabitants; the mainland Chinese were no longer considered Chinese relatives, but 'strangers to be scorned' (Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2008: 37).⁷

As a result, a more distinctive sense of a local identity emerged in Hong Kong (Ku, 2004). As opposed to the negative image of mainland China, Hong Kong was perceived as a modern and international city (Ma and Fung, 1999; Fung, 2001; Ku, 2004; Chan, 2014), and many 'locals' considered themselves to be those who had worked hard to achieve what Hong Kong had to offer. In sum, since the late 1970s Hong Kong people became very protective of their land and what it is able to offer, and unwilling to share it with new mainland Chinese immigrants. At that same time, the local population began to demand social benefits from the colonial government, leading to further friction over who should be able to enjoy those benefits and who should not (Siu, 1997; Fung, 2001; Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2008). For the first time, Hong Kong people made a distinction between 'us' (*Heunggong yahn*, in Cantonese) and 'them' (i.e., the mainland Chinese).

7 Although the context is inherently different, this dichotomy corresponds to discourses about migration in contemporary Europe. For example, during discussions I conducted with my students at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich about the current situation of migration in Germany, my students often talked about 'good migrants' and 'bad migrants'. 'Good migrants' were considered those who had escaped the civil war in Syria or Iraq and as a result were perceived to have experienced concrete hardships; the 'bad migrants' were perceived as those who view Germany as a land of opportunities and who had arrived in Germany 'to take advantage' of its social and economic resources.

Winds of change: Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty

On 29 March 1979, Hong Kong's Governor, Crawford Murray Maclehoose, travelled to China to study the Chinese government's position on the question of Hong Kong. One of the purposes of the visit was to explore the idea of extending the lease of some areas of the New Territories. After coming to power in 1978, one of Deng Xiaoping's first goals was to regain sovereignty over Hong Kong as a way to overcome China's past humiliations, and so he immediately refused the governor's proposal. However, Deng also recognized that Hong Kong could assist China's development in the areas of finance, technology, and management and that forcing its integration with the mainland would not facilitate China's goal of modernizing. Introducing the 'One Country, Two Systems' model was Deng's way to reduce the fear and insecurity of Hong Kong's business and international community (Vogel, 2011). In a speech during the Hong Kong Governor's trip to Beijing, Deng Xiaoping explained:

Hong Kong's special position can be guaranteed in 1997, no matter how this question is solved. To speak more clearly, Hong Kong can continue to implement its capitalist system for a rather long period from this century to early next century, while we, the mainland, practice socialism. (Hong Kong government, 2012b: 1)

Deng understood that Hong Kong's future prosperity was equally important for China's modernization efforts, and therefore keeping a boundary between the two entities continued to be important for Beijing. The Hong Kong-China border regime was perceived as necessary to maintain the 'One Country, Two Systems' model and to protect Hong Kong's political and legal systems, markets, and demographics.

Between 1982 and 1984 the exact terms of the handover and the future of Hong Kong were negotiated by the Chinese and British governments, with the final agreement signed by Zhao Ziyang and Margaret Thatcher on 19 December 1984 in Beijing. In the Sino-British Joint Declaration, China and Britain reinforced the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle. As part of the agreement, the Chinese Government stated that it had decided to resume the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong (including Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories), and the UK Government declared that it would hand over Hong Kong to the Chinese Government with effect from 1 July 1997. One of the main principles of the agreement was that the socialist system would not be practiced in the Hong Kong Special Administrative

Region, and that Hong Kong's previous capitalist system and way of life would remain unchanged for a period of 50 years, until 2047. The Joint Declaration provided for the stipulation of these policies in the Hong Kong Basic Law (Hong Kong government, 2012b).⁸

Despite Beijing's declarations that Hong Kong would keep its unique status, even before the handover many Hong Kongers believed that a change was inevitable and only a matter of time. In fact, as the date of the expiration of the lease approached, there was plenty of uncertainty over how the Chinese government would act after the handover and concerns about the future of the city rose dramatically. The extreme outcomes of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, less than ten years before the handover was scheduled to take place, caused a great shock around the world, including in Hong Kong, and led many Hong Kongers to lose confidence in the Joint Declaration. Hong Kongers began to question whether Hong Kong's unique lifestyle and their personal freedoms would truly remain protected (Goldammer, 1995: 267).

During the months following the Tiananmen incident, the foreign media published numerous articles describing Hong Kongers' fear of what the future holds, both for themselves and for their city. In an article published in the *New York Times* on 22 October 1997, the Hong Kong-based reporter described her impression of the city:

Since the Beijing massacres on June 4, Hong Kong has become a city frightened of its future and obsessed with one date – July 1, 1997, when Britain is to return its colony to China. The city of almost six million is increasingly torn between those who already have a foreign passport or can obtain one, and the 60 percent or so who cannot afford to leave or are unwanted elsewhere. (Scott, 1989)

The events of June 1989 triggered mass out-migration from Hong Kong, which continued throughout the 1990s. In an interview in the same article, a 45-year-old mainland Chinese immigrant to Hong Kong explained, 'I feel trapped and afraid, I came to Hong Kong to get away from the Communists.

8 The agreement is comprised by the main text and three annexes. The main text is the Joint Declaration of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China. The three annexes are ANNEX I: Elaboration by the Government of the People's Republic of China of its basic policies regarding Hong Kong; ANNEX II: Sino-British Joint Liaison Group; and ANNEX III: Land Leases. A memorandum on Hong Kong residents' travel documents was also endorsed by the two governments (Hong Kong government, 2012b: 14).

And now they are coming. Before, I thought they had changed, but now I see they haven't' (Scott, 1989).

The British government did not guarantee the right of abode for all Hong Kong people with British overseas citizenship, so the United States, Canada, Australia, and Singapore became primary destinations for immigrants from Hong Kong. By 1997, approximately one in ten Hong Kongers had acquired foreign nationality, and more than half a million had fled to other destinations (Goldammer, 1995: 267; Kraar, 1995; Manion, 2004). Class was a major factor in determining who had the resources to immigrate, and most of the people who left Hong Kong were 'the best educated, well trained, and highly skilled' (Skeldon, 1994: 31). Among those who applied for a foreign passport, some considered it an 'insurance' in case the political situation turned out for the worse. Many Hong Kongers did not want to lose their investments in Hong Kong and viewed their new destinations as 'way stations'.⁹ Interestingly, those seeking to leave Hong Kong did not suffer moral condemnations from Hong Kong's local population (Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2008: 44-45).

While the Chinese government had publicly announced that the city would continue to enjoy a high degree of autonomy, new winds began to blow from Beijing as the date of the handover approached. China's attempt to influence the first direct presidential elections in Taiwan in 1996 were interpreted as a red flag in Hong Kong, and Hong Kong residents reported feeling that China was interfering in matters that they believed were their own (Gargan, 1996). On 26 January 1996, The Preparatory Committee for the HKSAR (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), comprised of 150 Members from the Mainland and Hong Kong was established in Beijing. The Preparatory committee's main purpose was choosing the Selection Committee for Forming the First Government of the HKSAR in accordance with the Basic Law. The committee would choose the first Chief Executive and establish the Provisional Legislative Council. The establishment of the Preparatory Committee for the HKSAR meant that the first government of Hong Kong would be appointed, not elected, and it further demonstrated the domination of the Chinese government in Hong Kong affairs. When suggestions that Hong Kong residents will be those to elect the territory's new chief executive rose during the committee's discussions, China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen laid out China's position, not leaving any room for

9 There are no official indications as to how many Hong Kong people have returned to Hong Kong after the handover, since those holding foreign passports can continue living in Hong Kong without formally re-emigrating there.

interpretation: 'To mechanically ape the Western democratic model does not accord with Hong Kong's actual conditions or accommodate the interests of all social strata' (Gargan, 1996). With the establishment of the committee, Hong Kong's transition to Chinese rule entered its final stage (Hong Kong government, 2012a).

Another indication of China's interference in Hong Kong affairs came when Frederick Fung, a Hong Kong member of the Preparatory Committee, was barred from the Provincial Legislature and the selection committee for Hong Kong's new chief executive after voting against the establishment of the Provincial Legislature (Tang, 1997: 161). The main objective of the Chinese representatives in Hong Kong was to ensure that Hong Kong would comply with central instructions after the handover. Four issues were at the centre of the discussions: the autonomy of the new government; the establishment of representative institutions; the preservation of people's rights and liberties; and the continuation of economic prosperity. Despite official promises, the autonomy of the HKSAR and the development of a representative government for it were already contested by China, and China's commitment to securing Hong Kongers' civil rights was regarded as an empty promise (Scott, 1995: 189-190).

A propaganda poster published by the Chinese government on January 1997, a few months before the handover, further illustrates this idea (Figure 1.1). Even though the captions read 'Hong Kong's return, one country – two systems' (*Xianggang huigui, yi guo liang zhi*), most of the images are actually associated with mainland China. Traditional Chinese cultural symbols like China's Great Wall and The Forbidden City are situated at the back of the frame and the largest part of the composition is dedicated to Deng Xiaoping – China's paramount leader and the president of the Chinese Communist Party. Hong Kong Island is also present but is placed in the lower part of the composition and partially covered by a peony, which is often regarded as China's national flower. In other words, Hong Kong is 'swallowed' by the great Chinese nation and its image is marginalized if not completely excluded. The poster does not leave any room for doubt: Hong Kong is presented as an imminent part of China. This propaganda poster is an example of the nationalistic discourse seen in the local media during the period of the handover which worked to incorporate Hong Kong's local identity as subordinate to the national identity (Fung, 2001: 595). As Ian Scott wrote, 'The reality of how power is actually changing hands' should be seen as an indication of the nature of Hong Kong's future (1995: 189).

Figure 1.1 Hong Kong returns to Chinese sovereignty propaganda poster



Chinese posters.net¹⁰

10 The image is part of the Stefan R. Landsberger Collections.

After the handover, Chinese interference in Hong Kong's affairs became a major trigger for resistance on the Hong Kong side of the border. This interference came in different forms which I discuss throughout this book: cross-border marriages, maternity tourism, cross-border consumption, and cross-border schooling. Below I focus on political interventions which fuelled acts of resistance and anti-mainland sentiments among different groups within Hong Kong society, especially amongst the young generation. The first major act of opposition by Hong Kongers after the handover was in response to the release of the 'Proposal to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law Consultation Document' by the HKSAR government on 24 September 2002. Article 23 of Hong Kong's Basic Law states that:

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies.

In a press release, Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa attempted to endorse the necessity of the implementation of the Article and minimize the perception that the PRC was behind the decision:

The fact that this responsibility (that the HKSAR shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any acts which are harmful to national security) has been left to the SAR Government is a manifestation of the trust of the Central Government in the people of Hong Kong. Enacting the legislation under Article 23 is therefore not only a constitutional duty that the HKSAR must fulfil, but also a civic duty of the people of Hong Kong. (Hong Kong Government, 2003)

While the SAR government tried to rationalize the proposal as an act of trust on the part of the Chinese government, they encountered major resistance in Hong Kong. Three months after the initial proposal, on 15 December 2002, about 60,000 people participated in a demonstration against the Article 23 legislation, and by the end of the year, the Hong Kong Government had received a total of 97,097 local submissions opposing the Article's enacting, involving 340,513 signatures. Although several amendments to the bill were proposed, the bill itself was not abolished; as a result, on 1 July 2003 – the anniversary of the return to Chinese sovereignty – more than 500,000 Hong

Kongers marched the streets to protest the National Security (Legislative Provisions) Bill. Because of this public pressure, on 5 September 2003 the Chief Executive finally announced that the National Security Bill would be withdrawn (Lo, 2008; Ma, 2007).¹¹

China's interference in Hong Kong's affairs was not the only change that Hong Kong has experienced since the handover. Since 1997 there has been an increase in cross-border marriages and other interactions, which have had a significant influence on Hong Kong's society. George Simmel has stated that 'the border is not a spatial fact with sociological aspects, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially' (1997: 142). Following this idea, Paasi argues that 'rather than permanent elements, borders are seen as historically contingent institutions that are constituted in and constitutive of the perpetual production and reproduction of territories' (2012: 2304). In other words, borders should not be viewed as separate entities, but as 'components of larger assemblages' (Ibid.). These theoretical conceptions help me situate the Hong Kong-China border as a very specific type of border. One of the main arguments in this book is that the border between Hong Kong and mainland China is currently undergoing a process of negotiation. Following the ideas presented by Simmel (1997) and Paasi (2012), I argue that the (changing) nature of the border is a product of different phenomena that take place at and across the border, while the border itself also simultaneously produces the social, political, and economic context that reconstitutes those same phenomena. Consequently, in this book, the border is treated as a main target of inquiry and its specific characteristics are explored through the discussion of the cross-border marriages and lived experiences of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants. Although the phenomenon of cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men is but one 'component', I argue that it serves as a microcosm of the 'larger assemblage'.

The border between Hong Kong and mainland China: A specific type of boundary

The first unique characteristic of the border between mainland China and Hong Kong is that it is not easily defined as either an international or an internal border. On the one hand, since its return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 Hong Kong is considered a Special Administrative Region of China

11 For a detailed discussion of these events, see Fu, Peterson, and Young 2005.

(HKSAR) and mainlanders who cross the border are basically considered citizens of the same nation-state as the region they travel to. On the other hand, although in recent years social and economic interactions between mainland China and Hong Kong have intensified, since 1997 the border control mechanisms and management of the border more generally continue to operate more as an international border than as an internal border within a state (Cheung, 2002). In addition to Hong Kong's international airport, there are currently seven land control points and four sea control points. The detailed description on the Hong Kong Security Bureau's website further emphasizes the international character of the border:

The land boundary is constantly patrolled by the Hong Kong Police Force to detect illegal immigrants. The 35-km boundary fence erected along the land boundary is equipped with an array of technical aids which enables the Police to maintain vigilant control of the land boundary [...] The Police's enforcement actions at the land boundary are supplemented by land use control. The land adjacent to the boundary has been designated as a Frontier Closed Area and is subject to access and development restrictions. This serves as an effective buffer zone to assist in combating illegal immigration and smuggling. (Hong Kong Security Bureau, 2016)

The complexity of the political nature of the border between Hong Kong and mainland China is also apparent in the different terms that are used to define the border in academic literature. In recent years, studies focused on the changing patterns of the relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China tend to refrain from using the term 'the border between Hong Kong and mainland China', instead using the term 'the border between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta (PRD)' – the region where the Pearl river flows into the South China Sea and which contains, among others, the cities of Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Macau, and Hong Kong. One of the main reasons for this change in terminology is that Hong Kong's socioeconomic interactions with the mainland have been concentrated mainly in the PRD (Yang, 2005). Yang (2005) further claims that as a result of the transformation of the interactions between Hong Kong and the PRD from a market-led to an institutional integration, multilevel governance (MLG) has been created at the Hong Kong-PRD level.

Multilevel Governance (MLG) means that 'decision-making competencies are shared by actors at different levels rather than monopolized by state executives' (Marks et al., 1996: 346, cited in Yang, 2005: 2147). The idea of MLG has been mainly used to explain changes in decision-making policies

in the European Union. These changes have been characterized by the reallocation of authority 'upward, downward, and sideways from the central states' (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 233). In the case of the border between Hong Kong and the PRD, this means that 'decision making in the HK-PRD region has been dispersing across multiple levels, ranging from the central, Guangdong Provincial, and HKSAR, to municipal, city, and county-level governments of the PRD, as well as businesses and residents on both sides of the boundary' (Yang, 2005: 2164).

On the one hand, analyses such as these that move away from 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002: 30) contribute to the understanding of the unique characteristics of the Hong Kong-PRD/China border. On the other hand, treating the border as a separation between Hong Kong and the PRD, as opposed to a separation between Hong Kong and mainland China, implies that the border is more administrative than political. Furthermore, although the main socioeconomic interactions take place between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta (Ma, 2012; Yang, 2005), I argue that putting the spotlight on the PRD instead of the PRC suggests that mainland China is not a major player in 'the large assemblage'. Considering Hong Kong's recent socio-political turmoil, the statements of Chinese leaders including Xi Jinping about Hong Kong's status and the mainland, and my empirical data, I argue that mainland China must be considered a major component in the analysis and understanding of the (changing) nature of the border. For this reason, throughout this book I treat the border as a frontier between Hong Kong and mainland China.

Another unique characteristic of the border relates to the term 'border' itself and its different meanings. Before 1997, the term which was widely used to express the borderline between Hong Kong, then a British colony, and mainland China was *bianjing*, which translates as 'border'. After Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, official documents started using the term *bianjie*, which carries the meaning of 'boundary'. Yang (2005) suggests that *bianjie* carries a less international connotation than *bianjing*. The change from 'border' to 'boundary' also implies that the (political, social, and cultural) 'distance' between Hong Kong and mainland China has decreased. However, referring to the Hong Kong-China border as a boundary reflects only one side of the equation, which I believe is insufficient for understanding the complexity of the realm in which the border is situated.

As I demonstrate throughout this book, the Hong Kong-China border/boundary carries different meanings for the different people who wish to cross, manoeuvre, construct, and deconstruct it. Smart and Smart (2008) have pointed out that for most people borders are still significant obstacles

and that 'a world without borders' is only relevant to a privileged minority. Smart and Smart (2008) suggest that David Harvey's (1990) idea of 'time-space compression' is not sufficient for understanding the barriers presented by contemporary borders. As a complement to 'time-space compression', Smart and Smart (2008) suggest using the term 'time-space punctuation'. Using punctuation as a metaphor allows them to demonstrate that:

The world is punctuated by barriers [...] and that for some people and things, borders act as periods, full stops denying legal entry. For others, they are like semi-colons, requiring visas and work permits. For the global elite, by reason of their citizenship status or their assets, borders are like commas, slightly slowing movement at various checkpoints, particularly if they have access to VIP lanes or private jet facilities at ports of entry. (Smart and Smart, 2008: 175)

Instead of emphasizing 'interconnectedness, neoliberal deregulation and the "shrinking of the world"' (Smart and Smart, 2008: 191), the emphasis is placed on the barriers encountered by those on the move. 'Time-space punctuation' helps highlight the different meanings and implications of the Hong Kong-China border.

Based on Hong Kong's Basic Law, which came into effect on 1 July 1997, people with the right to abode in Hong Kong hold the status of 'Hong Kong permanent residents'. As a legal category, permanent residency basically bears the status of local citizenship, safeguarding one's right to unconditional stay in the territory and freedom from deportation (Ku, 2001). While the border might be a comma for people holding Hong Kong residential status, it acts as a semi-colon and in some cases even as a full stop for many mainland Chinese residents. With regards to Hong Kong permanent residents, the Hong Kong Government's website states that: 'Hong Kong residents enjoy simple immigration clearance with a minimum of documents to be presented' (Hong Kong Government, 2015). In practice, most Hong Kong permanent Identity Card holders above the age of 11 are eligible to use the self-service immigration clearance through e-channels, which indeed serves as a simple 'comma'. The relatively effortless process of swiping the Identity Card at the checkpoint is similar to swiping the Octopus card upon entering or leaving the train stations in Hong Kong. The situation is quite different for mainland Chinese residents.

According to Article 22(4) of the Basic Law of the HKSAR, mainland Chinese residents who wish to enter Hong Kong must apply for approval from the Exit and Entry Administration Offices of the Public Security

Bureau of the Mainland at the place of their household registration. Two types of permits are issued, depending on the type of intended visit. The first type is the One-way Permit (OWP), which is intended for mainlanders who wish to settle in Hong Kong for the purpose of family reunion; in most cases mainland Chinese women apply for this permit after marrying Hong Kong man. The OWP scheme has been governed by the Chinese authorities since 1980, and is justified in the context of the Chinese government's agreed human rights obligations of 'facilitating family reunification at a rate that Hong Kong's economic and social infrastructure can absorb without excessive strain' (Bacon-Shone, Lam, and Yip, 2012: 76-78). Each application for family reunification is assigned a certain number of points based on the family's situation. Over the years, this system has caused long periods of family separation and, in some cases, mainland wives have had to wait up to ten years before receiving the permit to immigrate to Hong Kong permanently. The Chinese government has gradually changed the OWP policy to shorten families' long waiting periods, and by 2009 the waiting time had been reduced to four years.

The second type of permit, 'Exit-entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao' (EEP), also known as the Two-Way Permit (TWP), is intended for individuals who wish to enter Hong Kong for family visits, business, tourism, education, employment, or other reasons. In many cases, obtaining the TWP is a relatively simple procedure and therefore, the border may seem like a semi-comma for those who wish to study or visit relatives in Hong Kong. In other cases, depending on one's area of registration in mainland China, obtaining the TWP might be more complicated. Starting in November 2002, obtaining a TWP allowed mainland spouses to stay in Hong Kong for recurring 90-day intervals during the long wait for the OWP (Ornellas, 2014: 76-78).

The Hong Kong-China border regime is used to regulate the number of people who cross it, acting as a comma for Hong Kong citizens and as a semi-comma, or full stop for mainlanders, depending not only on the purpose of their visit, but also on their social position and gender. This is especially apparent in the case of pregnant mainland women who wish to cross the border to give birth in Hong Kong. Since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty there has been a constant flow of mainland Chinese women whose spouses are not Hong Kong Permanent Residents who cross the border to give birth in Hong Kong. In 2001 the Court of Final Appeal declared that babies born in Hong Kong to Chinese nationals have the right of abode in Hong Kong. As a result, the number of babies born to parents who are not Hong Kong permanent residents has drastically increased, from

620 in 2001 to 35,736 in 2011 – more than a third of all babies born in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2015).

The increase in the number of mainland Chinese women who cross the border to give birth is a well-known phenomenon in the public discourse in Hong Kong, and has been drawing a significant amount of attention. The Secretary for Food and Health Dr. York Chow Yat-ngok has expressed deep concern at the rising number of babies born in Hong Kong to mainland mothers. According to Dr. Chow, 'It really puts pressure on our obstetrics services and neonatal intensive care units, and maybe even the pediatrics services, and we need to address the issue in respect to patients' safety and in the interests of local expectant mothers' (Lee, 2011a). As a result, on 9 April 2011, Hong Kong's government decided to ban mainland women from making new delivery bookings in 2011 (Ibid). However, only few days later, on 15 April 2011, three major public hospitals in Hong Kong decided to continue letting mainland women make bookings (Lee, 2011b). Eventually, due to massive public pressure, in 2013, Hong Kong's government implemented a zero-quota policy, which stated that mainland pregnant women whose spouses are not Hong Kong residents would not be allowed to reserve hospital beds for delivery. As a result, the number of births has dropped considerably, to 790 in 2013, 823 in 2014, 775 in 2015, and 606 in 2016 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2017). To avoid 'gate crashing' local hospitals, Hong Kong's government requires pregnant mainland women to provide guarantees when crossing the border:

If you are a pregnant Mainland resident and are at an advanced stage of pregnancy – seven months (28 weeks) or above – and are travelling to Hong Kong to give birth you must also produce a booking confirmation certificate issued by a Hong Kong hospital (not an individual doctor) for admission to the hospital for delivery. Whether you are at an advanced stage of pregnancy will be judged by the relevant staff; you can provide documentary proof such as doctors' medical examination reports for reference. If the aim of your visit is not to give birth in Hong Kong, you must provide sufficient proof. (Hong Kong government, 2015)

As a result of the zero-quota policy mainland women face more restrictions on their mobility, and their travel patterns differ from those of mainland men. This is true not only for pregnant women who cross the border, but also for women who are in some cases mistakenly identified by the Hong Kong immigration authorities as pregnant. In the summer of 2017, I witnessed a Hong Kong immigration officer approaching a group of young mainland

women who were on their way to the immigration checkpoint. One of the mainland women wore her backpack on her front, apparently for safety reasons. However, the immigration officer asked her to lift her backpack and show her belly. The woman seemed surprised but followed the officer's instruction. After the immigration officer realized the mainland woman was not pregnant, she let her pass.

The limitations imposed on pregnant mainland women and the long waits for the OWP are viewed not only as physical obstacles which prevent mainlanders from arriving in Hong Kong, but also as cultural and social divides which result in the exclusion of mainlanders, who are often perceived as foreigners, and in many cases also as intruders, in Hong Kong. The treatment of mainlanders as outsiders was also manifested in Hong Kong's 2007 Hospital Authority guidelines. On the main counter of a maternity clinic I visited in Shatin, an area in the Northern Territories, I found brochures with the title *fei bendi yunfu* ('Non-local pregnant women'). The brochure's main aim was to provide information for 'non-local women' about the new guidelines for giving birth in Hong Kong. The guidelines for 'non-local women' were written in simplified Chinese – meaning that the 'non-local' women the brochure referred to are from mainland China. Among other things, the brochure explained that pregnant women who want to deliver in Hong Kong need to receive a prenatal examination in a public or private hospital in Hong Kong and make an advanced payment of 39,000 Hong Kong dollars to get a confirmation certificate. Women who did not go through a prenatal examination would need to pay 48,000 Hong Kong dollars. In this way, mainland women who perceive the border as a resource are faced with border regime regulations that turn the border into a barrier. The border differentiates, sorts, and ranks between those who will be excluded and those who will be included (De Genova, 2013: 1188).

Gender functions as an important factor for im/mobility in other contexts as well, especially in destinations that provide automatic citizenship for new-born babies. The following excerpt from the US Customs and Border Protection website provides another example of how women's travel patterns differ from those of men:

Although there are no specific regulations prohibiting pregnant foreign nationals from entering the U.S., entry is allowed or denied at the discretion of the admitting U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer [...] When determining if you will be allowed to enter the U.S., CBP Officers take into consideration the date your child is due for delivery and the length of time you intend to stay in the U.S. In addition, they want

evidence that you have sufficient medical insurance to cover any medical necessities while you are in the U.S. and that you intend to return home.
(US Department of Homeland Security, 2017)

Mexican nationals who strive to enter the United States so that their child will be entitled to citizenship have been in the centre of social, economic, and political debates in the United States (Ojeda de la Peña, 2007; Su et al., 2014). Delivering an infant in the United States not only grants United States citizenship to the child, but often also provides access to better healthcare for the mother and her new-born. The desire to obtain U.S. citizenship is manifested in the number of women who cross the border in active labour or request emergency medical services (EMS) at the border. Studies indicate that EMS transport of obstetric patients with or without documentation into the United States at ports of entrances (POEs) in Texas and New Mexico occurs regularly, but the frequency is unknown (McDonald et al., 2015; Ojeda de la Peña, 2007).

Immigration from Mexico to the US has once again become a contested topic after May 2018, when Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced a new 'zero tolerance' policy that labels all border crossings as federal crimes. This meant that children and their parents would be separated, rather than kept together in detention centres. As a result, from 19 April to 31 May, about 1995 children were separated from their parents at the US border (Holpuch and Gambino, 2018). After widespread criticism of this immigration policy, president Donald Trump has backed down and signed an executive order that will put a stop to the practice. The change in immigration policy and criticism around it demonstrates how immigration patterns are often connected to gender, and how in some contexts children are viewed as the future of the family and of the nation, and in others as a threat to the nation's future.

Hong Kong and the United States are example for destinations that provide automatic citizenship for new-born babies. The Israeli context, for example, is an interesting case study because it demonstrates the relationship between gender, citizenship, and religion. Studies focusing on labour migration in Israel tend to emphasize the relationship between Israel's migration policy towards labour migrants and 'the state's never-ending anxiety about a changing ethnoscape that may pose a threat to its Jewish character' (Raijman and Kemp, 2016: 10). For example, to prevent labour migrants from establishing permanent residency or starting a family in Israel, migrants are prohibited from entering Israel with their spouse or any other first-degree relative. Furthermore, if a labour migrant gives birth in

Israel she is faced with two options: either to send her child to her country of origin and continue working in Israel until her contract expires, or to raise her child in Israel, but give up her work and residence permit and risk deportation (*ibid.*). The main reason for these unique regulations is Israel's definition as a Jewish state, intended to serve as a home to the Jewish people. In this sense, the uniqueness of the combination of religion and nationalism that 'does not hide behind alleged[ly] neutral legal terms' demonstrates how gender becomes a major factor in questions regarding citizenship and belonging (Hacker, 2009: 118).

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, political and gender-specific processes are tied to the making and remaking of the Hong Kong-China border. One of anthropology's main contributions to the study of borders is its sensitivity to the role of borders in daily life, to people's narratives, and to the ways borders are marked in and through everyday practices (Wilson and Donnan, 2012: 8). In the next chapter I introduce the group of marriage migrants that I came to know in the border town of Sheung Shui and focus on their motivations for leaving mainland China and marrying a man from Hong Kong. Their motivations for crossing the border and gaining Hong Kong citizenship are linked to their goal to cross social and cultural borders. The marriage migrants' motivations for migration shed light on the processes that take place on both sides of the border and which are tied to not only the making and remaking of the border, but also to the making and remaking of Hong Kong.

2 Motivations for Crossing Borders

It is a relatively common notion that journeys have a clear starting and ending point. But when exactly does a journey begin? Consider, for example, a German woman traveling in Thailand. At which point did her journey start? When she bought her flight ticket online? At the airport? When the airplane took off, or only when she landed in Bangkok? Perhaps her journey started when she first decided she wanted to travel to Thailand. It is not easy to put a finger on the exact 'starting point' of any journey – not even for tourism, let alone migration. Where do the marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui come from? Where and when did their journey begin? When did they become migrants? And when (if ever) did they become Hong Kongers? Their journey's starting point is difficult to determine since their decision (like any decision) is not only 'personal' and is always part of a specific and unique context. I do not intend to imply that Sheung Shui marriage migrants did not have an active role in their migration process, or that they were simply 'shaped' by structural conditions. Yet, from an anthropological perspective, a 'personal decision' does not only relate to the individual. Rather, it is a constant negotiation bound to structural constraints and opportunities.¹²

Wang Jian was the first mainland marriage migrant I came to know in Sheung Shui. When we met she was 39 years old, had been married to a Hong Kong man for 13 years, and had a daughter who was four years old. Our daughters were the same age and it was after the girls became friends that we came to know each other as well. Wang Jian had been living in Sheung Shui for a relatively long time and had many mainland marriage migrant friends. Her friends considered her to be knowledgeable about the local living situation, and often consulted her when they needed any kind of assistance. Shortly after Wang Jian and I first met we became close friends, and as the fieldwork progressed she turned out to be one of my key informants. Sitting in her cosy living room in Hong Kong, Wang Jian told me about life in the village where she grew up. She was born in a remote village in Hunan Province, and grew up with seven sisters and a brother.

12 This idea echoes Eva Illouz's argument that even emotions, which are often considered a personal matter, are shaped in the sphere of economic production. For example, in her books *Cold Intimacies* and *Saving the Modern Soul*, Illouz describes the ways twentieth-century culture became 'preoccupied with emotional life – its etiology and morphology – and devised specific techniques – linguistic, scientific, and interactional – to apprehend and manage these emotions' (Illouz, 2007: 6).

When she was a child, her family had very little to eat, and she described their lives as extremely difficult. She told me that because her family was very poor and food was scarce her mother became sick, and her teeth turned black and fell out one after the other. Wang Jian's mother died at a very young age and her older sisters had to take care of the whole family. Wang Jian realized that the village held few opportunities for her and at the age of 22 she left Hunan Province and settled in Shenzhen. As part of China's Open-Door Policy, in the mid-1990s Shenzhen was a growing city that offered young rural migrants many working possibilities. A few years after Wang Jian arrived in Shenzhen, she met her Hong Kong husband, Lau. After they married, Wang Jian had to wait in Shenzhen for seven years before she finally received the OWP and was legally allowed to move to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong Wang Jian lived with her spouse and daughter on the third floor of a high-rise building close to the Sheung Shui city centre. The apartment used to belong to her parents-in-law, who had passed away a few years prior. Wang Jian often complained that the apartments in Hong Kong were very small; she was not pleased with the size of their own apartment, which was about 30 square meters and had barely enough space to fit the necessary furniture. Nevertheless, she thought that Hong Kong was a good place to live, especially for her daughter's future.

All the marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui had met their Hong Kong spouse while working in Guangdong Province. They became wives (and marriage migrants) as a result of their decision to leave their homes and become labour migrants. As serial migrants, the marriage migrants passed through at least three different geographical and social habitats: the village or small town where they grew up in mainland China; the region where they worked as labour migrants; and Sheung Shui in Hong Kong. In this book, these spaces are viewed and analysed as points or locations along a symbolic axis which has many other symbolic and physical stations. This axis does not have a concrete start or end point and is a metaphor for the women's desire to gain upward social, cultural, and geographical mobility. Each of these spaces is characterized by different legal, political, and social systems and thereby have different consequences for the women's social status and mobility opportunities. Therefore, although I regard their migration pattern as 'marriage-related migration', their marriage to a Hong Kong man and immigration to Hong Kong are intertwined with their experiences as labour migrants. In other words, to understand the women's motivations to marry a man from Hong Kong and immigrate there, their motivations for leaving their homes in China's rural areas must also be considered.

Policy and im/mobility

Although it is largely agreed that the Communist party owes its coming to power to the peasants, it was during the Mao era (1949-1976) that the gap between the rural and the urban sector in China deepened dramatically (Whyte, 2010). In 1951 China's Ministry of Public Security set up *hukou*, China's household registration system.¹³ According to this system, every Chinese citizen has a residential status classified into two related sections: the *hukou suozaidi*, or the geographical location in which a person is supposedly residing; and *hukou leibie*, or the type of *hukou* – 'agricultural' or 'non-agricultural'. Until 1998, a child's *hukou* was inherited from their mother (Chan and Zhang, 1999). The main reason was that the Chinese government wanted to limit the number of non-agricultural *hukou* holders, so even children who were born in cities could only inherit their mother's residential status. Since surviving in the city without access to local benefits such as healthcare and education is extremely difficult, over the years this regulation discouraged urban men from marrying rural women (Fan, 2003). After 1998, the Chinese government eased these regulations and allowed the inheritance of the *hukou* of either the father or mother.

At the same time during the 1950s, and as a result of the Communist government's investment in industrialism, many peasants began to move to urban industrial sectors in search of employment. However, from the late 1950s the State began to consider this large migration to be a serious problem. The Communist Party believed that China's industrialization required the separation of rural and urban residents. In this way, the peasants could continue to produce food for those working in industry (Zhang, 2001: 25). The *hukou* system's original aim was to monitor the country's mechanism of population movement; after the end of the Great Leap Forward (1961), however, the system came to be used by the government to limit and control migration, especially from the rural to the urban sector. The reinforcement of the *hukou* system in 1958 eventually turned Chinese peasants into 'birth-ascribed' rural *hukou* holders; as a result, peasants were 'anchored' in the countryside for decades with virtually no ability to move. Studies have compared the *hukou* system during the Mao era to a 'domestic passport system' which divided the population into two 'castes': the urban or non-agricultural population, which was economically and socially superior; and

13 The system was first set up in the cities and was extended to rural areas in 1955. In 1958, it was formally implemented (Chan and Zhang, 1999: 819).

the agricultural population, which was not entitled to the benefits granted to urban *hukou* holders (Potter, 1983; Zhang, 2001: 25-26).

Urban residents were entitled to employment, housing, and social benefits while the agricultural population were left to produce and supply the food. Although the Communist government fostered techniques and institutions to advance agricultural production and improve the incomes of rural residents, The Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) – caused the most damage. The Great Leap Forward was an economic and social plan that aimed to transform the country into a modern state through the process of agriculturalization, industrialization, and collectivization. The plan ended in a catastrophe of widespread starvation hunger, which resulted in more than 30 million deaths, mostly in the rural sector. The result was a widening of the gap between the incomes and standards of living of rural and urban areas over the course of the Mao era. Most importantly, because of the *hukou* system, members of poor local communities were not able to leave their villages and ‘remain[ed] locked in poverty’ (Whyte, 2010: 10).

Since the early 1960s, the *hukou* system has created ‘social segregation and social disparity’. This social dualism has created a ‘chasm in [the] Chinese society’ (Chan and Zhang, 1999: 830) which is expressed on different social and personal levels. Since the 1960s, city jobs were reserved only for those holding local urban registration status, and those with a rural *hukou* could not compete for jobs in the urban sector (Whyte, 2010: 12). Besides employment, housing in urban areas was also bureaucratically controlled and allocated. Until the late 1980s, most urban residents received housing through their *danwei* (‘working units’). There was no housing market and a person with a rural *hukou* was not entitled or able to rent or purchase a house in one of China’s cities. Basic food necessities and medical care were also provided to urban residents through their working units; except for emergency rooms, clinics were off-limits to non-local residents. In addition, only those holding an urban *hukou* could enrol their children in city schools, which were considered significantly better than those in the countryside (Whyte, 2010: 12).¹⁴

After Mao Zedong’s death and the end of the Cultural Revolution (1976), China has undergone significant economic and social reforms which have had a dramatic influence on both the rural and the urban sectors. As part of China’s Open-Door policy, after the Third Plenary Session of the eleventh

14 Even today, it is extremely difficult for migrants’ children to enter the local education system in most large cities. This is still considered a significant barrier with tremendous social implications.

Congress in 1978 Deng Xiaoping declared four special economic zones in southern China: Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen. In 1984, the Chinese government declared on fourteen more coastal cities as special areas for overseas investment. Deng Xiaoping's main objective in these designations was to open China to the outside world and attract foreign investments. Since 1978, China's economic growth has been extremely rapid, reaching close to 10 percent a year for three decades and generating dramatic improvements in the average living standards of Chinese citizens (Beaver, Hou, and Wang, 1995; Whyte, 2010: 4).¹⁵

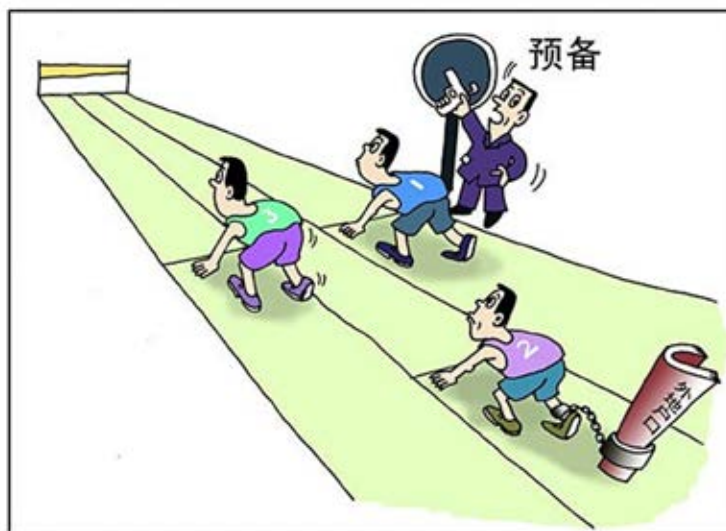
The development of a market-oriented economy resulted in major changes in the rural sector. In the early 1980s the Communist government decided that as opposed to the collective system which placed the responsibility on communal decision-making and rewards, the agricultural sector would return to using the 'Family Responsibility System', which meant that the family would once again be the basic unit for decision making. As a result, in 1982 China's communes were dissolved and by the end of 1984, 97 percent of farm families were operating under the 'Family Responsibility System' (McMillan, Whalley, and Zhu, 1989). The dissolving of the communes created a surplus of young workers looking for employment opportunities. Until the mid-1980s, however, there were still strict controls on rural-to-urban migration; for example, people were only able to purchase food or housing in the place where they were registered. This limitation resulted in an inability to leave one's hometown in search of better opportunities.

In the mid-1980s, as part of China's movement towards a market-oriented economy, the government eased its regulations, and people searching for employment opportunities were permitted to move into the cities (Luo, 2006). The government allowed peasants to obtain permanent resident permits which enabled them to migrate outside their hometowns (Fan and Huang, 1998). The opening of factories in China's coastal cities, together with changes in the economic and agricultural systems of rural areas, led to the movement of millions of young villagers from rural areas into cities. The rapid development of the urban labour market increased the demand for cheap labour in industrial and service sector jobs, and as a result, the number of rural-to-urban labour migrants began to grow rapidly (Fan and Li, 2002).

In the early 1990s, about 50-60 million people were estimated to be migrant workers in China. This number rose to about 100 million in the

15 For example, by 1984, peasant family per capita income in China had risen 62 percent over that of 1980 (Fu 1984, cited in Beaver, Hou, and Wang, 1995).

Figure 2.1 *Bu pingdeng* ('Not equal')



Zhongguo Qingnian Wang, 2008

early 2000s, by 2009 it had risen to 150 million, and – based on China's last population census – in 2010 about 261.4 million workers were living and working outside their registered area (Chan, 2012). According to the latest data published by The National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2016 the number of labour migrants stood at 292 million, among which 245 million were considered *liudong renkou* ('floating population') (China Statistical Yearbook, 2017). The term 'floating population' refers to rural migrants who work and live in the city but do not hold a local *hukou*. This means that they are not entitled to the social benefits to which local residents are entitled, such as access to healthcare and education. As I discuss later in the book, this was one of the reasons Sheung Shui marriage migrants viewed Hong Kong as a desired destination.

A-lin's narrative

A-lin was born in a small town in Sichuan province in 1979 where she grew up with her parents and younger brother. She attended school until ninth grade, and at the age of sixteen she left the village on her own and migrated

to Beijing in search of employment. She recalled how in Beijing she had felt quite lonely and often missed her family. More importantly, the money she earned was not enough to make a living, so she decided to leave Beijing and try her luck in Shenzhen. In Shenzhen A-lin worked in a beauty parlour, six days a week, between ten to twelve hours a day, for a monthly salary of 600 RMB. She quit her job after a few years to work as a receptionist at a local company. At the time, her salary was considered relatively high; although it took her some time to adjust, she remembered that she was quite pleased with her new life in the city. At the age of 19, three years after A-lin left Sichuan, she met Cheng, a man from Hong Kong who is eight years older than her. Unlike most Hong Kong men who are married to mainland women, Cheng is educated; he has a master's degree and works as an engineer. A-lin and Cheng met while A-lin was working as a receptionist in Shenzhen. During that time, Cheng's work demanded frequent trips to Shenzhen and they began talking during one of his company visits. A-lin told me that as time passed, they discovered that they enjoyed each other's company.

A-lin and Cheng married in Hong Kong four years after they met. After their marriage, A-lin was not entitled to immigrate to Hong Kong and had to wait in mainland China for her One-Way Permit. During her wait, A-lin and Cheng rented an apartment in Shenzhen where they lived together. Their son was born in Hong Kong three years after they were married. Even after the birth of her son, A-lin was not entitled to permanently immigrate to Hong Kong. When I asked Cheng about the time they lived together in Shenzhen, he drew me a map and explained me that each area marks the economic level of the people living there. Cheng explained that first they had lived in the mid-range area, but after a while he 'could not stand it'. He said that it was too dirty and noisy, so he decided to rent an apartment in an area that was considered much better. Cheng further explained, 'I could not stand living in China and although it was much cheaper than renting an apartment in Hong Kong, I could not wait to move back to Hong Kong.'

Continuing to live in Shenzhen was not an option for either her or her spouse. When their son turned three and it was time for him to start kindergarten, they rented an apartment in Sheung Shui, Hong Kong. At that time, A-lin was entitled to live in Hong Kong for three months at a time. The family continued to rent an apartment in Shenzhen where A-lin lived when she was not in Hong Kong. It was only after seven years of marriage that A-lin finally received her Hong Kong Identification Card (HKID) and permanently immigrated to Sheung Shui. On the day A-lin's HKID was approved, her spouse took a day off from work and they went together to pick up the card and celebrate at a shopping centre in Shatin, a town which is located about

30 minutes from Sheung Shui. A-lin was very excited and seemed immensely relieved. Receiving the HKID had significance for mainland immigrants in Hong Kong, granting them legal rights and social benefits. The fact that A-lin celebrated the receiving of the HKID card with her spouse shows that A-lin and Cheng's marriage generated emotional bonds. It was not only an important day for A-lin; it was a day to cherish for both of them. Receiving the card meant not only that they could begin their life in Hong Kong, but also that they could start to imagine a shared future.

Suzhi and im/mobility

During the first decade of the economic reforms, geographic mobility usually did not involve permanent relocation to the city. It was only during the second and third decades of the reforms that migration became less short-term and villagers began to travel thousands of miles from their ancestral village in the pursue of work. Since the end of the twentieth century, the motivations for rural-to-urban migration have been closely related to the launch of the campaign of 'Raising the Quality of the Population' (*tigao renkou suzhi*). Over the past three decades, the term *suzhi* has become a major component in contemporary China's governance and society, and it has had a significant influence on rural migrants' motivations for becoming labour migrants and on rural migrants' experiences in the city. During the 1980s Chinese intellectuals were concerned with uncovering what was keeping China from modernizing. The Chinese government attributed China's failure to modernize to the *suzhi di* ('low quality') of the population, especially in rural areas (Anagnost, 2004: 190). The policy of 'Raising the Quality of the Population' main aim has been to improve professional skills and academic and educational achievements in order to advance China's position as an economic power in the global arena and create a strong China in relation to the Western countries. The idea is to create a new socialist being through the improvement and development of each person's ideals, morals, education, and discipline (Judd, 2002: 22).

Although *suzhi* is usually translated as 'quality', the use of the term and the different meanings it carries are much more complex. In contemporary Chinese society, *suzhi* has become 'highly mobile and seems capable of being deployed in almost any context in which comparisons between individuals, communities, and populations are being made regardless of gender, location, class, or ethnicity (or indeed because of them)' (Sun, 2009: 618). The changes in the meanings and usage of *suzhi* are related to

the popular perception that human life has become 'a new frontier for capital accumulation' (Anagnost, 2004: 189). While earlier usage of the term implied that the *suzhi* of a person is related to deeply internalized qualities, in contemporary China it is quite well known that a person's (usually referring to a child's) qualities are greatly influenced by their family, social, political, cultural, and economic capital (Woronov, 2003: 35-36; Kipnis, 2006: 297).

Studies demonstrate how the term *suzhi* has entered discourses surrounding the rural/urban division. Sun (2009) argues that a common perception among urbanites is that *suzhi* is usually found lacking in the rural labour migrants who have moved to one of China's wealthier metropolises and industrial centres. The term has been widely used to criticize the various scarcities of rural migrants, from 'lack of formal schooling and low literacy to poor personal hygiene and table manners' (Sun, 2009: 618). Anagnost (2004) argues that the *suzhi* discourse can be found most elaborated in relation to the bodies of the rural migrant and the middle-class only child, which are thought to be placed at two opposite poles. While the middle-class urban family strives hard to build 'quality' into their child in order to become a neoliberal subject, rural migrants struggle to reach the city in order to escape rurality (Anagnost, 2004: 192). In fact, Susan Greenhalgh has argued that one of the main contributions to this dichotomy between the urban and the rural child is China's birth-planning policy, which created a modernist binary of the planned-unplanned birth: the planned birth is of the urban 'well-educated, well-dressed, healthy, "quality" child who is playing and laughing as it graces the cities' spots', while the 'unplanned child', in most cases, is the child of rural labour migrants. In contrast to the planned child, the unplanned child is the 'uneducated ragged, unhealthy child who is crying or fighting, disrupting social order, and generally polluting the cities' margins' (Greenhalgh, 2003: 196).

According to Greenhalgh (2003), this dichotomy should be understood as connected to the 'development' discourse that became dominant after WWII. The main idea of the development discourse is the structuring of 'underdeveloped societies' according to certain characteristics which are associated with 'advanced societies', such as industrialization, urbanization, the technicalization of agriculture and production, better health, and higher living standards (Escobar, 1994). These foci of development also include population – and this is especially true in China. The categorization of population within the Chinese context was produced by the State, which has an exceptional power to reshape social life through its extensive control over the resources and institutions of society (Greenhalgh, 2003).

'In order to move up, you need to move elsewhere' (Vertovec, 2009: 1)

After Shenzhen was declared a special economic zone (SEZ) in 1979, it became one of the cities that attracted large numbers of labour migrants. Shenzhen's exceptional economic development is manifested by the growth of its population. In 1980, before millions of migrants reached the city, Shenzhen was a small city with 310,000 residents and less than 30,000 workers. At the end of 2000, the population had increased to 4.33 million, in 2010 it rose to 10.22 million, and in 2016 it stood at 10.75 million (China's National Census, 2010; Ngai, 2004; Statistica, 2018). Estimations are that close to 70 percent of Shenzhen's population is composed of non-permanent residents, which means that they do not hold a local *hukou* ('residential status') and are not entitled to any social benefits (Ngai, 2004).

In contemporary China rural women continue to be subject to various constraints that limit their social, economic, and geographic mobility. Even though *hukou* is and has been a formidable barrier to institutional mobility, the city is still viewed as a desirable destination in comparison with the economic opportunities in the village. As a result, since the 1980s, millions of young single rural women have chosen labour migration as a means of achieving economic and social mobility. Surveys on female rural-to-urban labour migration estimate that around 35 percent of all labour migrants in the 1990s were female. This number has increased dramatically; at the beginning of the twenty-first century, female migrants constituted about half of all labour migrants (Luo, 2006: 69). Shenzhen's growth, for example, has depended to a large extent on rural female labour migrants; estimations state that the city has the largest concentration of female migrants between the ages of 15 and 29 in comparison to other Chinese cities (Andors, 1988; Liang and Chen, 2004). In Pun Ngai's study in garment and electronics factories in Shenzhen, she found that 90 percent of the total labour force in the light manufacturing industries was 'young, female, and under 25 years of age' (Ngai, 2004: 30). In this gender-segregated labour market men are usually channelled toward working in heavy manufacturing while women are often directed to textile and light manufacturing industries and the service sector. Moreover, the female labour force is extremely homogenous, comprising mostly young and single peasant women (Fan, 2003: 27-28; Zhang, 2014: 17).

Migration from the village to an urban area not only offers myriad opportunities, but also contributes to geographic and occupational mobility. In the city peasants work in new industries and earn higher incomes. Yang Chen, a 36-year-old labour migrant who has been living in Shenzhen for more than 20 years told me that most rural Chinese women of her age,

including her sisters, are already married, taking care of children and the rural household. She explained that she decided to become a labour migrant because she was unsatisfied with the life that she believed was expecting her as a rural woman:

When I was two years old my mother died, and I grew up with my father and my two older sisters. Our family was very poor, and I was considered very naughty (*tiaopi*) [...] I left home when I was fifteen years old. If I would not have left, I was probably married when I was eighteen and I didn't want that. By now I was probably at home with my children. I managed to change my life!

Yang Chen's narrative was quite exceptional. Even though many of the women who left the villages and became labour migrants have expressed their will to postpone marriage, after a few years of working as labour migrants, they usually returned to the village to get married and start a family (Jacka, 2006). Yang Chen decided to remain in Shenzhen, but even after 20 years she still held a rural *hukou*. When Sheung Shui marriage migrants discussed their experience as labour migrants in Shenzhen, they made a clear distinction between the poverty that had characterized their past in the countryside and their life in Shenzhen, which they considered a place that could fulfil their dreams. A-xian, a mainland marriage migrant who became a labour migrant at the age of sixteen explained:

I was born in a village in Guangxi Proving and came to Shenzhen when I was 16 years old. My home was very poor [...] it is a rural area and I couldn't continue my studies. So I followed my classmates and my friends to Shenzhen. I was very young back then and did not understand anything. If someone told me to do something I did it. I worked in many places, and I even went to work in a factory. Afterwards my brother arrived, and he opened a small business, so we worked together, and it was better.

The discourse of *suzhi* not only highlighted the gap between the rural and urban sectors, but also underscored the constraints imposed by poor conditions in the villages. Yang Chen's narrative below further illustrates the commonly held perception that the village did not offer any hope for young women:

I was born in Henan Province and left home when I was fifteen years old. My father gave me 100 Yuan and told me that this was all he could give

me. I came to Shenzhen in 1994, and it was very difficult back then. My purpose for coming to Shenzhen was to work hard and to change my life on my own (*wo yao kao ziji de nuli jiu gaibian wo de shenghuo*). In Shenzhen I became a nanny. I took care of two children and you know how much I earned? One hundred Yuan per month, but I said, never mind, I can do it! They gave me a place to stay, provided me with food, and I really thank them nowadays. They taught me everything I know!

Yang Chen not only emphasized her desire to build a 'new life' in Shenzhen, but also highlighted the significant change that had taken place in her life since she first left her hometown. Moreover, she attributed this change to the urban family she worked for and the urban environment in which she lived. Her assertion that this family had 'taught her everything she knows' echoed discourses about the social position of rural migrants and the common conception that city dwellers have 'higher *suzhi*' than rural people. The poor living conditions and lack of economic opportunities in the villages were closely related to the desires of young village women to experience new things and develop themselves. A-lin, a Sheung Shui marriage migrant from Sichuan Province, explained: 'I left my home because I wanted to look at the outside world, to grow up and experience (*chuxi*); I wanted to find employment, to earn money and to change my living conditions (*gaibian jiating de shenghuo*). I heard similar explanations from other Sheung Shui marriage migrants, for example:

'I left to make a better life' (*weile rang shenghuo sheng de geng hao*)
 'because my home environment was not good, and I wanted to go out and find work' (*jiali huanjing buhao, xiang chuqu dagong*)
 'I wanted to see what is outside' (*xiang qu wai kankan*)
 'to change my life' (*gaibian ziji de shenghuo*)

These explanations given by Sheung Shui marriage migrants clearly demonstrate that rural-to-urban labour migration is considered a means of 'moving up' and fulfilling one's dreams. In this sense, the discourse around *suzhi* also determined the strategies employed by Sheung Shui marriage migrants in their pursuit of upward geographical and social mobility. To escape their rural destinies, they left home in their early teens and migrated to one of China's cities. Many of the women believed that life in the village was constraining and explained that they had migrated to the city to 'change their life'. Further, after their immigration to Hong Kong, almost every time Sheung Shui marriage migrants discussed the living conditions in the villages

where they grew up they followed their description with a comparison to their living conditions in Hong Kong and the opportunities that Hong Kong holds for their children.

Most of China's internal migrants are young rural males and females who have left China's inland provinces in search of better opportunities in one of China's metropolitan areas. Despite the hard work, difficult living conditions, and low salaries that the city usually offers them, many migrants share the belief that the city provides many opportunities, and that only in the city would they be able to earn more, develop, and gain experiences. However, after the initial upward move from the rural to the urban labour force, most migrant workers are unable to progress to higher positions in urban industries, even when they move between jobs (Li, 2004). Many migrants experience exclusion and social disadvantage, and they remain a marginalized group (Fong and Murphy, 2006; Han, Huang, and Han, 2011). For most labour migrants, social, economic, and political constraints continue to influence their everyday experiences, and the journey from the village to the city does not end in acquiring a local *hukou* that would enable institutional upward mobility. Because of peasants' difficulties with improving their social status in the city, many choose to return to their villages after a few years of working (Han, Huang, and Han, 2011: 209). Furthermore, for many migrant women, the pressure to get married escalates once they reach their early 20s. Even if they manage to find urban work, in many cases the household division binds women to their village and limits their opportunities for mobility. Marriage usually means giving up their job and returning to the village (Fan, 2003).

This social segregation is one of the consequences of the *hukou* system, and of the hegemonic discourses which have created social dualism and a split in Chinese society (Chan and Zhang, 1999: 830). Perceptions about the relatively low status of the rural sector, especially the less developed provinces, are based on a structural dichotomy between 'centers and peripheries, knower and known, and the independent and the dependent' (Sun, 2009: 618). As a result of this structural dichotomy, although the labour migrants' main goal is to increase their employment opportunities and improve their living conditions, the migrants who move from the 'periphery' to the 'center' become subalterns in the city and usually acquire the status of having low *suzhi* (Anagnost, 2004: 192; Sun, 2009: 618). The stratification of citizenship in contemporary China is also a result of the Family Planning Policy, which resulted in the classification of persons as 'unplanned' and 'planned'. In addition to labelling rural migrants as having 'low *suzhi*', the terms *heirenkou* ('black population') or *heiren heihu* ('black persons/black households')

are often used when referring to labour migrants who do not hold a local *hukou* (*bendi hukou*). This term, which is associated with 'unregistered' and 'unlawful' persons, further emphasizes the illegitimacy of people residing outside their fixed registered place (Greenhalgh, 2003: 199).

The increase in geographic mobility and exposure to global cultural trends also influenced the market for romantic and marital partners. In this context of rapid change, social norms which define intimate relationships inside and outside of the marriage, were redefined (Davis, 2014: 556). Thus, among the new opportunities the city had to offer, many rural women reported that they viewed the city as an opportunity to marry an urban husband (Murphy, 2002). While marriage to an urban man is considered desirable, it is quite rare for a rural migrant woman to marry such a man. Most urban men are reluctant to marry migrant women because of their perceived lower social status, as well as the added difficulty if their wife and future mother of their child does not hold a local, urban *hukou* (Jacka, 2006: 1313). A-lin told me that, like most of her friends, she had arrived in Shenzhen with the hope of marrying a man of a higher social position. In this sense, from the marriage migrants' perspective, marrying across the border and obtaining a Hong Kong Identification Card was a way to achieve institutional mobility – a desired mobility that was out of their reach in mainland China. Cross-border marriage enabled them to gain a legal status that entitled them to social privileges and to 'build quality' into their children. However, it is important to note that while hopes of marrying a man from a 'higher social position' were part of many labour migrants' desires and Sheung Shui marriage migrants did cherish the benefits of becoming a Hong Kong permanent resident, the women I came to know in Sheung Shui never stated and did not treat their marriage to a Hong Kong man as simply a means to an end.

Hong Kong as a desired destination

Historically laden imaginaries – socially shared and transmitted (both within and between cultures) representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices – are at the roots of many travels, whether in the context of tourism or migration. (Salazar, 2011: 576-577)

Studies about the relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China focus primarily on the views Hong Kongers share about mainland China

and mainlanders, and their attitudes towards mainland immigrants in Hong Kong. These studies also emphasize changes in Hong Kongers' perceptions of their own identity (Lau, 2008; Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2008; Newendorp, 2008, 2010; Ma, 2012; Chan, 2014). Few scholars have studied the way mainlanders think of and consume Hong Kong (Ma, 2012). Below, I concentrate on the views of Hong Kong held by Sheung Shui marriage migrants. My argument is that mainland marriage migrants' desire to permanently immigrate to Hong Kong and their views and perceptions about Hong Kong's superiority are influenced by broader hegemonic discourses in mainland China which are based on the structural dichotomy between urban and rural, centre and peripheries, and modernity and tradition.

Ma (2012) argues that the imagining and consumption of Hong Kong by mainlanders is related to the notion of modernity and can be understood through the concept of 'satellite modernities', which refers to cities that mediate between developed centres and developing cities. As a 'satellite site', Hong Kong draws immigrants from across Asia who immigrate there to experience the 'global West' in an environment that they consider relatively secure and comfortable. Hong Kong, among other satellite sites and developed centres across Asia, has 'highly functional nodes that facilitate exchange and motivate modern imaginations' (Ma, 2012: 12). In the late 1970s, after Mao Zedong's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, China's economic reforms were at their embryonic stage and the economic gap between mainland China and Hong Kong was pronounced. The significant gaps in material wealth and standard of living, together with differences between Communist Party and British colonial rule, created an apparent social and cultural boundary between the two places (Ma, 2012: 22). According to Ma, as time passed and China opened to the world, the vision held by mainland immigrants about Hong Kong changed accordingly: it is no longer envisioned as the desired destination. Ma concludes that the modern/traditional distinction is the motivating force behind mainlanders' immigration to Hong Kong, and that the superiority of modernity is displayed in materiality (Ma, 2012: 16-17).

While materiality does help explain mainlanders' imagining and consuming of Hong Kong in the 1970s and 1980s, it is insufficient for understanding contemporary cross-border relations between mainland China and Hong Kong, particularly the large number of marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men. As my ethnographic data demonstrates, issues like education, health, and law and order were perceived by the marriage migrants as extremely important factors contributing to the positive image of Hong Kong. These factors demonstrate that while the economic gap between

mainland China and Hong Kong has narrowed dramatically over the past two decades, the cultural and social gaps remain. This idea is manifested in the everyday lives of mainland marriage migrants and the growing number of cross-border interactions.

One morning, after having breakfast with several Sheung Shui marriage migrants, I joined them for a stroll in one of Sheung Shui's shopping centres. Although Sheung Shui is a relatively small town, it has several shopping centres that are quite new and include very expensive and name brand shops. As we strolled through the stores, tried on clothes, and learned about new makeup and cosmetic products, we entered one store that specializes in imported cosmetics. While A-lin, A-xia, and A-Chun began to contemplate which products they would like to purchase, I noticed that they were staring at three women who had just entered the store. The women, who were speaking Cantonese, examined the products but did not purchase anything and left the store after a few moments. I thought that the Sheung Shui migrants knew the women who had just entered the store, but when I asked they immediately replied they did not know them and that they were looking at them because 'they are tourists from Guangzhou (mainland China).' It was apparent that the marriage migrants looked down upon the mainland tourists, whom they viewed as 'outsiders'.

When I wondered whether they were able to guess that the women were tourists from mainland China by listening to their accent, A-xia explained, 'It is easy to tell they are from the mainland because of their clothes and the way they walk.' During another visit to a shopping centre in Shatin several weeks before the Chinese New Year in February 2015, A-lin also told me that it was very easy to distinguish between local residents and mainland tourists. She pointed at a group of people getting off the train and said: 'Look at them [...] you see how they push their way through the crowd, you immediately know they are mainlanders (*daluren*).' On our way back to Sheung Shui, the train was crowded with mainlanders carrying handfuls of shopping bags, and A-lin explained that if she had to make the decision again, she would still choose to live in Hong Kong despite the difficulties she had experienced, because 'Hong Kong people's culture (*wenhua*) is higher.'

These two episodes are manifestations of the views that Sheung Shui marriage migrants shared about mainland China, mainlanders, and Hong Kong. Sheung Shui marriage migrants seemed to have a certain image of what mainland tourists in Hong Kong 'look like' and 'act like', and in their everyday lives they made a clear distinction between the mainland tourists who were temporary guests in the(ir) city and themselves, who were

Hong Kong permanent residents. The boundary they drew is similar to the distinction that urban *hukou* holders make when referring to rural labour migrants (*waidai ren*) who they perceive as temporary guests in their cities. I argue that this emphasis on Hong Kong's superiority is closely related to the discussion of the different meanings and usage of the term *suzhi*. As rural migrants, the women in my study were considered *waidi* ('outsiders') with 'low *suzhi*'. However, being Hong Kong permanent residents enabled the Sheung Shui marriage migrants to institutionally situate themselves as *bendi* ('locals'). Legal citizenship was the tool that Sheung Shui marriage migrants used to draw a boundary between 'us' and 'them'. Even in everyday life, the women sought to differentiate themselves from not only mainland tourists and mainland Chinese citizens in general, but also their previous social position as rural *hukou* holders and particularly as labour migrants. However, the fact that their families had stayed 'behind' on the mainland made this distinction between 'us' and 'them' more ambivalent and even painful.

The HKID: The significance of institutional mobility

During one of my Cantonese breakfasts with the marriage migrants, I mentioned that I had just returned from a doctor's appointment. The women seated around the table asked me about my appointment and were interested to know which clinic I had visited, and I explained that it was a local public clinic. They then inquired whether it was expensive for foreigners to use Hong Kong's health services. I replied that because I was a student at a Hong Kong university, I was entitled to receive an HKID, which enabled my family and me to access highly subsidized access to Hong Kong's public clinics. The women seemed so surprised that I had received the HKID only a few weeks after arriving in Hong Kong and asked if I could show them the card. After I took out my HKID, the women passed it around the table and examined it. Yang Yan, one of the marriage migrants seated at the table, took out her own card, compared it with mine and explained that although I held an HKID and was entitled to subsidized health care, I was not considered a Hong Kong permanent resident, and that that might be the reason I had received my Identity Card so quickly. In other words, to the mainland marriage migrants the HKID signified an institutional belonging to Hong Kong, not only a vague idea about a desired life. It was clear that this card and what it offered them as permanent residents had a significant meaning for the marriage migrants.

The social benefits offered in Hong Kong cover a wide range of vital services, including highly subsidized education for children,¹⁶ healthcare, and public housing for eligible citizens.¹⁷ These are considered superb by many of the mainland people I spoke with, and one of the most important advantages that Hong Kong offers its citizens. While mainland citizens consider these social benefits to be extremely desirable, they do not seem to have made a major impact on the poverty situation in Hong Kong. In 2012 Hong Kong's commission on Poverty (CoP) set the first official poverty line at half of the median household income. For 2012, the PL was \$3,600 for a single person, \$7,700 for a two-person household, \$11,500 for a three-person household, \$14,300, \$14,800 and \$15,800 for a family of four, five and six & above respectively. These poverty thresholds was to be reviewed annually (Commission of Poverty. 2013). This new poverty line analysis was followed by a strategy for the alleviation of poverty. Hong Kong's latest 'Poverty Situation Report' shows that before the implementation of the new policy 1.345 million Hong Kong people (close to 20 percent of the population) lived below the poverty line. After the policy intervention, which mainly includes the provision of government welfare, the number had dropped to 971,000 (14.2 percent) (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2016).

Although Hong Kong's government has declared that poverty alleviation is one of its priority policy areas (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2016), a survey conducted by a local Hong Kong think tank named 'Hong Kong Ideas Center' has revealed that almost one-third of the young adults in Hong Kong are dissatisfied with society. While many of the respondents argued that they would be willing to take an active part in political demonstrations, most cited housing, not politics, as their main area of complaint (Lau, 2015). In my conversations with young Hong Konger social activists, they often mentioned that the cost of living in Hong Kong is unbearable, and it seemed that this was one of their major concerns. In the winter of 2015, a young social activist named Ben told me that most Hong Kongers were very upset with the housing prices. He explained that he was extremely worried about his own security since his landlord could decide to increase the rent at any given time. During a lunch with a young artist named Hannah, she also expressed concern that it had become extremely

16 Public education in Hong Kong requires payment for books, uniforms, and extra curriculum activities.

17 The Hong Kong Housing Authority offers affordable housing for lower-income residents. There are specific criteria for eligibility, and the system is based on a lottery and is highly competitive.

difficult to make a living in the city, and that even a simple meal at a local restaurant was not something she could partake in as often as she had earlier.

In the summer of 2017, the increase in the cost of living seemed to be a main concern for both young social activists and the Sheung Shui families. A-lin's family had a heated discussion about the high prices of food ingredients and clothes, and in general they all seemed extremely worried and tense about their increasing expenses. Like the young Hong Kongers, Sheung Shui marriage migrants often discussed Hong Kong's housing situation. Most of them lived in rented apartments, and they tended to complain that their apartments were extremely small and too expensive. Because of the high living costs, A-lin and her family changed their apartment three times between 2010 and 2017. A-lin's spouse Cheng explained that every year their landlord raises the rent, so they have no choice but to move. While the Sheung Shui marriage migrants did not provide an explanation about why this change has taken place, Ben and Hannah both blamed mainland China's interference in Hong Kong's economy for the sharp increase in the cost of living.¹⁸ When I first began my fieldwork, the Sheung Shui marriage migrants often discussed the housing situation but rarely complained about Hong Kong's high living costs. It was only during my last two visits to Hong Kong in 2018 that a change occurred, and I began hearing more complaints about 'how expensive Hong Kong has become'. In this sense, it was the high living costs that brought them closer to the local Hong Kongers who were often preoccupied with the same topic. At the same time, it is important to stress that, although the housing situation was a major concern for Sheung Shui marriage migrants and their families, on many occasions they continued to emphasize the advantages of Hong Kong's social services, often comparing them with how things were organized in mainland China. For example, one of the benefits routinely mentioned in our conversations was Hong Kong's highly subsidized medical care. The contrast between the access that mainland Chinese citizens have to medical care and the health benefits that Hong Kong offers its citizens is evident in the following example.

One day, Yang Yan received a telephone call from her younger brother in Sichuan Province. He explained that his wife, who was eight months pregnant with their first child, had gone into early labour, apparently because of food poisoning. After a few days, due to the wife's serious condition, the couple lost their baby. The wife remained in critical condition and was hospitalized for further treatment. Yang Yan's brother and his wife both hold

18 In 2016 Hong Kong was listed as the second most costly city in the world, after Singapore and ahead of Zurich (*South China Morning Post*, 2017).

a rural *hukou* and, as Yang Yan explained, because it was too expensive, they did not have health insurance and could not receive the needed healthcare. She added that the doctors in mainland China 'only care about the money they will receive from patients and that the healthcare a patient receives is dependent on the amount of money a person is able to pay.' Yang Yan decided to help her brother and send him 20,000 RMB. When Yang Yan and Wang Jian, Yang Yan's close friend, discussed the situation, they criticized mainland China's hospitals, the Chinese doctors' lack of a sense of morality, and the low quality of street food there. Yang Yan explained, 'no wonder his wife got food poisoning, she should not have bought street food.' In addition to the views Yang Yan and Wang Jian held about mainland China's health system, this episode also demonstrates the close connection between Yang Yan and her natal family and the continuing link between Yang Yan and her place of origin. During her sister-in-law's hospitalization Yang Yan was very worried about her brother and his wife, and she kept up close communications with them. Supporting her brother financially also demonstrated that she felt an obligation towards her natal family. In fact, it was her secure social position as a Hong Kong resident that enabled her to support her natal family in Sichuan Province, more than a thousand kilometres away from Sheung Shui. In this way, her hometown and the symbolic baggage it carried continued to impact Yang Yan's everyday experiences in Hong Kong.

The mainlanders from different social backgrounds whom I interviewed in Shenzhen often highlighted the sharp contrast between the welfare systems in Hong Kong and mainland China. For example, in a conversation I conducted with a mainland couple who lives and works in Guangzhou, they praised Hong Kong's excellent social services. The wife argued that, although mainland Chinese people who hold an urban *hukou* and work in one of China's cities are entitled to medical care, it is usually not enough to cover the basic expenses of visiting a physician. She went on to explain that her medical insurance had covered only a small portion of the expenses she had incurred when she went to see a doctor a week earlier, and that as a result she had to pay for the medical care and medicine from her own pocket. She concluded that as a result many mainlanders, herself included, 'do not feel safe living in mainland China'.

China's tremendous economic growth has been accompanied by dramatically increasing inequality. While most urban residents who hold permanent jobs receive benefits such as free or subsidized education and healthcare, the situation in rural areas is quite different (Zhang and Kanbur, 2005: 189-190).¹⁹

19 For a review of the changes in China's medical policy, see Yip and Hsiao, 2008; Zhang and Kanbur, 2005; Mou et al., 2009.

Although rural areas received far less social expenditure than the cities during the Mao era (1949-1976), the government did adopt an alternative strategy to promote basic healthcare, with a focus on preventative rather than curative healthcare. China's large amount of manpower and the fact that the masses were organized in communes, production brigades, and production teams enabled the mobilization of the masses to engage in public health (ibid.: 189-190). Before the 1978 economic reforms, insurance was provided by the Cooperative Medical System (CMS) in rural areas. This system organized health stations, paid village doctors to deliver primary care, and provided prescription drugs. At its peak in 1978, the CMS served 90 percent of China's rural population. After the communes were dissolved and the villages returned to the Family Responsibility System, the CMS collapsed, leaving close to 90 percent of all peasants uninsured (Yip and Hsiao, 2008). To fill the gap, the government authorized the establishment of private medical practices in rural areas, forcing most rural residents to pay for healthcare themselves (Zhang and Kanbur, 2005). As a result, rural families who cannot afford basic healthcare are often driven into poverty by large medical expenses (Yip and Hsiao, 2008).

There are also major disparities in healthcare access between migrant workers and urban *hukou* holders (Mou et al., 2009). Due to institutional barriers that are still in place, rural migrants who do not hold a local *hukou* usually have limited access to healthcare when they migrate to the city (Mou et al., 2009; Chen, 2011). Furthermore, labour migrants are not entitled to Government Employee or Labour Insurance, the main types of health insurance for employees holding local *hukou*, while also being unable to access the New Rural Cooperative Medical Insurance since they live and work in the city (Mou et al., 2009). For this reason, migrants who become seriously ill usually return to the countryside to receive treatment (Hu, Cook, and Salazar, 2008; Xiang, 2007, cited in Chen, 2011: 1298). The high number of pharmacies in Shenzhen is also a sign of rural labour migrants' lack of access to medical care. During my fieldwork in Shenzhen I noticed that in neighbourhoods with a large percentage of rural labour migrants, there were many pharmacies and small clinics. When I asked labour migrants in Shenzhen about the reason for this, they indicated that because they do not have the financial ability to see a doctor or go to the hospital when they get sick, they try to treat themselves by purchasing inexpensive medicine at local stores.

Like the millions of rural labour migrants in China's cities, when the marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui lived and worked in Shenzhen they had been considered part of the 'floating population' by the Chinese government, and *waidi ren* ('outsiders') by the local population. As

waidi ren, they were entitled to very few of the social benefits that the Chinese government provides residents who were born in urban areas. These benefits include medical insurance, housing subsidies, pensions, and educational opportunities for children (Han, Huang, and Han, 2011). Furthermore, as labour migrants they were situated at the margins of society, and their *suzhi* remained low in the eyes of the local population. While their geographic move from the 'periphery' to the 'centre' did not allow them to shed the social and cultural boundaries they carried or to change their *hukou*, their marriages to men from Hong Kong did change their legal status. Obtaining an HKID meant that they received the One-Way Permit, they were legally part of Hong Kong's society, and they were therefore entitled to many of the social benefits they lacked in the village or as labour migrants in the city. Thus, from the Sheung Shui marriage migrants' perspective, the HKID marked not only a significant change in their legal status, but also their higher *suzhi* in comparison to mainland tourists, particularly labour migrants who in mainland China are perceived as marginal citizens and as having low *suzhi*.

Desire for and consumption of Hong Kong's high 'quality' commodities

The social benefits granted to the marriage migrants after receiving the HKID were a major part of their motivation for continuing to live in Hong Kong. However, other aspects of life in Hong Kong have also played a significant role in their perception that it is a desired destination. These aspects are linked to the way Hong Kong is experienced by the women, as well as to how 'the other side of the border' is mediated by different social agents. These powerful imaginations have influenced the way the women collectively envision the world they live in and their own 'positionalities and mobilities within it' (Salazar, 2011: 577). Even before their immigration, many of the marriage migrants already had a vision of what life in Hong Kong would be like. For example, A-xia, who is married to a Hong Kong man and had lived in Hong Kong for four years recalled:

Before I arrived in Hong Kong, I thought that Hong Kong was a place to yearn for (*yige hen xiangwang de difang*), I thought that every aspect of life in Hong Kong was excellent: commodities (*wuzhi*), everyday survival (*shengcun*), and the culture (*wenhua*). I also thought that it was good that there is democracy (*minzhu*). I did not think there was anything bad in Hong Kong (*meiyou bu hao de*). I believed Hong Kong was all of these

things because I used to watch television and the news, or sometimes my friends or relatives came back to China from Hong Kong and that is what they used to say about Hong Kong.

As I mentioned above, in my last two visits to Hong Kong I have noticed a change in the women's perception of Hong Kong, and topics which were not discussed when I first entered the field in 2010 were discussed more often. In most cases, these topics revolved around Hong Kong's high living costs. However, despite these concerns, Hong Kong continued to be a desired place to live and consume. One topic that dominated many of the marriage migrants' conversations was that Hong Kong is a very orderly place. Sheung Shui marriage migrants praised the orderliness of Hong Kong and often expressed the view that *fazhi yanming* ('the law is strict and impartial'). Like the comparison between Hong Kong's social benefits and the lack of benefits in mainland China, the emphasis on the orderliness of Hong Kong was usually contrasted with the image they held of mainland China. Hong Kong was also perceived as very *ganjing* ('clean') and *anquan* ('safe'). The women often stressed the tidiness of the streets, trains, and bus stations. On one occasion, A-jun, a mainland marriage migrant who had lived in Hong Kong for two years when we met, expressed her satisfaction with life in Hong Kong. She explained that Hong Kong is a wonderful place to live because it is 'very clean'. On one occasion, A-jun pointed to the floor of the bus station to demonstrate just how 'clean' Hong Kong was, and told me that it was very important for her that Hong Kong was orderly and tidy. She assured me that when I went to Shenzhen 'I will see for myself how big the difference is'.

Another important issue was the quality of the food. Sheung Shui marriage migrants usually praised the safety of the food products in Hong Kong and contrasted them with the *jia* ('fake') products they claimed are often found in mainland China. Whenever we visited a new restaurant, I was told that I should not worry because 'in Hong Kong the food undergoes regular inspections by the health department'. On one occasion, Yang Yan invited my family to eat in a food court located on the top floor of the fish and vegetable market in Sheung Shui. When we reached the food court, I noticed the extremely dirty floors, the overflowing garbage cans, and in general what looked like a very unsuitable place to eat. I was in the early stages of pregnancy and was worried about the sanitation level of the place. However, Yang Yan reassured me: 'you have nothing to worry about; we are in Hong Kong, it is clean and safe!' In other words, Yang Yan did not judge the cleanliness of the restaurant by its actual condition, instead believing that because we were in Hong Kong, the food must be completely safe. These thoughts echoed her reaction to the

food poisoning her brother's wife had suffered during her pregnancy. When Yang Yan described what her brother and his wife had eaten the night before they lost their baby, she told me that 'it was street food' and that the food 'there [in mainland China] cannot be trusted'. Yang Yan was not surprised to learn that purchasing food in mainland China could be dangerous, while she believed that the same was not possible in Hong Kong.

Although Sheung Shui is situated very close to the Hong Kong-China border, Sheung Shui marriage migrants often told me that they felt Hong Kong was much safer than mainland China. One of my neighbours, a mainland marriage migrant who had lived in Hong Kong for four years named Ding, told me that she was afraid to take her children with her when travelling to Shenzhen. She said that many children are kidnapped in Southern China and that 'it is very dangerous there'. Trafficking in children had become a national concern in mainland China and stories involving the trafficking of babies in Southern China occasionally appeared in Hong Kong media. These stories further contributed to the image of a lawless China that is particularly dangerous for children (Tam, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Bosco, 2011: 142).

The notion that Hong Kong is a trustable place is not only held by mainland immigrants living in Hong Kong; it can also be found among mainland Chinese living in China. The mainland Chinese people from different social backgrounds whom I have talked with and interviewed also believed that Hong Kong products were safer and of higher quality than those sold in mainland China. Consequently, since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty there has been mass consumption of Hong Kong-produced products by mainlanders, especially in Guangdong Province. This is particularly conspicuous since similar but Chinese-made products are widely available across mainland China. The following ethnographic excerpt illustrates this point.

Every morning, on the way to my daughter's kindergarten, I would see a line of used plastic bags placed on the ground in front of the door of a pharmacy in one of Sheung Shui's shopping centres. This was usually several minutes before the pharmacy opened at 9:00 AM. I wondered about this line of plastic bags and asked A-lin about it. She told me that they belonged to mainland people who crossed the border early in the morning to purchase baby formula at the pharmacy. They placed their plastic bags to save a place in line, so they would be the first ones to purchase the formula. A-lin explained that they tried to arrive as early as possible because by 11:00 AM the milk powder would be sold out. Baby milk powder has become one of the most popular products carried across the border from Hong Kong to mainland China in recent years. In 2008, Chinese authorities reported that

296,000 of mainland Chinese babies had become sick from contaminated Chinese-made baby formula and related products that, as it turned out, contained melamine (*BBC*, 2008, 2010). Since then, many mainland parents prefer to use foreign formula brands such as those sold in Hong Kong. Even though about a decade has passed since the melamine was discovered, many mainland Chinese parents believe foreign milk products to be safer and better and prefer to give their babies products that are not made in China. Mainland parents who lived and worked in Shenzhen told me that they crossed the border on a regular basis to purchase milk powder for their baby. They emphasized that although imported milk powder is sold in pharmacies and supermarkets in Shenzhen, they still do not trust its authenticity. They explained that even if the box itself indicated that the contents were not manufactured in China, the contents could still be locally-made. It was a common belief in both Shenzhen and Hong Kong that Chinese food products could not be trusted. I occasionally heard ‘horror’ stories about what happened ‘on the other side of the border’. For example, one of my key Hong Kong informants, a forty-year-old woman who volunteered at community centres across Hong Kong, told me that a friend had bought some fruit in mainland China only to discover that the contents were purple, and that the fruit was not real. She also added that many of the eggs sold in mainland China are not genuine but manufactured. The perception that low quality or even dangerous food products are produced in mainland China was held by mainlanders, mainland marriage migrants, and local Hong Kongers alike. The difference was that while mainlanders had to receive a TWP (Two-way permit) to cross the border and purchase products in Hong Kong, the marriage migrants could consume what they considered to be ‘first world products’ on a daily basis. In other words, as Hong Kong permanent residents they were able to easily enjoy what the first world had to offer, and this was a major advantage that they extremely appreciated.

In recent years the issue of Hong Kong’s ‘quality’ products has been drawing a significant amount of attention in the media in Hong Kong as well as in mainland China. In 2014, a post titled ‘Why do “I” purchase products in Hong Kong’ (*‘Wo’ weishenme qu Xianggang gowu*) was published on one of the most famous forums providing information about life in Hong Kong. The writer listed the reasons mainland people should consume Hong Kong products:

Why should mainlanders purchase Hong Kong commodities? First, the quality (*zhiliang*) of Hong Kong products is guaranteed (*baozheng*). Unlike mainland China’s standards (*fuhe Zhongguo biao zhun*), Hong Kong has one of the world’s top-quality inspection systems. When comparing mainland

China's fake products and bad quality to Hong Kong's good quality and cheap prices, who wouldn't choose to go to Hong Kong? Second, the shopping environment, the openness, the transparency, the service and other aspects are all better than those in mainland China. (Tianya, 2014)

This post drew many comments confirming the writer's experiences. One of the commenters gave the following example:

A while ago I watched the news in Guangzhou about a man who had bought some kind of Chinese medicine. After he discovered that the product he had bought was fake (*jia huo*), he returned to the store and confronted the clerk. However, the clerk refused to admit that the product was not real. The buyer told his story to the local media and when the reporter called the store, the owner still did not concede; they argued, and it was not solved. No one knows what happened in the end. Based on mainland Chinese norms (*guanli*), the guess is that nothing happened to the store or its owner. If something like this would have happened in Hong Kong, after the evidence was collected, the shop would definitely have been closed down. I myself have seen with my own eyes many cases in which pharmacies in Hong Kong were forced to close for this same reason. This is the high degree of law enforcement in Hong Kong. As a buyer, who wouldn't want to purchase without worries. (Tianya, 2014)

Sheung Shui is the closest Hong Kong town to the border with mainland China. When mainlanders cross the border to purchase Hong Kong products, they usually visit one of Sheung Shui's shopping centres. I witnessed hundreds of people at the Sheung Shui train station and at the immigration checkpoints in Luo Wu and Shenzhen carrying large boxes of baby formula and other commodities on their way back to mainland China. In addition to people crossing over to Hong Kong to purchase Hong Kong products, many traders could be seen daily in train stations selling products bought in Hong Kong. These products include baby formula, diapers, cookies, yoghurt drinks, and electronic devices. When Sheung Shui marriage migrants travelled back to mainland China to visit their families, usually on Chinese New Year or during the summer holiday, most would bring baby formula as part of the gifts they brought to their family. Other gifts included clothes and electronic devices such as a new type of mobile phone.

In 2011, the children of the marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui were between the ages of four and five and were still drinking milk formulas on a regular basis. In addition to their regular meals, the children also drank

a bottle of milk formula every night before going to bed. When I asked A-lin why she gave her four-and-a-half-year-old son milk formula, she replied that it was very important for the development of his brain. Most of the women told me that they breastfed for a relatively short time and preferred to use milk powder because it would contribute to their child's development. While the World Health Organization recommends feeding children exclusively breastmilk up to the age of six months, only 15 percent of babies aged four to six months in Hong Kong are breastfed. One of the main reasons is that, despite health professionals' recommendations, Hong Kong's baby milk industry is constantly promoting its products as scientifically proven to be better for babies than breastfeeding (Tsang, 2013). For example, large advertisements hang on Hong Kong's MTR station walls promising parents smarter children who will do better in school and succeed better in life. The use of milk powder by the marriage migrants is another illustration of *suzhi*: they are 'improving' the quality of the child by feeding them Hong Kong-made milk formula.

Several days before the Chinese New Year in February 2013, mainland parents' consumption of Hong Kong milk formula became a hot topic of debate in Hong Kong. Dozens of articles in the Hong Kong media raised public awareness about the intensification of cross-border consumption. According to these media reports, stocks of baby formula had become 'alarmingly scarce' in Hong Kong as mainland traders and residents crossed the border to purchase milk powder (Ko, 2013). During a visit to Hong Kong several weeks before the Chinese New Year in February 2015, Sheung Shui's streets were crowded with mainland tourists who had crossed the border to purchase New Year's gifts in Hong Kong. I noticed that many Sheung Shui stores had turned into shops catering to mainland Chinese visitors and traders. This was also confirmed by the Hong Kongers with whom I spoke, who claimed that 'Hong Kong shops and restaurants are changing'. Several young Hong Kong activists told me that the 'old shops' were disappearing and that all one could purchase in Hong Kong now was milk powder and diapers. On one occasion, a young Hong Kong artist suggested that instead of going out for a meal, 'we can go out to drink milk formula'. Her remark signified the presence of the cross-border shoppers and their impact on the everyday life of the local population. Social activists I interviewed explained that towns closer to the border like Sheung Shui and Yuen Long are turning into places intended for mainland tourists and shoppers. The distinction between 'now' and 'before [1997]', was very common among the group of young social activists and artists I came to know in Hong Kong. From their point of view, the intensification of the cross-border interactions and the increase of cross-border marriages had caused major changes in Hong Kong.

Figure 2.2 Shops in Sheung Shui and mainland shoppers



Photograph taken by the author, February 2015

As a result of public pressure, in 2013 Hong Kong's government decided to allow only two boxes of milk powder to be carried across the border from Hong Kong into mainland China. Thus, in the summer of 2013 large signs appeared around the immigration checkpoint in Luo Wu on the way to the mainland Chinese border, stating that people could not bring heavy luggage or more than two boxes of milk powder into China. In the winter of 2015, protests against mainland visitors and traders intensified and

Figure 2.3 Mainland traders at the Shenzhen train station selling Hong Kong commodities



Photograph taken by the author, July 2013

demonstrations spread to several Hong Kong cities. In response to requests by the Hong Kong government, the Shenzhen municipal government issued a decision to restrict the number of visits that Shenzhen permanent residents could make to Hong Kong (He and Tsang, 2015).

Mainlanders living in Guangdong Province continue to consume Hong Kong products because these products are perceived as having higher *zhiliang* ('quality'). The search for higher 'quality' is related to China's goal of *yu shijie jiegui* ('linking up with the rest of the world'). This popular slogan broadly captures China's objective to achieve *xiandaihua* ('modernity') (Zhen, 2000: 93; Gaetano, 2004: 41). This idea also involves leaving the 'periphery' and migrating to the 'centre' to cast off the 'peasants' mentality' and be 'baptized in civilization' (Meng, 1995: 257, cited in Gaetano, 2004: 41). However, the reason mainlanders cross the border to buy foreign milk powder for their children is related to trust and confidence, not an economic issue. Mainland Chinese parents are willing to pay substantially more for imported products than for domestic brands because they believe that the health of their child is at stake (O'Neill, 2017). In other words, although the economic divide between mainland China and Hong Kong has narrowed dramatically over the past few years, for mainland commuters and the Sheung Shui marriage migrants Hong Kong continues to be perceived as an 'answer' to mainland China's current problems – or at least for some of them.

3 ‘Same as Before, Living as a House Wife’

The women I came to know in Sheung Shui left their homes in their late teens in search for ‘a better life’. They were young, and they envisioned the city as a destination which could fulfil their dreams. Although they did not acquire institutional mobility in the city, many of the young female migrants still reported having feelings of personal freedom since they were living as single women in dormitories, made their own living, and were able to delay marriage. Their marriage to a man from Hong Kong enabled the women to gain Hong Kong citizenship and acquire the social benefits they lacked as rural migrants. However, their marriage also changed their social position, and their feeling of personal freedom transformed once again. To understand these changes, in this chapter I focus on the gender relations that have constructed, maintained, and transformed the marriages.

The pattern of gender relations that I have identified reveals a ‘gender contract’ between Sheung Shui marriage migrants and their Hong Kong spouses. Following Hirdman’s analysis, in this chapter I discuss the three levels in which the gender contract functions: the metaphysical, structural, and individual (1991: 78). I begin with the metaphysical level, which includes cultural myths and representations. Then I discuss the structural conditions and emphasize the link between gender, space, and economics. Last, I focus on the individual level and demonstrate how the marriage migrants’ everyday experiences in Hong Kong reflect their changing subjectivities. Since these marriages involve mobility and result from an amalgam of structures (rural China, urban China, and Hong Kong), I have added a geographical dimension, which is highly relevant to the analysis (Valentine, 2007).

In recent years more and more studies have highlighted the importance of affects and emotions for understanding migration and transnational processes (Shaw and Charsley, 2006; Skrbiš, 2008). Geographers have argued that ‘place’ plays an important role in the on-going constitution of identity (Cresswell, 2004). This idea derives from understanding that ‘who we are’ is closely related to multiple connections with people, events, and places (Conradson and McKay, 2007). Since a person’s home usually, although not always, represents stability, geographical mobility significantly influences a person’s subjectivity. The networks lost through migration, the benefits of

citizenship, and other local and global structures of power have a significant effect on gendered domestic relations of power (Charsley, 2012). Migration thus inevitably results in new and complex forms of emotions (Sheller and Urry, 2006). While the marriage migrants perceived Hong Kong as a desired destination, and in many ways the marriages were the reason they were able to access institutional mobility, the marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui never claimed that their marriage to a Hong Kong man was only a utilitarian means to achieve a premeditated end. Rather, the marriages which were entangled with their migration narrative generated affective bonds and attachments which were also evident in their everyday lives.

The metaphysical level: A gendered impact on the gap between the rural and the urban sector

So (2003) argued that one of the main reasons Hong Kong men marry mainland Chinese women is related to the fact that Hong Kong men believe that mainland women are 'more stable, less sophisticated, and less picky than Hong Kong women, and thus would give them a greater sense of control and security' (ibid.: 525). This perception of mainland women by Hong Kong men rests on traditional Confucian norms which dictated women to demonstrate obedience before all other virtues. For centuries, although there were significant regional, ethnic, and class differences, girls and women's family and social position in China was considered inferior. The positions of boys and girls were reflected in common sayings, such as: 'a son keeps incense at the ancestral alter burning' and 'investing in a daughter is like pouring water onto another's field' (Attané and Guilmoto, 2007; Murphy, Ran, and Xi, 2011). With the end of the Confucian bureaucratic system at the beginning of the twentieth century, intellectuals began to develop a strong sense of a mission to shape new modes of thought and behaviour. Instead of seeking solutions in traditional thought, early modern writers turned towards the future, reaching beyond China's borders and embracing the new in an attempt to assert China's place and ensure its survival in the modernizing world (Pease, 1995: 279-280). The search for China's modernity was closely related to class differences and the urban/rural divide. However, in addition to these aspects, the critique of the family system and the issue of women's liberation also provided one of the most significant terrains on which China endeavoured to construct its modernity, and the

public discourse on women's social position underwent significant changes (Johnson, 1983: 28; Rofel, 1999: 44).

Most studies about the changes in women's social position during the first half of the twentieth century have focused on the May Fourth Movement's criticism of the Confucian values regarding family traditional norms and women's inferior position. These studies also report the changes which began to take place in women's everyday lives (Johnson, 1983; Gilmartin, 1995; Rofel, 1999; Leutner and Spakowski, 2005; Brownell and Wasserstorm, 2002; Bailey, 2012). Although some of the mechanisms that tied women to traditional roles were weakening in rural areas, the new cultural currents of the May Fourth Movement generally failed to reach the villages. Most of these changes took place in urban areas where the exposure to western culture was stronger (Johnson, 1983: 33-34).

The political and social changes after the rise to power of the Communists in 1949 had a tremendous impact on women's position in society. The early 1950s is considered a period in which women's rights were dealt with more actively than at any time before or since. The 'Marriage Law' published by the Communist Party on 1 May 1950 stated the minimum age for marriages, prohibited arranged marriages, stated that a man and woman are allowed to choose their spouse freely, and that widows are permitted to remarry (Davis and Harrell, 1993).²⁰ This law had a profound influence on the structure of the family and on women's position in the Chinese society. While many scholars agree that the law expanded women's rights as brides, wives, and daughters-in-law, some scholars have also argued that the law reinforced the State's control over the institution of marriage (Davis and Harrell, 1993; Davis, 2014). Moreover, after the early 1950s the reform of women's social and family position was left to occur as a result of other social, economic, and political changes that China underwent in the pursuit of economic development and building socialism (Johnson, 1983). The liberation of Chinese women has been continuously set aside as 'secondary' in importance to the 'more pressing needs' of land reform, production, and economic reforms. While the Communist government embraced gender equality as a principle, it still saw revolution through the 'cultural lens of patriarchy' (Wolf, 1985: 261). The Chinese Communist Party's emphasis on class as the primary cause for inequality resulted in viewing gender as peripheral to the proletarian

20 In 1980 The Marriage Law was revised to liberalize divorce and favour the interests of women and children in property distribution in the case of divorce. As a result of public dissatisfaction and confusion in the lower courts with regard to financial, property, and custody disputes, in 2001 the National People's Congress once again revised the Marriage Law (Davis, 2014: 556).

struggle, and women remained second-class citizens within a patriarchal society (Wolf, 1985; Park, 1992; Gilmartin et al., 1994).

The launching of The Family Planning Policy (*Jihua shengyu zhengce*) in 1978 is an example of how State institutions and actors played a major role in policy formulation and implementation. This policy, which has had a major impact on the lives of Chinese women and children, is a manifestation of the close interaction between the State, gender, and culture (Murphy, 2003: 598). When the policy was first implemented, each couple was allowed to have only one child. However, any couple facing financial difficulties, mainly those in rural areas whose first child is a girl, could apply to be permitted the birth of a second child by going through the necessary formalities. In addition, the policies were also more flexible in ethnic minority areas.

In recent years, the rapid decrease in the birth rate, combined with stable or improving life expectancy, has led to an increasing proportion of elderly people and an increase in the ratio between elderly parents and adult children. Consequently, in November 2013 urban families in which one of the parents is an only child were given permission to have a second child (Hu, 2002). On 29 October 2015 the Communist Party ended the 'One-Child Policy': all couples are now allowed to have two children. As a result, China's birth rate increased slightly in 2016 but dropped again in 2017. It is still unclear whether this change in policy will have a significant impact on the birth rate in the future, as recent studies report that having one child has become an ideal in China and that many urban parents do not want more children because of the high costs of housing, healthcare, and education (*The Economist*, 2018).

This summary of the main principles of the 'family planning policy' does not mention the harsh consequences of the policy for women's bodies. As argued by Susan Greenhalgh, even the widely used English term 'family planning policy' 'implies the existence of a liberal, individually centered family planning program rather than the radical state-run birth planning program China actually has' (2004: 150).²¹ Official estimations state that over 300 million births were prevented since the early 1970s, and in many cases the practices used to implement this birth planning project were extremely harsh (Greenhalgh, 2003: 198). Since the introduction of the policy in 1978 there has been a steady increase in the sex ratio, especially in China's rural and poor provinces. In 1979 the sex ratio was in the biologically normal range of around 106 males per 100 females. However, the gap has deepened

21 The literal translation of the Chinese term *jihua shengyu* should be 'planned childbirth' (Greenhalgh, 2013).

since the mid-1980s, from 108 males per 100 females born between 1985 and 1989, to 124 boys for every 100 girls born between 2000 and 2004 (*The Economist*, 2010). There are strong indications that both urban and rural families choose to have sex-selective abortions, but the gap in the sex ratio is much more acute in rural areas, especially for second births. However, in some of China's poorer regions there is an acute ratio of 130 boys for every 100 girls (Hesketh, Li, and Xing, 2005). Since most rural couples are permitted to have two children, the sex ratio for the first birth is within the normal limits, but it rises sharply with the birth order. If the second child is female, it is not uncommon that parents will decide to terminate the pregnancy, allowing them to have another child in an attempt to give birth to a son. Murphy, Tao, and Lu concluded that even though they witnessed variations in the intensity of son preference within China's patriarchal rural society, China's patrilineal system clearly maintains the 'social, cultural, and economic need for at least one son' (2011: 683).

The imbalance in the sex ratio was also apparent in the Hong Kong kindergarten my daughter attended, where close to two-thirds of the children were boys. Wang Jian did not seem surprised when I mentioned that there are very few girls in the class. When I enquired about the issue, she immediately replied without needing to think about the reason: 'Most of the mothers in the kindergarten are immigrants from the mainland and in mainland China people still prefer boys. Everybody knows that women in mainland China have abortions when they find out that their foetus is a female.' China bans such tests for fear it will lead parents to selectively abort their unborn child in favour of having a boy, but demographic patterns indicate that this practice is not rare: parents have found a variety of ways to reveal their foetus's sex. For example, in 2014 a mainland man was arrested on suspicion that he was arranging sex tests in Hong Kong for pregnant mainland women. According to the report, the women sent their blood tests to Hong Kong and received the result in just a few days. After finding out that they were carrying girls, some of the women had abortions and others arranged adoptions (Zhuang, 2014).

In addition to the acute sex ratio, studies of urban and rural families' conceptions about their children's education demonstrated that traditional norms continue to exist in China today. For example, Kajanus argues that, while many urban parents did support their daughter's pursuit of higher education, they still directed them to pursue the kind of degree and job that is considered 'stable and undemanding' (2015: 95). The rate of educated Chinese women delaying marriage is much lower than equally educated Chinese men and equally educated women in other Asian societies (Fincher,

2014). Furthermore, single, educated women who are not married by their late 20s have recently started to be tagged as *shengnu* ('leftover') women in China. The 2015 changes to China's family planning policy (allowing women to give birth to two children) has given women more freedom over their bodies, but has also created new difficulties. Contemporary discussions on social media and conversations I had with urban Chinese women indicated that urban women experience growing discrimination in the labour market, since companies believe they might take multiple maternity leaves. A survey carried out by the employment website 51job.com discovered that 75 percent of Chinese companies were more hesitant to hire women after the policy change. In a survey from 2017, one-third of women reported that their salaries fell after they gave birth. According to recent reports, China's laws against sex discrimination do not seem to help in this matter, as most companies do not fear punishment because enforcement is usually relaxed (*The Economist*, 2018).

In China's rural areas, young girls, more than boys, are often under pressure to leave school early to help with farming (Wolf, 1985: 126-133). For example, in the film *Up the Yangtze* (Chang, 2007) a rural family is forced to leave their home as a result of the construction of a dam. When the family's conditions turn for the worst, they urge the oldest daughter to leave school and go to work on a tourists' boat. Although the girl wishes to continue studying, dreaming of becoming a scientist, she is forced by her parents to abandon her goal. A study of rural parents' views regarding their children's education documented a rural mother stating that while girls should study well and perhaps 'learn a skill later', boys should study as hard as they can or else they will 'have no chance' (Chi, and Rao, 2003: 344). Discussions I had with mainland women from different social backgrounds revealed similar views. In a conversation with Li Xian, an educated urban mainland woman, she explained that because it was still common for rural girls to move out of their natal home to live with the husband's family after marriage, most rural families still believed that it is not 'worth' investing in their daughter's education. She added that if a family had to choose between investing in education for a son or a daughter, they would 'definitely choose' to invest in their son, and that as a result, most rural women have few opportunities to improve their living conditions. It is important to emphasize that in recent years there have been indications that these gender disparities in basic education in China have decreased dramatically. However, in China's poorer rural areas it remains a valid concern (Hannum, Kong, and Zhang, 2009: 5).

China's economic reforms and the growth of the industrial sector have changed women's labour opportunities in rural areas (Beaver, Hou, and Wan, 1995; Murphy, Tao, and Lu, 2011: 667).²² Nevertheless, during the 1980s and 1990s young women were still often considered marginal to the rural economy and men usually had a better chance of obtaining non-agricultural work (Bauer et al., 1992; Fu, 1984; Honig and Hershatler, 1988). Over the years, socio-cultural traditions rooted in Confucianism, have reinforced a division of labour leading both men and women to be channelled into 'gender-segregated jobs' (Fan, 2003: 24). This division became a dominant mode of household production in China's rural areas; in some cases, economic growth led women workers to be gradually eased out of the labour force and given primary responsibility for their homes and their families' welfare (Beaver, Hou, and Wang, 1995: 208; Fan, 2003). While before 1980, most women participated in the collective agricultural labour force, in the subsequent years, women have gradually returned home. Most unmarried women entered the labour force, but after marriage they returned home, especially after they gave birth. As a result, the traditional notion that 'men are in charge of the outside things, and women are in charge of the inside things' (*nan zhu wai; nu zhu nei*) has re-emerged, and with it women were given a new social status, that of the *jiating funu* ('housewife') (Zhang and Ma 1988, cited in Beaver, Hou, and Wang 1995: 212).

The structural level: '*nan zhu wai; nu zhu nei*'

When I met Wang Jian in 2011, she was a housewife. She did not have a paying job and her husband Lau, who worked as a luggage carrier in a five-star hotel in Kowloon, spent many hours at work. He often left the house very early, returned home late, and worked night and weekend shifts. Wang Jian was the main caretaker and rarely received any assistance from other family members. Like Wang Jian, most of the marriage migrants I

22 In a 1986 report of 323 counties in 14 provinces, women accounted for 35-45 percent of the total number of workers in specialized trades (Xiao, 1986, cited in Beaver, Hou, and Wang, 1995: 206). In a study about the implications of economic reform on rural women's lives in two different townships in northern China, it is demonstrated that in the township of Taoxianxiang, women's positions in their families have improved dramatically. According to Taoxianxiang's party secretary, women's earnings have also increased: 'from this labour, women's earnings are comparable to, or greater than, those of labourer's in factories, the preferred occupation for Taoxianxiang men' (Beaver, Hou, and Wang, 1995: 222).

knew in Sheung Shui did not work outside their homes until their children began to attend primary school – even though many of the families could have used the extra income and the women had previously worked as labour migrants. The traditional phrase ‘men are in charge of the outside things, and women are in charge of the inside things’ characterized many of the cross-border marriages. The fact that many of the women did not work was not exceptional for married women in Hong Kong; the labour force participation rate for all married women in Hong Kong is relatively low in comparison to single women. In 2011, the labour force participation rate for Hong Kong women who had never been married was 67.2 percent, compared to 46.8 percent for women who had been married. At the same time, the labour force participation rate for Hong Kong men stood at 70.1 percent (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2012). The latest data from 2016 reveals that there has not been a major change in the patterns of the labour force participation rate: the percentage for women who had never been married was 70.3 and for married women it was 48.6 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2017). In other words, in most families in Hong Kong men continue to be the primary breadwinners. Low levels of education, lack of Cantonese proficiency, the presence of kindergarten and school-aged children in the family, and the inability to hire outside help have all been identified as negative correlates for married women’s continued participation in the Hong Kong workforce (Lau, Ma, and Chan, 2006). As immigrants, limited social contacts also influenced the employment opportunities of the Shueng Shui marriage migrants in Hong Kong.

One reason for feeling insecure when searching for employment was immigrants’ level of proficiency in Cantonese. When I first entered the field, many of the marriage migrants had been living in Hong Kong for several years and, even though it was not their mother tongue, they could understand and speak Cantonese freely. Nevertheless, the Sheung Shui marriage migrants often told me that their Cantonese was ‘not good enough’. Even after living in Hong Kong for more than eight years, and although she spoke fluent Cantonese, Wang Jian still thought that her Cantonese was *hen cha* (‘very bad’). Similar remarks expressing disappointment in their Cantonese proficiency were often made by mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong, regardless of how long they had been living in Hong Kong. Cantonese is the local dialect in Guangdong Province, and most Sheung Shui marriage migrants began learning Cantonese as labour migrants in Shenzhen, either at work or by watching television. Some of the most popular mainland Chinese television programs are aired in Hong Kong with

Cantonese subtitles.²³ Watching mainland Chinese programs was a common part of their leisure time, and television was an important instrument by which the women could improve their Cantonese.

The necessity of knowing Cantonese and its expressed superiority over Mandarin was widespread not only in Hong Kong but also in Guangdong Province, and it influenced rural labour migrants' working and living experiences. In a study about a factory in Shenzhen, Pun Ngai has demonstrated that Cantonese is a major component in shaping workplace hierarchies. Cantonese was considered powerful: subordinates who were not native speakers but learned to speak Cantonese fluently were appreciated and had a better chance of receiving a promotion. Those who could not speak Cantonese often dealt with misunderstandings with their superiors. According to Ngai, if a worker did not want to remain at the bottom of the work hierarchy, they had to learn Cantonese, or at least understand enough to survive in the workplace (Ngai, 1999: 9). On the other side of the border, Cantonese was not only considered superior to Mandarin, but was also regarded as 'a way' into Hong Kong society. The migrants' spouses considered Cantonese to be an important element in their wives' integration and most did not make the effort to learn Mandarin. As a result, all of the couples that I came to know in Sheung Shui spoke Cantonese with each other, and in most cases the mainland mother also spoke Cantonese with her child/ren. A-lin's husband proudly told me that his wife spoke Cantonese better than any mainlander he knew. He then added that 'if Hong Kong people do not look at his wife but only listen to her speak, they will have a hard time knowing she is an immigrant from mainland China.'

The status of Cantonese in Hong Kong has changed in recent years. When I first began my fieldwork, although they described their Cantonese proficiency as 'not good enough', Sheung Shui marriage migrants spoke Cantonese with their spouses, and in many cases with their children, especially outside the home. In addition, the young Hong Kongers I came to know during my fieldwork spoke only Cantonese with one another; with me they spoke English. However, as my fieldwork progressed, I noticed that Mandarin's position within Hong Kong's society was gradually changing. First, as the number of mainland Chinese tourists and commuters grew, and Mandarin

23 While a similar character system base is used in Mandarin and Cantonese, the pronunciation varies and mainlanders who speak Mandarin will not be able to understand Cantonese and vice versa. While there are major differences in the oral language the written system (characters) used for Mandarin and Cantonese share the same roots in ancient China. Since the 1950s, Mandarin uses simplified characters, while Cantonese still uses the traditional characters.

could often be heard on public transportation, in shopping centres, and restaurants in Hong Kong. Second, my Hong Kong informants began telling me that the number of mainland employees was rising and that they were working more closely with the mainland, and as a result they needed to speak Mandarin on every day basis. On one occasion, I called Sara, one of my Hong Kong informants who worked in a publishing company, and was surprised to hear her answering the phone with *wei* (the Chinese way of answering a phone call), as opposed to “hello” as she had before. Third, Sheung Shui marriage migrants themselves started emphasizing the advantages that their children had over local children. They realized that speaking fluent Mandarin would be an advantage in the future and they claimed that their children aced the Mandarin classes they attended in school. These changes in attitude have been confirmed by recent studies showing that more Hong Kong families are aware that fluency in Mandarin may be a key for success in Hong Kong (e.g. Liu, 2017). Ruth Benny, founder of the Hong Kong-based education consultancy Top Schools, claims that 99 percent of the families she meets, both local and expatriate, strongly preferred that their children master Mandarin rather than Cantonese. While more Hong Kong parents are noticing the importance of education, there is also growing anger and fear about the future of Cantonese, which is perceived as an eminent part of the uniqueness of Hong Kong (Liu, 2017).

While their Cantonese proficiency level had a significant impact on their employment opportunities, the primary reason most Sheung Shui marriage migrants did not work outside the home was related to their position in the marriage. In all the families I knew in Sheung Shui, the men were the bread-winners; their jobs often required them to return home late; some worked night shifts and slept throughout the day, while others worked relatively far from Sheung Shui and returned home only during the weekends. The women's natal families lived in mainland China and in most cases the husband's family did not take an active part in caring for the children. As a result, Sheung Shui marriage migrants were the main caretakers, which meant that they had to be available when their children returned from kindergarten or school. As Wang Jian explained, working outside the home ‘is not an option’:

We [the mainland marriage migrants] can't work because there is no one to look after our children. Hong Kong grandparents don't want to take care of a baby whose mother is from China. Hong Kong women earn 20,000 HKD a month, so they can afford a nanny, but if we worked we would earn around 8000 HKD. 5000 HKD will go to the nanny, so it is not worth going to work.

Hiring a nanny in Hong Kong is a very common phenomenon and many families, including those making average wages, hire nannies who reside with the family and take care of the household and the children. For a short while, A-lin was also thinking of hiring a nanny and finding a job, but she eventually decided that she would be her son's best caretaker, and that her son 'needed her' to help him prepare for first grade. The marriage migrants' role as the main caretaker was the unsigned contract between them and their spouse. This characterized the hierarchy of most of the cross-border marriages. In fact, many of the marriage migrants told me that the main reason they did not look for a job outside the home was that their husbands preferred that they did not work. Wang Jian explained that her husband was working hard enough and that he preferred her to stay home and take care of their house, their daughter, and him.

Sheung Shui marriage migrants were aware that their employment opportunities were relatively limited and accepted the idea that it would be difficult to find a caretaker for their children. However, they also told me that if they were in a position to make their own choice, they would leave the home sphere and find employment. Although A-lin's Cantonese level was very high and her son's day in the kindergarten ended at 5 PM, she did not have a paying job when we first met and she spent most of her days with her mainland friends. I asked A-lin about her views about how she spends her mornings and she told me that she was very bored at home and that she would have loved to learn English and then find a job. After A-lin's son turned five years old, she decided, together with her neighbour Fan, another mainland Chinese woman married to a Hong Kong man, to sign up for a local course intended to train women to become beauty consultants. A-lin had done this kind of work in Shenzhen, and although she was not sure how she would handle the situation with her son, she was eager to leave the home sphere for a few hours a day.

The Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education offers vocational education to post-secondary students in Hong Kong. The course that A-lin and Fan took covered different fields. To pass the course and receive the diploma, the students had to take an exam, and at the end of the course representatives from different beauty parlours in Hong Kong visited the school and interviewed the participants. The participants had to prove their ability to speak a few simple sentences in English. It was quite difficult for A-lin and Fan to attend the classes, which were located about a thirty-minute train ride from Sheung Shui and ended in the afternoon after the children returned home from kindergarten. Because A-lin's spouse returned home only during the weekends and Fan's spouse returned home quite late

on weekdays, they asked Wang Jian and me to pick up the children from kindergarten and take care of them until they returned home.

It was very important for A-lin to succeed in the course and she took it very seriously; she even asked me to help her prepare for the English interview. After Fan and A-lin successfully graduated from the course, they both received job offers at beauty parlours they considered to be 'very good'. Although they were both very excited to finally work outside the home, they eventually chose to decline the offers. A-lin told me that because the work-hours will not allow her to pick up her son from kindergarten 'there is nothing she can do'. She explained that in Fan's case, even if she were to find a caretaker for her son, her husband preferred that she did not work. In other words, not only were the mothers responsible for taking care of the child, but even in cases where they were able to hire a nanny or work in accordance with their child's school schedule, the wishes of their spouse were more important and the 'contract' was not negotiable.

The marriage migrants' employment opportunities changed when their children began to attend primary school. Unlike kindergarten, primary school lasted every weekday from 8 AM to 4 PM, giving the women more free time. At school, the mothers made new social contacts which created new opportunities. In addition, as the children grew up and the women felt more confident in their marriage and in living in Hong Kong, the men intervened less in their wives' schedules. After their child began to attend first grade, some of the marriage migrants searched for activities outside the home sphere. A-lin started volunteering at her son's primary school for a few hours per day, three days a week. Wang Jian and Yang Yan found employment at a local primary school, three days a week, three hours a day, preparing lunchboxes for school children. Their salary was 100 HKD per day (approx. 17 USD). When I asked A-lin how she felt about this change in her life, she said that although she did not earn any money 'she is very happy to do it'.

Although working outside the home was a relatively fresh change, many of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants did not regard it as a key change that had a major influence on their social role or sense of belonging to Hong Kong society. As Sheung Shui marriage migrants' journey in Hong Kong continued, their Cantonese improved, but most of them still did not pursue vocational or higher education. They were still bound to their child/ren's school schedule, and their employment opportunities remained quite limited even after their children began to attend first grade. During our gatherings, the women usually asked one another whether they were 'currently working'. In other words, the 'employment discourse' usually centred on the women's current employment situation, as opposed to thinking of their employment

as a permanent situation or developing a career. Like rural labour migrants in China's cities, whose labour is devalued as having 'low quality' (Anagnost, 2004) and regarded as purchasable at a low price (Zhang, 2014: 18), Sheung Shui marriage migrants took part-time jobs which were considered marginal to Hong Kong's economy.

A few months after A-lin began volunteering at her son's school, I asked her once again over Facebook chat how she spends her days:

I spend my time pretty much as before, like a housewife (*shinai shenghuo*). From Monday to Friday I am busy making breakfast and packing lunch for my son's school. During the mornings I also do some volunteer work at the school. If I don't go to the school I meet with friends and have breakfast, play cards, but recently I don't play as much as before. In the evenings I prepare dinner for my son and then we do the homework together. On the weekends my husband returns, and we go to eat outside, drink coffee.

Even though A-lin began volunteering at a school three days a week, she still felt that she was a 'housewife'. Importantly, the phrase A-lin used to describe her social role was in Cantonese rather than Mandarin, indicating that she was evaluating herself according to Hong Kong society. Although she managed to find volunteer work outside the home, she felt it had relatively little influence on her position in her marriage or in society in general.

In the winter of 2015, about two years after the above Facebook conversation, A-lin was no longer volunteering. She explained that now that her child was at school, he was very busy and had many tasks to complete every day. As a result, she did not have time to work. A-lin further explained that because she had to help her son with all his tasks, she did not get to meet her friends as frequently as she had before. Each day when her son Yueyue returned home they did his homework together. She sat next to him and closely watched that he completed all his assignments in the best possible manner. This usually took them more than three hours, and then it was already time to eat dinner, take a shower, and go to bed. A-lin prepared a hot meal every day and they sat to eat together. After her son fell asleep, A-lin prepared his breakfast for the next day and put the school uniform on the sofa. In the morning, she woke up early and walked her son to school.

In her book about Japanese housewives, Goldstein-Gidoni (2012: 97-98) mentioned that the question of the division of labour in the domestic sphere is normally discussed in relation to working mothers, who are pressured between their employment outside the home and the burden of the 'second shift', which includes different household chores and child-rearing

(Hochschild and Machung, 1989). Goldstein-Gidoni (2012) argues that it is also important to consider the division of labour in the home sphere with regards to women who do not hold paying jobs, as it can contribute to our understanding of women and their perspectives on themselves and their social role. While the term 'division of labour' is often used to identify and better understand the complexities between women and men's abstract relationships, it also contributes to a better understanding of the social, economic, and cultural relations between the state, the labour market, and the home (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2012). A-lin's everyday practices demonstrate that in some cases after their child began to attend first grade, instead of having more free time to search for employment or spend time with friends, the mothers found themselves under additional pressure and even experienced increased isolation, since their time to meet their mainland friends for breakfast or have joint dinners became limited. The children's schedule was still the major anchor in the marriage migrants' everyday lives, and since they rarely received help from family members their employment opportunities remained limited and marginal in their lives. Because her spouse worked outside of Sheung Shui, A-lin was the main caretaker and was in charge of the household tasks. In this sense, the traditional phrase *nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei* ('men are in charge of the outside things, and women are in charge of the inside things') characterized A-lin and Cheng's relationship. However, although this may seem like a fixed 'contract', A-lin and Cheng's relationship contained different layers. For example, every day when A-lin and her son sat to eat dinner, she would take her phone and place it on the table in an upright position. She would then videocall her spouse, who was at work, and he would 'eat with them'. In this sense, although Cheng was physically absent, he still took an active part in the dinner. Although the spouses were absent from everyday activities in many of the families I came to know, I was able to witness the complexity of the emotions between the mainland wives and their Hong Kong husbands.

The individual level: Social gatherings and social relations as empowering strategies

Almost every morning after bringing their child/ren to the kindergarten, the Sheung Shui marriage migrants went to have breakfast together. These breakfasts became an everyday habit and were an important part of their everyday schedule. The Cantonese restaurant we regularly visited was located inside a shopping mall in Sheung Shui, close to the kindergarten our

children attended, and was considered one of the most popular restaurants in town. It was very large, with round tables – each covered with a light-coloured tablecloth – that could fit more than ten people scattered around the room. The floors were covered with wall-to-wall carpeting, and there were no windows, which contributed to a feeling of isolation from the world outside. Large chandeliers hung from the ceiling and the florescent lights were very bright. The tables were crowded with families or friends, and all through the day it was difficult to find an empty table. In most cases, on the way to the kindergarten one of us would make a reservation and we would find the table ready upon our return. The restaurant was so popular that in some cases we had to wait more than an hour for our table to be ready.

Next to each seat was placed a plate, a small bowl, a spoon, a cup for tea, and a pair of chopsticks. After everyone sat down, one of the women usually took charge of the order. The menu was made of paper and the guests were supposed to mark their order right on the menu. Many of the waitresses and cleaning staff were mainland marriage migrants; the group of women I came with often knew them and spoke with them for a few minutes. On some occasions the workers were from the same hometown as the guests, and then they would exchange a few sentences in their mother tongues. After the order was placed, one of the women, usually the one in charge of the order for that particular meal, began to clean the dishes that were on the table. She would pick up all the spoons, cups, and chopsticks and place them in a large bowl that was brought to the table. Then she poured hot water from the pot onto the dishes in the bowl, rattling the dishes around so every side received the hot liquid. After a few seconds, the woman who 'washed' the dishes would give them back to the others. In most cases, Wang Jian was responsible for ordering the food and cleaning the dishes. When I asked her the reason for cleaning dishes which already seemed very clean, she replied that it was a 'local custom' and something they only do in Hong Kong.

The women were familiar with the exact gestures they should make during breakfast. For example, when the teapot was empty, they knew that the lid should be lifted. This was a sign indicating that the waitress should fill up the pot. When one of the women poured more tea into her cup, the others tapped on the table to let her know that she should fill their cups as well. Although most Sheung Shui marriage migrants were not originally from Guangdong Province and had not previously been used to the local cuisine, after a few years of living in Hong Kong they were already familiar with most of the Cantonese dishes. Their encounter with Hong Kong culture did not occur after immigrating to Hong Kong. Since the marriage migrants were

labour migrants in Shenzhen before meeting their husbands, many had visited Hong Kong-style restaurants in Shenzhen and were familiar with some of the Cantonese dishes from there. Although in contemporary Hong Kong friends often split the bill in joined gatherings, we never split our bill and instead paid in rotation. In keeping with the mainland custom, each of the guests would insist on paying until the rest of us gave up. Breakfast usually ended around 11 AM; because the children's school day ended only a little later, we did not return home after breakfast. Instead, we strolled the streets together, hung out in Sheung Shui shopping malls, or bought groceries in the local market. At noon, we went to pick up the children together. We usually made our arrangements for the rest of the day as a group, often making plans for the rest of the afternoon and dinner on our way home from the kindergarten.

When the weather allowed, we spent our afternoons in the square and playgrounds outside the buildings where we lived. The building my family and I resided in was part of a compound that included four buildings. Each building had 33 floors and housed close to 200 families. The compound was very conveniently located close to the train station and stores. The apartments were small (approx. 30 square meters), and as a result the mothers and the children preferred to spend their afternoons outside. Many of the young families who lived in the compound comprised a mainland Chinese mother and a Hong Kong father. After the children completed their kindergarten or school tasks, the mothers went down to the square and the children played together. It was a time for the mothers to meet new mainland neighbours and chat with women they had not seen for a while. Often at dinner time, we did not return to our individual homes, instead going to one of the apartments to have dinner together. In addition to our everyday gatherings, during the holidays or on special occasions we would meet for a meal which included a larger number of marriage migrants. During these gatherings, the host prepared different kinds of dishes, in most cases associated with her hometown. At a special lunch Wang Jian hosted in her apartment to celebrate the Chinese New Year of 2015, there were more than fifteen mainland marriage migrants in attendance, many of them friends who had not seen each other for a relatively long time since they had moved to different parts of Hong Kong. The table included more than ten different special Hunan dishes and some of the guests also brought their own regional specialties. Others brought wine or dessert. The women took pride in their home's dishes and they took photos of them which were uploaded to Facebook and We Chat and sent to their family and friends back home.

The event Wang Jian hosted lasted several hours; the women drank red wine and the atmosphere was very vibrant. At 3:30 PM when it was time to pick up the children from school, most of the guests remained at Wang Jian's apartment while I went with her to pick up the children. Wang Jian told me that when she immigrated to Hong Kong there were only few mainland women in Sheung Shui, but that recently more and more mainland women were living there. Wang Jian explained this was a 'problem' for her, because her apartment was too small to fit all her new mainland friends. Wang Jian conveyed that although she has been living in Hong Kong for more than eight years, all her friends in Hong Kong were originally from mainland China, and that 'Hong Kong women look down at us' (the mainland immigrants) (*kan bu qi women*).

As a result of their feelings of exclusion, Sheung Shui marriage migrants maintained close contacts with each other. They were involved in their friends' lives, often counted on each other's support, and their social networks functioned as a strategy for dealing with the isolation they experienced. The women's mutual assistance and cooperation was especially evident during our joint gatherings. On weekdays when we met for dinner the host was in charge of preparing most of the dishes, but the other women took an active part in the preparations and the cleaning afterwards. The meal was a communal activity which was regarded by the women as a joint responsibility. In many cases even choosing the dishes and purchasing the ingredients at the local market was done together; if one of the women went to buy the groceries on her own, the other mothers would take care of her child/ren while she was gone. While the host was preparing the food in the kitchen, the other women would set the table; they did not need to ask where the utensils were, as they were familiar with their friend's kitchen and felt free to open the refrigerator and cupboards. When dinner ended, the women acted as if it was their own home; together, they would wash the bowls, clean the table, and contemplate how to save and pack the leftover food. In some cases, the leftovers were packed in boxes and given to the guests to take home for their spouse. Even though in some cases the mainland marriage migrants who participated in the gathering were not close friends or had only known each other for a relatively short time, their spouses' absence and their own isolation from Hong Kong society resulted in a feeling of a shared destiny. On many occasions Sheung Shui marriage migrants also felt a certain degree of obligation towards their mainland friends' children. This became prominent during our social gatherings, when the mothers often commented on their friends' children's behaviour or addressed the children's requests or problems. For example, when the children were called to stop

playing and come to the table, one of the mothers usually encouraged all the children (and not only her own) to wash their hands and go sit down. She then went to the washroom and made sure that the children were doing as she asked. The children did not necessarily sit next to their own mother, and during the meal the mothers helped each other's children fill their bowls and even persuaded them to eat.

One Sunday morning in the summer of 2013, I joined a large breakfast with ten mainland marriage migrants. Because it was the summer holiday four children also joined us. Chun, a 39-year-old mainland marriage migrant from Sichuan, was Wang Jian's closest friend. During my fieldwork, Chun discovered that her husband had a mainland girlfriend with whom he spent time whenever he travelled to Shenzhen for business. The couple got divorced; her husband moved to Shenzhen to live with his girlfriend and almost lost contact with his children. As a result, Chun went through an extremely difficult period, during which she attempted to commit suicide. Chun's mainland friends supported her in any way they could. During that breakfast, Chun's daughter Lily asked her mother for a glass of Coke, but Chun did not agree and continued chatting with her friends. Lily did not give up and asked a few more times. After a short while, Chun lost her patience and began yelling at Lily. Lily started crying and when she did not stop, her mother lost her temper and began hitting her. Wang Jian, who was sitting next to Lily, hugged her and comforted her. Lily continued crying, but after a few moments Chun calmed down and stopped hitting her daughter. During the whole episode, the women sitting at the table did not say a word to Chun, instead embracing Lily until she stopped crying. That afternoon, A-lin told me that even though she did not agree with Chun's behaviour, she did not want to judge her because everyone has their own method of educating their children. The women's treatment of Lily was part of providing support for the family as a whole. The support Sheung Shui marriage migrants provided to their mainland friends was a strategy to deal with and negotiate the structural conditions they encountered in their everyday lives.

In addition to the joint meals, playing the Chinese tile game of Mahjong (*majiang*) was a major component of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants' everyday lives. The game usually took place in one of the women's homes; in many cases, other women besides the four players would arrive with snacks and drinks and the game would become a social event. Usually, these games lasted between two and ten hours. Although the women began to play when the children were still at school, in some cases the game lasted for a long time, so one of the guests would be sent to pick up the children and bring

them to the apartment where the game was taking place. Even after the children returned, the game did not end, and the children completed their homework assignments or played together while the mothers continued their game. Sometimes on weekdays the game lasted until 9 or 10 PM and the children would fall asleep on the sofa. During weekends when the fathers were home, the game could last until 2 or 3 in the morning.

Mahjong was not only a social gathering and a desired way to spend the day; it was also an empowering activity. During the game, the women often bet small amounts of money which contributed to the excitement. Occasionally they lost or earned relatively large amounts. Whenever one of the women won a few hundred Hong Kong Dollars, she felt pride. Since most of the women did not have a permanent paying job, Mahjong presented a non-conventional opportunity to earn their own living in Hong Kong. One evening, in a Facebook chat I had with A-lin's spouse, Cheng he told me that although it is already very late, he was not yet asleep because he was waiting for his wife to return from a Mahjong game. Cheng said that his wife had told him that she would not be home until 3:30 AM. After a few minutes, he wrote: 'Haha! She is back on time! She won 200 HKD tonight and 800 HKD last night.' On rare occasions one of the spouses joined the game, but most of them did not know how to play and in general it was considered the mainland marriage migrants' sphere.

In both mainland China and Hong Kong, Mahjong is considered a complicated game that is not easy to learn. In Hong Kong it is also regarded as an activity that is mainly conducted by retired people or men and women who were unemployed and had enough spare time to invest in the game. All the mainland marriage migrants I met in Sheung Shui spent a significant amount of their time playing Mahjong. Yet, because it was time-consuming and in many cases the marriage migrants lost large amounts of money during the game, they often announced that 'from now and on I will not play anymore'. Since the game was an important part of many of the marriage migrants' everyday lives, not playing also meant missing social events and the women usually returned to being active players after a short while.

When I returned to Hong Kong in the winter of 2015, A-lin told me that she rarely played Mahjong anymore. She explained that she was too busy with her son's schoolwork and that the game demanded too much time. However, instead of being a player, A-lin had become a game organizer and a host. She bought an electronic Mahjong table for 4000 HKD (approx. 500 USD) and placed it in the middle of her living room. The table was unique and had different functions to automatically deal and arrange the tiles. A-lin told me that she bought the table 'to make money'. She explained

that usually twice a week, four women (all mainland marriage migrants, and usually not close friends) rented the table and played at her apartment from around 10 AM to 6 PM. The amount paid for a whole day's game was a total of 160 HKD for the four players (approx. 20 USD); if A-lin provided the players with meals throughout the day, then the price was 240 HKD (approx. 30 USD). Being a game 'host' enabled A-lin to earn money and at the same time, to not be part of an activity that is associated with unemployment. It was an empowering strategy that she used to differentiate herself from the image of the 'bored' marriage migrant. Since A-lin's spouse preferred that she did not work outside the home, the fact that she found a way to earn money, even if it was in the home sphere, showed not only her ability to exert agency, but also that the contract between her and her spouse was not static.

Sheung Shui marriage migrants spent most of their time with other marriage migrants who shared similar schedules and livelihood problems and concerns. Even after living in Hong Kong for long periods, most of the women did not have close Hong Kong friends, and they experienced feelings of exclusion from the local society. During the joint gatherings, the women were stripped of their 'otherness'. While 'outside' they were bound to the local structure, the joint gatherings enabled them to make their own rules and behave according to them. Even if their children or spouses did take part in the activities, the children and the spouses were relatively marginal to the activities. In many ways, the mainland marriage migrants' social gatherings could be understood as 'experimental regions of culture,' regions 'where not only new elements but also new combinatory rules may be introduced' (Turner, 1974: 61). At the same time, the freedom produced at the individual and group level existed within the context of limited social mobility and was usually practiced only in the confined and crowded spaces of the women's private homes.

The geographic level: Transnational ties

Before the Communists came to power in China in 1949, daughters were usually regarded as having no economic value for their birth parents. Marriage was considered an opportunity for the natal family to be compensated for raising a daughter, and the common compensation was in the form of a bride price (Fan and Huang, 1998: 230; Tang, Ma, and Shi, 2009). After marriage, women usually left their homes to live with their husbands' families, and as a result their ties with their village and natal family weakened (Andors,

1983: 56; Honig and Hershatler, 1988: 166; Johnson, 1983: 8-9; Zhang, 2009: 256-7). The implementation of the Open-Door Policy in the late 1970s caused widespread social and economic transformations. These changes have had a significant influence on the relationship between married daughters and their natal families. In fact, recent studies demonstrate that in contemporary China most married women have increasing contact with their natal families (Zhang, 2009; Shen, 2016; Wong, 2016). Consequently, women are no longer considered 'spilt water', as was the case in traditional Chinese patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal society. To gain social and familial support, daughters maintain closer ties with their natal families, while parents gain social and economic support from their daughters (Zhang, 2009). The changing nature of the relationship between women and their natal families is a manifestation of the general improvement of women's position in society, as well as the increasing educational and employment opportunities available to both rural and urban women (Wong, 2016).

Upon discussing their reasons for leaving their homes at a relatively young age and becoming labour migrants, most Sheung Shui marriage migrants expressed a desire to *gaibian ziji de shenghuo* ('change their lives') and also to feel *ziyou* ('free'). This freedom was closely related to their ability to earn their own living. As labour migrants, most women spent between 10 to 12 hours per day outside the home, working and earning their own income before they permanently immigrated to Hong Kong. They were economically independent and it enabled them to send money to their natal families on a regular basis. However, their marriage to a Hong Kong man signified a major change in their daily lived experiences. Most of the women quit their jobs after marriage or during pregnancy, and as a result became economically dependent on their spouses. Although in some cases they did work outside the home after their children grew and entered primary school, it was usually only part-time. However, Sheung Shui marriage migrants continued to send money to their natal families in mainland China on a regular basis even after permanently immigrating to Hong Kong. Marriage migration was viewed by both the women and their natal families as having an impact not only on the women and their children-to-be, but on the future of the whole family. For example, Fan told me that her parents viewed her marriage to a Hong Kong man as 'a very good thing which could improve the family's economic condition and contribute to a happy living' (*keyi gaishan jiali jingji tiaojian, guo shang xingfu shenghuo*). Most of the women indicated that their relationship with their natal families had improved after their marriage. Although in most cases they were able to send more money after they were married, they did not connect their financial support with the

improvement in their relationship with their natal families. It is reasonable to assume that their marriage to a Hong Kong man and the general increase in their social position also had a positive effect on their relations. Although all the replies I received from Sheung Shui marriage migrants indicated that their families were quite pleased with their marriage to a Hong Kong man, their move to Hong Kong also meant that they only saw their natal families once or twice a year, which was an emotional burden.

Even though in most families the wives did not control the household budget, they had access to the family's bank account and made the decision about whether and how much money to send to their families. In fact, in many cases, even if the spouses knew that money was being sent, they were not involved in the process and often did not know the exact amount that was sent. For example, before A-lin and her son travelled to Sichuan Province for a family visit, a few days before the Chinese New Year in 2015, Cheng told me that he knew his wife took 'a lot of money with her' each time she travelled to the mainland. He also mentioned that, while traditionally Chinese children often received paper money as a gift for the New Year, in contemporary China a child would not accept less than a one hundred Hong Kong dollar bill. When I asked him how much Hong Kong children receive, he replied: 'no more than twenty'. In other words, Cheng viewed his wife's habit of sending money to her family not as a traditional Chinese custom which he could relate to, but as an act of greed – as something disconnected from the Chinese tradition. Cheng's opinion on this issue was in accordance with the negative views he often expressed towards mainland China and mainland Chinese habits. Sheung Shui marriage migrants explained that their spouses 'did not mind' (*meiyou yijian*) that they sent money to their natal families. In practice, the meaning of 'he does not mind' – or 'does not have an opinion' in a more literal translation – was that Hong Kong men did not stop their wives from sending their mainland families money. The husbands believed that the wife's continuing relationship with her natal family was inevitable and must take place. In fact, the women's contacts with their natal families were perceived as an integral part of the gender contract.

In addition to supporting their natal families financially, Shui marriage migrants travelled to mainland China to visit their parents at least once a year, usually during the spring break or summer holiday. Since the children's vacation lasted almost two months, their visits were quite long and lasted about three to four weeks. Some of the women also went back to mainland China for shorter visits during the Chinese New Year. When traveling for a family visit, Sheung Shui marriage migrants always took their children with them, while in most cases their spouse remained in Hong Kong. The

main reason given for the husbands only infrequently accompanying their wives was that they could not get time off from work – but in some cases the husbands simply preferred to remain in Hong Kong, even during the Chinese New Year when they were on holiday. Cheng told me that he did not like to travel with his wife to Sichuan Province and that he had last visited her family about four years before. Cheng emphasized that he just did not like spending time in mainland China and described his previous visit to his wife's home as a negative experience. Even when Cheng talked about his wife's family, he often drew a line between his lifestyle in Hong Kong and her family's lifestyle. Cheng told me that a few years ago he had joined his wife and son to visit his wife's family in Sichuan Province. Cheng described the visit in a very negative way: 'Can you imagine, sitting in your own living room and spitting right on the floor [...] I can't understand how people could live this way.' Visiting family and old friends in mainland China was the marriage migrants' sphere. They usually decided if and when to travel and made the travelling arrangements by themselves. Although there are indications that in contemporary rural China more men accompany their wives to visit their natal families (Zhang, 2009: 265), in most cases, this change did not characterize cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men. This does not mean that the Hong Kong spouses did not cross the border at all – in some cases they did join their wife for the visit or even went on a family trip to a famous site in the mainland – but in general the decision to travel, the arrangements, and the visits were part of the women's sphere. This arrangement signified the social and cultural relations between the spouses' feelings of local identity and the home. The men saw themselves as Hong Kongers, and in most cases did not feel an obligation towards their wives' natal families, instead choosing to remain on the 'Hong Kong side of the border.'

When we got together to celebrate the approaching Spring Festival of 2015, the marriage migrants discussed their upcoming plans for the holiday. When Wang Jian discovered that most of her mainland friends were planning to travel to their home provinces in the next few days, she mentioned that this year she had decided not to travel. She explained that visiting her home village meant having to spend a large amount of money on presents for her classmates and red envelopes for her sisters' children, all of which she considered a heavy financial burden. Nevertheless, after many of her mainland friends left Hong Kong for their New Year family visit, Wang Jian eventually decided to return to Hunan Province to visit her family. Although Wang Jian's parents had both passed away and even though she had been living in Hong Kong for close to nine years, she still wanted to spend the

New Year with her sisters and old classmates in her home village. In one of our conversations a few days before the Chinese New Year she told me that she had very good friends in Hong Kong but that her family was in Hunan Province. During her visit, Wang Jian uploaded photos of herself in Hunan with old classmates and family members to WeChat (a popular chat application). In her description of the photos Wang Jian stated, 'I just could not be away from my dear ones'. In a conversation two weeks before the Chinese New Year of 2015, A-xian, a mainland marriage migrant who had been living in Hong Kong for eight years, explained that she missed her family in Guangxi Province especially during that time of the year, but that she could not return home because of her work. The women's alienation in Hong Kong became especially prominent during the holidays. Yang Yan also conveyed that she did not like to remain in Hong Kong during the Chinese New Year because the atmosphere was not as 'warm' and 'exciting' as in mainland China.

Although Sheung Shui marriage migrants travelled to mainland China only once or twice a year, many communicated with their natal families on a regular basis. One of the main reasons that it was quite easy for the marriage migrants to keep in touch with their families and old friends was the constant use of smartphones. Through online chat applications, they could easily speak or send messages at a relatively low cost. Living in Hong Kong did not disconnect them from their families, and it seemed as if they were very involved not only in their mainland friends' lives in Hong Kong, but also in the lives of their mainland families and friends. During our joint gatherings, they often took photos of the dishes and uploaded them to their group chats. It took only a few seconds until they received responses from family members or friends, who immediately texted back. In addition to sharing posts and pictures, Skype was a common way of communication. A-lin spoke with her father on Skype every day; in fact, she told me that their relationship had become even closer after she got married and moved to Hong Kong. One evening, A-lin mentioned that she had just realized that her father had not called her that day, but then added that he probably knew she was busy and that is why he did not call. She thought of calling him but said that he was either asleep or watching television. In other words, even though they were more than a thousand kilometres apart, she was involved in her father's life and felt close to him. A-lin's close relationship with her natal family is further demonstrated in the following example.

A few weeks after A-lin graduated from the beauty consultants' course, she decided to find a solution to the problem of childcare, so that she could finally spend time outside her home. Because A-lin did not feel close to her

mother-in-law and occasionally even mentioned to me that she never helped take care of Yeuyue, she turned to her own parents. A-lin asked her parents who live in Sichuan Province to travel to Hong Kong and help her take care of her child, so that she could work for a short while. A-lin's parents received a three-month-permit and moved to Hong Kong to live with A-lin and her family. Although their apartment was quite small, her parents slept in her son's room and her son slept in his parents' bed like he did almost every night anyway because Cheng spent the weekdays outside Hong Kong for work. During those three months, A-lin worked at a beauty parlour and, according to what she told me, was very satisfied. When their permit ended after three months, her parents returned to Sichuan and A-lin quit her job to make herself available for her son again.

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, the division of labour between Sheung Shui marriage migrants and their spouses revealed a 'gender contract'. First, on the metaphysical level, cultural values rooted in Confucianism that dictate women's inferior position in their families and in society, continue to exist and dominate many of the marriages. As I have demonstrated, these cultural ideas were part of the reason young women decided to leave their homes in search of a better future in one of China's cities. Second, on the structural level, as immigrants from rural China they were situated at the margins of Hong Kong's society: their low levels of education, lack of language proficiency, and the presence of small children in their families are all significant barriers to the women's search for employment. This has left the women in the home sphere, economically dependent on their spouses. Because the men were the breadwinners, Sheung Shui marriage migrants were the main caretakers who had to remain at home, available to their children. On the individual level, in most cases men were reluctant to let their wife work outside the home. However, the marriage migrants' everyday practices also revealed the complexity and the dynamics which characterized the marriages. Their joint activities and the close ties they kept with other marriage migrants served as empowering strategies and allowed the women to negotiate the boundaries they encountered, both in society and in their marriages. Adding the geographical dimension further highlights the dynamic nature of the gender contract. Although the women were 'left' in the home sphere, they continued to have feelings of belonging to their home village, maintaining transnational ties that enabled them to negotiate their place within the marriage. In other words, their place of origin and the symbolic baggage it carried continued to impact the marriage migrants' experiences in Hong Kong.

4 Hong Kong's Education: A Bridge to the 'First World'

After bringing our children to kindergarten on one Friday morning, I went with A-lin to have breakfast in a Western-style cafe in Sheung Shui Centre. A-lin's son's kindergarten ended at 5 PM every day, and since her spouse's workplace was outside of Hong Kong, he returned home only on Friday nights. As a result, A-lin felt quite bored at home. She said that before their son was born, they used to go to Starbucks, drink coffee, and listen to music, and she had liked it very much. She told me that they had a wonderful relationship and that her husband was quite good to her and to her family, but then she added: 'I really don't know why he married me. He was born in a very good hospital, went to good kindergartens and schools, has a master's degree and I didn't do anything with my life.' This excerpt demonstrates the importance A-lin placed on education and the close connection she made between education and a person's socio-economic status. Linking the hospital where her husband was born with his academic achievements stresses her perception that the journey to achieve upward social and economic mobility begins at the very first stages of a person's life. While comparing her spouse's accomplishments to her lack of education signified the hierarchy that characterized their marriage, her description of the activities they enjoyed together also signified the complex forms of emotions their marriage generated. A-lin's views were common among Shueng Shui marriage migrants as well as mainland marriage migrants who lived in other areas of Hong Kong. They often expressed the importance of their children's education and the close connection between Hong Kong's education system and their children's future.

Education is often perceived as a means for obtaining geographical, social, cultural, and economic mobility. Previous research has indicated that parents' academic guidance, preparation and planning for educational aspiration are related to children's educational attainment (Levine and Havighurst, 1992). In many cases, parents' motivation for helping their children get what is usually referred to as 'high quality education' or 'good education' stems from the lack of opportunities in a specific region or home country. In contemporary China, education in its various forms is often considered a dream of experiencing the 'other' and searching for a 'better life'. Following Bourdieu (1986), I consider Sheung Shui marriage migrants pursuit of 'quality education' for their children to be part of a collective strategy to accumulate cultural capital with symbolic and potentially economic value. In a recent study, Chee (2017) argues that

pregnant women from mainland China give birth in Hong Kong 'to access motilities for their children'. However, after giving birth the mothers find themselves trapped 'physically, socially and psychologically' in a system that they are not able to access. In other words, according to Chee, these mothers might have provided a channel for mobility for their children, only to find themselves trapped – perhaps even more than they felt in the mainland. Unlike the mainland mothers in Chee's (2017) study who did not hold the OWP, Sheung Shui marriage migrants' legal status enabled them not only to provide mobility opportunities for their children, but also to try to transform their own social position in Hong Kong. Despite being able to move from rural to urban China and improve their economic situation, China's registration system did not enable them to receive institutional mobility. Furthermore, the women viewed Hong Kong as a destination that would provide social and cultural aspects which they viewed as desirable. Building on scholarship that examines education as an important social process which facilitates mobility, and on ethnographic data of the everyday parental practices of Sheung Shui marriage migrants, this chapter explores Sheung Shui marriage migrants' investment in their children's education. One of my main goals is to demonstrate that Sheung Shui marriage migrants perceived Hong Kong's educational system as a desired destination, which played a highly significant role in their everyday lives and in their journey towards achieving upward mobility. Thus, their legal status played a crucial role in their ability to focus on their children as a symbol of 'quality' and mobility.

The gap between rural and urban education in mainland China

In one of our conversations, Wang Jian asked about my work at the university. After I briefly described my daily routine, she told me that she could never imagine attending university. I was quite surprised with her remark and thus had to reflect on my response for a few moments. I began telling her that Hong Kong provides different opportunities for young women and that she should consider her possibilities. However, Wang Jian decisively explained that because of her rural background she simply 'could not do it'. Wang Jian's reply surprised me because while she was extremely confident with regards to her own lack of abilities, she was simultaneously extremely confident about her daughter's abilities. Wang Jian made a clear distinction between the opportunities that she believed she herself deserved in life and those that her daughter deserved. In other words, she thought that there were heavy consequences to the lack of stimulation which was a result of

the rural environment where she had grown up, and emphasized Hong Kong's enriching educational environment. Wang Jian's words echoed the discourse about differences in educational opportunities for China's rural and urban populations. In what follows I discuss the implications of this gap between the rural and urban sectors for children's educational opportunities, thereby shedding light on one of the main reasons Sheung Shui marriage migrants viewed Hong Kong a desired destination.

China's remarkable economic growth has attracted the attention of numerous scholars who have explored the underlying factors responsible for this dramatic change. Economists often attribute China's rapid economic growth to high savings, large-scale capital investments and the rapid growth of productivity (Hu and Khan, 1997; Whyte, 2009; Morrison, 2015). While this strategy has paid obvious dividends, in recent years more and more questions are being raised about its sustainability. According to neoclassical economic growth theory, long-term development relies on improvements to productivity that are primarily driven by the accumulation of human capital. Investment in human capital is a primary concern of China's government; since the 1980s, together with launching economic reforms, the government has been advancing and adjusting its education policies so that the system would be compatible with China's social and economic development. In other words, in China education is perceived as the basis for national development and modernization. The resulting social pressure to ensure that children attain a high socio-economic status through education has recently been described by some scholars as 'education fever' (Kipnis, 2011; Anderson and Kohler, 2012). Kipnis (2011: 1) argues that 'education desire' is a 'total' social phenomenon which penetrates every aspect of everyday life.

Official publications tend to emphasize the significant efforts that China has made to improve the educational system. One of the most important milestones was the implementation of The Law of Compulsory Education in 1986, and its new versions in 2006 and 2015. According to this law, all Chinese children have the right to receive nine years of compulsory education, exempted from tuition and miscellaneous fees. Furthermore, Article 3 of the law also emphasizes the importance of improving the quality of the provided education for the sake of the nation's future:

In compulsory education, the State policy on education must be implemented to improve the quality of instruction and enable children and adolescents to achieve all-round development – morally, intellectually and physically – so as to lay the foundation for improving the qualities of the entire nation and for cultivating well-educated and self-disciplined

builders of socialism with high ideals and moral integrity. (Ministry of Education of the Peoples Republic of China, 2018)

At the end of 2005, the State Council established a new financial system for compulsory education in rural areas with the aim of improving the educational attainments of rural children. The main idea behind this new system was to increase the level of investment in rural areas and to compel the local and central governments to share the education expenses of rural areas. The new policy resulted in the integration of the compulsory education guarantee mechanism in rural areas. According to a 2010 report by China's Ministry of Finance, 97 percent of the total financial investment in rural compulsory education came from the central government's budgetary allocation for education (OECD, 2016).

Even though primary and junior high school education has been free for all students since 2007, the annual fees for senior high school can exceed the annual income of a rural person. In most cases, university fees are even higher (Murphy, 2014: 33). Given the educational background of rural parents, the absence of one or both parents due to labour migration, limited school-family communication, and the lack of investment in rural areas, educational strategies are difficult to implement in the rural context. In other words, although the central government has exerted great efforts to develop access to better education for the rural and urban labour force since 1978, like other developing countries experiencing economic changes there continues to be inequality in the educational system (Zhang, Li, and Xue, 2015). As a result, there is still a significant difference between the educational opportunities and achievements of rural and urban children in contemporary China.

Wang Jian's explanation that her rural background anchored her to the home sphere is in line with the scholarly work that emphasizes differences between urban and rural environments and the implications of these differences for children's futures. In a study of rural parents' attitudes towards school learning, one of the fathers interviewed pointed at the yard of the house and cited a local saying, 'Here, you get up in the morning and see hills and pines, while in the city, you get up in the morning and see big buildings. There are only pines in the rural village. You see less, so the brain will be bad. In the city, there are lots of people. You see more, and your brain works well [...] it is a big difference' (Chi and Rao, 2003: 342). Because of their low status and everyday difficulties, rural parents view school education as a means to obtain a secure job and improve the family's living conditions. The rural parents in Chi and Rao's (2008) study emphasized that nothing

could be worse for their children than to be compelled to do farm work throughout their entire lives. The most important thing for the parents was for their child to find a stable job outside the village, and they believed that this could be done through education.

Although the educational opportunities of rural children are limited in comparison to those of urban children, recent studies conducted in China's rural areas demonstrate that rural parents were just as enthusiastic as urban parents about education. In a national survey conducted in 1988, 90 percent of rural parents wanted their children to leave the countryside (Kipnis, 2011: 17). In a study conducted in 2005-2006, 100 percent of the surveyed rural households answered affirmatively when asked whether they would like their children to pursue higher education (*ibid.*: 1). The increasing importance placed on education by rural parents is also manifested in a study conducted by the Chinese sociologist Gong Hong Lian (2005) in a township in Jiangxi province. Gong compared the educational approaches of the first-generation migrants who went to work in Shenzhen during the late 1980s with the second-generation migrants who had migrated during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Gong noted that the parents of the first-generation migrants had little education and wanted their children to work and earn as much money as possible. The mainland women I came to know in Sheung Shui were part of this first generation. They left their homes in search for employment and better opportunities and did not consider education a means to upward social mobility. Gong observed that second-generation migrants had a few more years of education and that their own migration experience had taught them that, even though uneducated people could earn money, those with more education could enjoy better quality lives and higher social status.

The importance of pursuing education for the sake of the family and parents' aspirations that their child will have the opportunity to leave the village are expressed in the excellent documentary film *The Last Train Home (guitu lieche)* (Fan, 2009). The film tells the story of a rural couple who leave their two children in the village in the care of their grandmother and travel thousands of miles to work as labour migrants in a clothing factory in Guangdong province. The remoteness of the village is sharply contrasted with the possibilities offered by the city. Throughout the film, both the parents who work long hours to support their family who stayed 'behind' in the village and the grandmother who takes care of the farm work and the children express deep concern about the children continuing their schoolwork so that they will someday have a chance to leave the village. The importance of education for rural children is expressed by the grandmother:

Who doesn't want their children to have a good life? One can only leave the countryside if they study hard. Life was tough back then; we never had enough to eat. We had holes in our clothes. At that time, I wanted to leave the countryside. But the country needed farm labour. Schoolchildren like me were asked to stay on the farm. We were called to support the agriculture. Otherwise, I would not have stayed here.

As the plot continues, we learn that although the parents have worked hard to ensure their children's future, as an act of rebellion their older daughter has decided to quit school at the age of seventeen and leave the village to become a labour migrant just like her parents. When her father goes to visit her for the first time, he tells her: 'You shouldn't be like us, first you quit school, and now you sew clothes [...] You should think things over.' When the parents go back to the village for a family visit during the Chinese New Year, the first thing the mother asks her son after not seeing him for a year is how he is doing in school and how his report card is: 'You are ranked fifth in your class? You should have done better.' When her son answers that he does not want to work too hard, she tells him: 'Do well in school; it will benefit you when you grow up.' To her daughter who left school, she says: 'A peasants' child must study hard. Otherwise you will end up like us.'

One of the main themes of the film is that the villagers view their own home as a constraining place which does not hold any promise for their children's future. Their only hope for their children is that they will leave the countryside, and this goal can be obtained through education. Kipnis (2001) argues that rural parents' desire for their child to leave the village is closely connected to their desire for their child to escape the stigma of being a 'peasant'. Like the parents in *The Last Train Home*, the rural parents that Kipnis interviewed expressed their desire for their children to work as hard and as much as they can so that they would have the same opportunities as urban children. Combined with this information about parents in the countryside, Gong's (2005) findings about rural parents' changing attitudes towards education help explain mainland marriage migrants' emphasis on their children's education. Their marriage to a Hong Kong man has enabled the mothers to expose their children to what is perceived as a 'first world education' (Fong, 2011). Like the rural parents in the studies and film described above, Sheung Shui marriage migrants believed that Hong Kong generated enriching opportunities and that the educational system there would be the instrument for achieving the upward social mobility of their children.

Quality (and) education

The Policy of 'Raising the Quality of the Population' (*tigao renkou suzhi*) launched in China at the end of the twentieth century highlighted the idea that education is a key element for achieving upward social mobility and 'succeeding in life'. The following 1998 speech by Jiang Zemin is an example of this new discourse:

Socialism does not only aim to realize material prosperity but also to achieve all around social progress. Our basic direction is to grasp socialist material civilization and spiritual civilization (*jingshen wenming*) together. The construction of spiritual civilization ultimately demands raising the quality of the entire nation, to develop the new socialist person with ideals, morality, education and discipline. Do not imagine that a nation without strong spiritual pillars can stand on its own feet among the world's nations. We must deeply absorb the diverse lessons of the past few years in the construction of material civilization and spiritual civilization. We must conscientiously grasp the construction of spiritual civilization. Developing education and science is a hundred-year strategy that has great and far reaching significance for raising society's forces of production and the nation's quality. (Judd, 2002: 20)

From Jiang Zemin's speech, it is evident that one of China's main aims is to develop a new socialist person through the improvement and development of each person's ideals, morals, education, and discipline. The idea of improving one's self for the sake of the nation is rooted in traditional Chinese thinking as well as in ideas that were introduced to China during the twentieth century. The classical Confucian idea that humans are malleable and educable has persisted and become embodied in modern educational initiatives. In the mid-twentieth century, this approach intersected with Marxist understandings that human nature requires well-rounded and creative interaction with the material world. Merging within the Chinese revolutionary tradition, these two ideas created practices in which 'the politically engaged were constantly called upon to strive for higher levels of self-cultivation, sometimes in connection with practices of criticism and self-criticism in rectification campaigns, but also and always as a continuing call for improvement' (Judd, 2002: 20).

The term *suzhi jiaoyu* ('Quality Education') originally appeared in educational journals in the early 1980s to describe various kinds of educational interventions and practices intended to raise the quality of schoolchildren. By the early 1990s, use of the term was widespread among educators and had

expanded beyond the confines of formal education to include family-based childrearing practices and the broader social climate. There are several common themes which emerge from the analysis of quality education that the Chinese educators have done, including: that the world should be known objectively, accurately, and scientifically; and that knowledge requires certain appropriate attitudes (Woronov, 2003: 34-35). The quality of a child is defined as the potential within each child that requires hard work to realize. This potential can be increased and is linked to the social, political, cultural, and economic capital of the child's family (Woronov, 2003: 35-36).

In 1999, the Ministry of Education codified and standardized the disparate and often informal educational reform policies from different areas of China in a formal policy called 'Education for Quality' (Woronov, 2003: 31-32). The policy is extremely broad and includes major differences between China's provinces in pedagogy, curricula, teacher training, and the structure of the educational system from kindergarten to the university level. Woronov claims that, as of 2003, precisely how these changes were supposed to come about was not clearly defined. Thus, in this respect, the reform was less a thorough plan for designing the nation's future through intervention in the lives of its children, and rather – as Bakken (2000) claims – more of an image or a national dream of the nation finally reaching its long-elusive and postponed goal of strength, wealth, and quality. The Quality Education policy was thus 'a kind of fetish, an inanimate object imbued with power to change the future' (Woronov, 2003: 32). In this sense, 'creating' a 'quality child' is like reaching a new destination that is highly desired but known only through the imagination.²⁴

Based on a study of tourism discourses and practices on the island of Java, Salazar has written that 'people hardly journey to *terrae incognitae* anymore these days but to destinations they already virtually "know" through the widely circulating imaginaries about them' (2011: 577). Similarly, Sheung Shui marriage migrants' motivations for crossing borders from the 'periphery' to the 'centre' were closely related to their ability to imagine their new destinations even before they reached them. This idea is manifested in

24 China's new curriculum reform's main goal has been more than simply changing the curricula, methodology, and students' achievements. Its main goal has been to bring a fundamental cultural change to China's basic education. According to the reform designers, the main goal of the new curriculum is to erase the 'examination culture' and transform the previous 'inhuman' curriculum (Zhong, 2004), and to produce fundamental changes to curriculum culture, classroom culture, teacher research culture, and the administrative culture in China (Liu and Kang, 2011). In evaluating whether the reform has succeeded, recent studies claim that considering these goals, it may take many years to realize these outcomes, because as opposed to structural changes, cultural changes are much more difficult to realize (Yin, 2013).

different studies showing that Chinese citizens view traveling abroad not only as a physical journey, but also as moving from one social position to another. These travellers do not desire legal citizenship per se, but rather the prestige associated with the 'developed world' (Ong, 1996, 1999; Friedman, 2010, 2015; Fong, 2011). In her book about transnational Chinese students, Fong describes how Chinese citizens imagine foreign countries as 'paradise' (Fong, 2011: 2). Fong chose the term 'developed world' to describe popular Chinese ideas related to the kind of paradise that Chinese citizens desire to be a part of – a classification that depends more on the power, prestige, and geopolitical alliances of those countries and less on objective economic standards. The imagination of the developed world by Chinese students is not individual; rather, it is related to a collective imagination. Like the imagination of the city by rural Chinese and the envisioning of the 'developed world' by transnational Chinese students, Hong Kong's education system embodied the desired destination of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants.

Quality Education is directly linked to the government of the self. As opposed to earlier socialist practices of self-formation, Quality Education's goal is to create an independent, self-evaluating child – that is, to teach children to be competent, self-aware subjects who monitor their own behaviours, feelings, and interactions with others (Dunk, 2000, cited in Woronov, 2003: 36). The independence and self-awareness promoted through Quality Education are essential aspects of creating post-socialist subjects who govern themselves as productive members of the capitalist economy. The following article published in China Education Daily (*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*) summarizes the main common characteristics and goals of 'Quality Education':

The new market economy places new demands on the quality of the personnel (*rencai*) of the future. The center of the market economy is competition. In order to prepare our youth for this, we have to get them used to the character of the new environment. First, survival of the fittest is a principle of nature in biology, the animal world, and in the changes in human society. Therefore, we have to inculcate in our young people, starting from a young age, the mentality of competition, mastering how to exist in the midst of competition, be good at developing amidst competition. Second, we have to raise their ability to generate new ideas. The central point of the new information age is constant actions; it can produce new ways of thinking, new ideas, and new behaviors. In the market economy, those who can grasp the ability to be creative, who understand new technology, who can see new products- those, are the ones who can succeed. (China Education Daily 1995: 3, cited in Woronov 2003: 33)

Here we see once again that Quality Education's main aim is to create neoliberal subjects who can govern themselves and cultivate high abilities for participating in the global labour market to advance China's position in the international arena and thereby improve China's future. The close connection between the policy and the nation's future raises the important question of who the policy is aimed at – the child, the family, or the state (Binah-Pollak, 2014).

During the 1980s, the campaign for quality had a significant influence on 'The Family Planning Policy', and as a result birth control propaganda began to use the term *renkou suzhi* ('human population quality'),²⁵ emphasizing the quality over the quantity of the population (Anagnost, 2004; Kipnis, 2006: 298). The campaign underlines the close connection between the 'right' child-rearing practices and the 'quality' of the child, and it has been widely transmitted to the public through different media devices. For example, in a 1986 poster (Figure 4.1) the relationship between fewer births and the 'quality' of the child is highlighted. This poster is exceptional because, while during the Mao era propaganda posters usually placed Chairman Mao in the middle of the composition, in this poster the only child replaces the communist icon. In other words, having one child with 'quality' traits becomes the main message. In Figure 4.2 the child is smaller and does not occupy most of the composition as in Figure 4.1 but is instead situated as part of China's economic development. The emphasis is on the close relationship between the Family Planning Policy and the development of China, and the child is represented as a contributor to the nation's future progress and growth. The emphasis on the importance of the quality rather than the quantity of the population was also evident in numerous interviews and conversations I conducted with Beijing urban parents between 2006 and 2013, in which we discussed China's education system and their personal parental ambitions (Binah-Pollak, 2014). During our conversations parents often expressed their personal wish to give birth to more than one child. However, whenever they conveyed this wish, their words were usually followed by the phrase 'but there is nothing we can do, China has too many people' (*meiyou banfa, Zhongguo ren tai duo le*). In other words, young middle-class urban parents believed that having one child was not a personal choice that only affected the parents and broader family; instead, parents

25 In the late 1970's *suzhi* still referred to inborn qualities, and so the use of the term *zhiliang* was more widespread. In 1982 the *People's Daily* began to use the two terms synonymously. Since the mid-1980s the use of the term *suzhi* became more predominant. This meant that the usage of the term *suzhi* bridged the nature/nurture divide (Bakken 2000; Kipnis 2006).

Figure 4.1 'Clever and pretty, healthy and lovely'



China Posters 1986a²⁶

had internalized the idea that having fewer children with higher *suzhi* was important for the nation's future.

²⁶ The image is part of the Stefan R. Landsberger Collections.

Figure 4.2 'Do a Good Job in Family Planning to Promote Economic Development'

China Posters 1986b²⁷

The term *suzhi jiaoyu* ('quality education') was often used together with *yousheng youyu* ('superior birth, superior education') (Kipnis, 2006). To reach *yousheng youyu youjiao* ('excellence in child bearing, rearing, and education'), the Chinese government established *jiazhang xuexiao* ('parent-training institutes') across the country beginning in the early 1980s (Jing, 2000; Naftali, 2007: 163). According to government publications, the aim of these schools and other courses was to 'raise the level of parents' scientific education' and consequently 'improve the quality of childrearing' in China (All-China Women's Federation and China's Ministry of Education, 2002, cited in Naftali, 2007: 163). As I will discuss below, this idea is a main theme of the websites that provide services for mainland Chinese women who plan to give birth in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's quality education: A desired destination

Living in Hong Kong is good for my children because Hong Kong's education system is a lot better than in mainland China. (A-jun, Shang Shui marriage migrant)

27 The image is part of the Stefan R. Landsberger Collections.

I think that living in Hong Kong is better, because the curriculum in Hong Kong is stronger than in mainland China [...] and there is an emphasis on learning English. (A-lin, Sheung Shui marriage migrant)

The above quotes from interviews I conducted with Sheung Shui marriage migrants demonstrate their views of Hong Kong's education system. Sheung Shui marriage migrants often emphasized that living in Hong Kong was excellent for their child's future, and this was one of the major reasons they decided to continue residing in Hong Kong despite the difficulties they experienced. After the birth of their first child, mainland marriage migrants tended to live with their child in a rented apartment in Shenzhen until s/he turned three years old and it was time to attend kindergarten. In many cases the child would begin kindergarten in Hong Kong before the mother received a One-Way Permit, and the mother would go back and forth to Shenzhen until she received the final approval to permanently live in Hong Kong. As I will discuss below, Hong Kong's education system was considered a migration strategy by the marriage migrants. According to Newendorp (2008), obtaining this education for their children was one of the main reasons mainland mothers endured the long wait for the Hong Kong Identity Card.

Studies on migration from developing to developed countries demonstrate that children's education is one of the primary motivations for migration. Many of these studies concentrate on the close connection between parents' investment in their children's education and their children's academic performance. Although in many cases the children of migrants have better opportunities in the receiving country, academic achievements are also influenced by the age and gender of the child, the socio-economic status of the parents, and the specific school system (Kandal and Kao, 2001; Asis, 2006; Jampaklay, 2006; Chen et al., 2009; Arguillas and Williams, 2010).

The idea that a Hong Kong education was a means to achieve upward mobility for their child was also widespread among mainland marriage migrants who lived in other areas of Hong Kong. Sham Shui Po, a poor district located in the north-eastern part of Kowloon, has a large percentage of mainland marriage migrants. The socio-economic level of many of the marriage migrants residing in Sham Shui Po is very low; many of the families live in public housing and receive government subsidies (Newendorp, 2008). During my fieldwork, I visited a welfare centre in Sham Shui Po that was intended to provide support and information about life in Hong Kong to mainland immigrants – most of them marriage migrants. During the week-ends, the marriage migrants' children also received assistance with their

schoolwork at the centre. In interviews, Sham Shui Po marriage migrants emphasized that they were willing to put up with their own hardships for the sake of their children's future. A-jun and Linxia's migration narratives below illustrate this point.

A-jun left her hometown in Guangxi province in 1995 and migrated to Shenzhen in search of employment. After working in Shenzhen for a few years she met her Hong Kong husband through the introduction of mutual friends. They got married in 2006 in Hong Kong, and a year later, in 2007, she gave birth to her only daughter. After her daughter was born, A-jun continued to live in Shenzhen while waiting to receive her One-Way Permit, which she eventually received three years later. When their daughter turned three, A-jun and her husband decided that her daughter should attend kindergarten in Hong Kong and after she received the OWP they permanently moved to the city. The family rented a small apartment in Sham Shui Po, an area which she described as 'a very bad environment'. A-jun told me that her spouse's job required him to travel throughout Hong Kong and mainland China, so it was not convenient for him to return home every day. Because their daughter was young, and she did not have any help from her parents-in-law, A-jun could not work outside the home. She said that as a result she felt very alone and lonely. A-jun conveyed that she did not like living in Hong Kong, that all her friends were mainland immigrants, and that she was usually treated badly by Hong Kongers. Although A-jun described her living experience in Hong Kong as extremely difficult, she also emphasized that she would never consider leaving Hong Kong and moving back to mainland China. She concluded that living in Hong Kong was good for her daughter's future because Hong Kong's education system was *feichang hao* ('superb'). At the end of our conversation, when I asked her if she thought Hong Kong's education system was better than she would find in mainland China, she replied: 'It is not what I think; it is something that everyone knows!'

At the same welfare centre I also interviewed Linxia, who was from Zhuhai and had been living in Hong Kong for ten years. Linxia had three children who were twenty, sixteen, and eight years old. She explained that she came to the welfare centre every weekend with her younger daughter because the teachers helped her daughter improve her schoolwork. When Linxia told me about her life in Hong Kong she said that although she had been living in Hong Kong for more than ten years, she still could not get used to her 'new' life and summarized: 'life is just not good here [...] As opposed to mainland China, in Hong Kong everything is related to money, if you don't have any money, you don't have a life [...] Life here is just too

hard.' Linxia's friend who was standing nearby overheard our conversation and added that although living in Hong Kong was 'bad for the mother' it was 'good for the children'. These excerpts from my fieldnotes further demonstrate the popular perception expressed by mainland parents from different social backgrounds that the only way to increase a child's *suzhi* is through education. Since the common conception in mainland China is that a child's *suzhi* is greatly influenced by the family's social, political, cultural, and economic position (Woronov, 2003: 35-36; Kipnis, 2006: 297), mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong are willing to accept their marginal position in order to increase their children's educational opportunities.

Since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, a growing number of mainland families, who consist of a mainland father and a mainland mother, have found ways to cross the border and ensure their children's future. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, in 2001 the Court of Final Appeal declared that babies born in Hong Kong to Chinese nationals have the right of abode in Hong Kong. As a result of this decision, the number of babies born to parents who were not Hong Kong permanent residents increased. According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Census and Statistic Department and published in 2011, education is the primary reason mainland parents decide to give birth in Hong Kong. The survey's main conclusion is that 82 percent of mainland parents who gave birth in Hong Kong decided that they wanted their child to live in Hong Kong because of Hong Kong's educational system. Other reasons parents considered important were Hong Kong's comprehensive legal system and the quality of life in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Census and Statistic Department, 2011).

Slogans such as 'Provide your child with a bright future' and 'let your child win at the starting line...' are commonly found on websites that provide services for mainland Chinese women who plan to travel to Hong Kong to give birth. *Baobao le* ('Happy baby') is one company that provides information, special services, and maternity packages for mainland pregnant women who give birth in Hong Kong. According to their website, parents whose children are born in Hong Kong are 'people who wish that the next generation will have a better future' (*meihao qiancheng*). In other words, these websites are advocating that parents who want to do right from the start and ensure their child's future should give birth in Hong Kong. Moreover, these sites are selling a dream of becoming an 'excellent parent' – an idea that has been promoted by the Chinese government for the past three decades (Anagnost, 1997; Naftali, 2014).

The phenomenon of maternity tourism by mainland mothers has caused growing concerns, mainly due to the difficulty encountered by Hong Kong

women when trying to book hospital beds. Before the zero-quota policy in 2013, the numbers of births was extremely high, and many Hong Kongers expressed dissatisfaction with the phenomenon. Conversations I conducted with Hong Kongers from different backgrounds revealed similar views. A Hong Kong University professor (who is a physician) mentioned with anger that all the taxes he pays go straight to mainland women. Young Hong Kong women I spoke with told me that 'mainland women occupy all of the beds in the hospitals'.

In recent years the Hong Kong media has become more favourable towards China. According to K.C. Chan, the chief editor of *The Hong Kong Economic Journal*, the main reason for this new tendency is not the growing favourability of China, but rather a consideration of mainland market forces. Nevertheless, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Hong Kong's mass media remained comparatively free (Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2008: 58-61), and in many cases China was still portrayed in a negative way in popular newspapers and other forms of media. For example, an article published in the *South China Morning Post* on 19 November 2004 depicted the negative impact of the phenomenon of maternity tourism on Hong Kong's health system, describing the women as exploiters and a burden on Hong Kong society:

Our maternity wards, we are told, are being swamped by pregnant women from the mainland, putting a strain on resources. Increasing numbers of mainland tourists are committing crimes and filling our jails. The flood of visitors from the north is even crowding local residents out of their favorite restaurants and entertainment venues. Pregnant women from the mainland have long sought to have their children born in Hong Kong. They view the medical treatment they receive as superior – and there is the added bonus that their children are entitled to the right of abode. In the past, they often came here as illegal immigrants – now they are coming as tourists. As for crime, there have always been understandable concerns that the visitor scheme will be exploited. So far, the official figures suggest that the impact has been slight, although it is increasing. But this is also an inevitable result of opening up the floodgates. It would be naive to think that the only tourists applying for visas will be those motivated entirely by a desire to spend their hard-earned cash in our shopping malls. (*South China Morning Post*, 2004)

The criticism is not only aimed at the mainland women who are blamed for occupying Hong Kong hospital beds and using Hong Kong's resources. The

case described by Dr. Cheung in the excerpt below demonstrates that the criticism is also aimed at mainland parents who desperately want to raise a 'superior' child and are blamed for the increase in the number of babies born with abnormalities in Hong Kong hospitals due to the lack of prenatal care. Recent reports indicate that it is not rare for mainland mothers to abandon a child born with abnormalities, and many of these babies end up in special homes in Hong Kong awaiting adoption (Constable, 2014). Articles published in the Hong Kong media occasionally also blame mainland mothers for being 'irresponsible', 'ignorant', and 'immoral,' especially during pregnancy. As I described earlier, as part of the 'Quality education' campaign, the Chinese government has been emphasizing the idea that raising a 'high-quality child' begins even before the child is born, as potential parents need to acquire the 'right' scientific knowledge that would allow them to have a 'superior birth'. The case presented in the article below is an example of the many costs of the campaign advocating for having a 'high-quality' 'superior' baby:

About three months ago, Dr. Cheung's (consultant pediatrician at Prince of Wales Hospital's neonatal care unit) team took care of a boy whose ears and jaw were deformed. The parents already had two healthy girls and were shocked. Dr. Cheung said that with surgery the boy would be able to hear normally. 'We counselled the parents, but they would not listen,' he said. 'The child was too far from their expectations.' The neonatal team called in ear surgery experts to confirm their prognosis, but the couple, who desperately wanted a healthy boy, signed the child off after a few days. 'We all feel very sad about the baby's future. There is one more orphan in this world,' Dr. Cheung said. (AsianNews.it, 2006)

A video that was uploaded to YouTube in 2012 represents an escalation in Hong Kongers' discontent about the phenomenon of maternity tourism by mainland women, and in general the changes that Hong Kong has experienced since its return to Chinese sovereignty. The video shows mainland people in different locations and in different situations in Hong Kong. For example, in one scene a mainland child is seen defecating on the side of the road. A different scene shows mainlanders taking their shoes off on the train. The dominant colours added to the video are bright red and black, which represent blood and dirt and create a general feeling of discomfort. Throughout the video, mainlanders are compared to locusts:

Locusts come out of nowhere overwhelm everywhere
Shouting, screaming, yelling like no one could hear

Ever feel shame to yourself?
 Invading across the Hong Kong border and taking over our land
 That's your specialty
 Parasitic until your citizenship is recognized
 Big-belly locust like aliens, pregnant and not stopped by immigration
 No one can stop them from scamming HKIDs
 Locust eggs hatch in hospitals
 Taking over beds and not paying bills...
 What's really invaded is the future of the next two generations
 Setting up this trap, brainwashing us with China is great every day
 ('Locust World', 2012)

After the zero-quota policy was implemented the number of births dropped significantly but did not stop, and media coverage of the phenomenon remained negative. For example, mainland women who did manage to give birth in Hong Kong were described as 'gatecrashers':

These babies were delivered by mainland women who gatecrashed the city's emergency wards, almost half at overcrowded public hospitals, at late stages of pregnancy in order to obtain right of abode for the child.
 (Tsang, 2016)

Some Hong Kong men married to mainland women also had negative views about this phenomenon. For example, Wang Jian's spouse Lau explained that although his family did not object when he married a mainland woman, he personally believed that mainland people just want to take advantage of Hong Kong's resources. He recalled a recent story about a mainland woman who tried to cross the border to give birth in Hong Kong but was caught by the authorities. After being caught, she did not give up and did not agree to return to China. Eventually the police accompanied her to a Hong Kong hospital where she gave birth to her son. As a result, the woman received an extendable three-month permit to remain in Hong Kong. In addition, Lau said that the child was entitled to receive a monthly stipend of 2000 HKD. 'This is why so many Hong Kongers don't like mainland people', he concluded.

Kuajing xuetong ('cross-border pupils') are children who were born in Hong Kong to mainland parents and who reside in mainland China and commute to attend public kindergartens and schools in Hong Kong. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes is an example of the stories of cross-border students. When I met Li Xianchun, she was a doctorate student

in one of Hong Kong's universities. Li is a mainland woman, married to a mainland Chinese man. The couple own an apartment in Shenzhen where the husband works. During her studies in Hong Kong, Li lived in the university's dormitories and commuted to Shenzhen during the weekends. When we met, she was at an early stage of pregnancy. We had long conversations about her child-to-be and especially about where her child would be born (Hong Kong or Shenzhen). Because she was a student in Hong Kong she had received a HKID and was entitled to free healthcare and prenatal examinations in Hong Kong. Although Li went through her prenatal examinations in Hong Kong, when she was 24 weeks pregnant she still had not decided where to give birth. Li explained that the medical conditions in Hong Kong were much better than in mainland China, and she thought that being a Hong Kong permanent resident would be good for her child's future. She especially emphasized the importance of being entitled to receive Hong Kong social benefits and access the free education system. She also thought Hong Kong's education was better than that of mainland China, explaining that the classes are much smaller and that all the schools have good teachers. It was a difficult decision for Li because, although she believed Hong Kong had many benefits, she did not like living in Hong Kong. What bothered her the most was her feeling that 'Hong Kong people really don't like mainlanders.' Eventually Li decided to give birth in a public hospital in Hong Kong. Her son was born in the summer of 2011. He received the right of abode in Hong Kong and is entitled to all the social benefits the city offers its residents.

In the summer of 2013, Li was very troubled about where her son would attend kindergarten. Since he was born in Hong Kong, he did not have a Shenzhen *hukou* and was not entitled to public education in China. Because her husband and she believed Hong Kong's education system was better than mainland China's, they both knew that they would send their child to school in Hong Kong. As a result, her husband thought that for their son's benefit, he should attend kindergarten in Hong Kong as well. Studying in a Hong Kong kindergarten would enable him to learn Cantonese and to get used to Hong Kong's educational system. Li explained that getting into a good kindergarten in Hong Kong is not an easy task – especially for a child whose parents are both mainland Chinese. She applied for her son to be admitted to several kindergartens which were an hour drive away from the border and hoped for the best. After attending several interviews, her son was finally accepted to a kindergarten in Hong Kong's northern district. Every day his grandmother, who lived with the family in Shenzhen, accompanied him to the border

crossing area where a bus waited for all of the mainland children who study in Hong Kong. The journey from home to the kindergarten took about an hour and a half.

In the 2002-2003 school year there were only 3567 cross-border pupils; this number increased to 28,106 in the 2015-2016 school year (Chan et al., 2017). The dramatic growth of cross-border pupils has had a tremendous impact on Hong Kong's schools as well as on Hong Kong parents and their children. Especially in the North District, there has been an increase in the number of classes and the number of students in each class. In addition, schools require additional resources to assist cross-border pupils and their families. Because of the increase of students, many Hong Kong parents have found themselves unable to secure a spot for their child at local schools in the North District (Chang and Kabir, 2014). Chen, a Hong Kong artist and social activist, told me that he has great concerns about the phenomenon of cross-border pupils. He explained that in his opinion these children are born to broken families and will be very angry when they grow up. He concluded that the phenomenon would have a negative influence on Hong Kong's identity. The Hong Kong demographer Paul Yip Siu-fai has warned of the intensification of anti-mainland sentiments, arguing that the government should take steps to integrate the cross-border pupils: 'Hong Kong is now filled with anti-mainland sentiments. If these groups of children cannot be integrated into the society, the cross-border conflicts will only get worse' (Tsang, 2016).

Around the first day of each new school year, newspapers in Hong Kong are usually filled with articles about cross-border pupils. These articles focus on the difficult journey the children need to go through every day to reach their schools. In many cases, young children wake up at five or six in the morning and stand in long lines at the immigration checkpoints, only to repeat the journey back to mainland China in the afternoon (Zhao, 2013; Zhang, 2018). Nevertheless, a poll conducted among mainland families showed that almost 85 percent of the cross-border pupils intended to continue their studies in Hong Kong and 70 percent claimed that they would like to work in the city (Zhao, 2014). As a result of the implementation of the zero-quota policy, the number of cross-border pupils is expected to decline in the future. Further, in April 2017 the Shenzhen Education Bureau announced that students from Hong Kong and Macau, together with others whose household registration or *hukou* is from outside Shenzhen, could apply for the city's public schools through a point system (Zhang, 2018). These new regulations will most probably influence the number of cross-border pupils. However, as long as mainlanders continue to perceive

Hong Kong and its education system as a desired destination, it is assumed that they will find ways to cross the border. As a result, new regulations tied to the making and remaking of the border will most likely continue to be implemented.

Education and caretaking in everyday life

Blue Ocean (a fictive name) was the kindergarten my five-year-old daughter attended in Hong Kong. It was a local privately-owned kindergarten situated in Sheung Shui. The children in the kindergarten were between the ages of one and six, and they were divided into groups based on their age. Tuition for a half day was 2300 HKD per month, which was not considered high compared to the international schools in Hong Kong but was higher than public kindergartens. A full day cost 4300 HKD. In addition to the monthly tuition, extra fees were collected for books, field trips, snacks, and winter and summer uniforms. Although Hong Kong's public education is considered excellent in the eyes of many mainlanders, it is often criticized by local Hong Kongers. For this reason, the families I came to know in Sheung Shui preferred that their children attend a private kindergarten, especially since the tuition at Blue Ocean was not considered high. Furthermore, the mothers often told me that in this specific kindergarten there was an emphasis on learning English, which they considered extremely important.

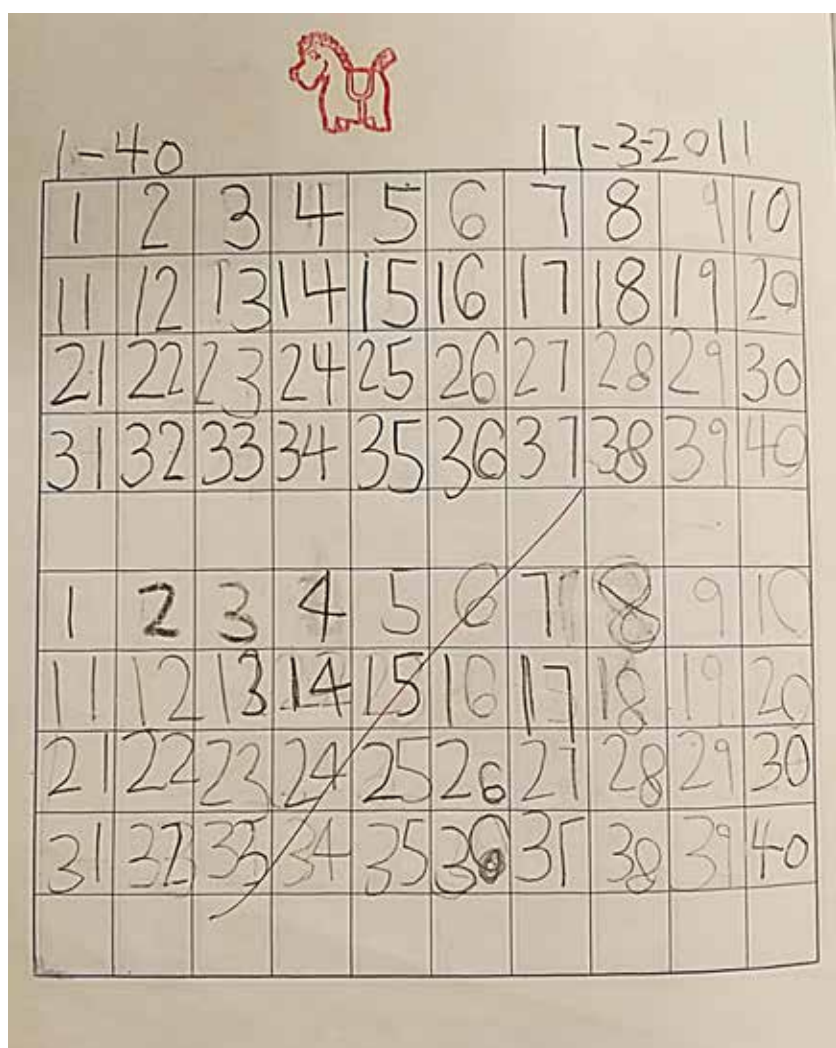
My daughter's group was comprised of 22 children aged four to five. Even though it was a local kindergarten and its main language was Cantonese, about 70 percent of the mothers were mainland marriage migrants. Besides the children whose parents were both Hong Kongers, there were also three children with foreign parents (including my daughter) and several cross-border students. The class had a Hong Konger professional kindergarten teacher, who could speak only Cantonese, and a young Hong Konger assistant who had spent a few years living in Canada and spoke English with the children. Beginning at the age of three, the main aim of the kindergarten was to prepare the children for the examinations which would eventually determine the elementary school they would attend. The Sheung Shui marriage migrants often discussed the different schools, and their goal for their child to be accepted to the best elementary school in the district. The room contained few toys, and was designed as a classroom with small tables and chairs in front of a board intended for teaching. The kindergarten's program was rather strict, and the curriculum included Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese,

Figure 4.3 My daughter's English homework at the kindergarten

English, and mathematics. The children also had art and sports lessons twice a week. The kindergarten schedule was dedicated to studying the different subjects, and between classes they received a snack and a thirty-minute break for playing inside the classroom. The school year was divided into two semesters; in the beginning of each semester the children received books and notebooks to accompany their studies. Every day, the children were assigned homework which included writing numbers, practicing Chinese characters, and learning new words in English. The teacher graded the homework and each child received one, two, or three stamps according to how well they did. Twice a week the children had dictations in English and Chinese, and they received number grades.

The children had to attend the kindergarten dressed in the school uniform. The white colour of the uniform could be seen as a sign that children were not expected to get dirty, paint, or play childish games. They spent most of their time sitting in the classroom listening to their teachers and learning the materials. In addition to the weekly dictations, at the end of each term (twice a year) the children had thorough examinations to assess their learning abilities. Each exam was scheduled on a school day. During that week the children only attended the exams, and the other kindergarten activities were cancelled. The kindergarten also provided the option to register for extra-curricular activities, which took place during the afternoons and weekends. These classes included violin, art, dance, Kung Fu,

Figure 4.4 My daughter's math homework at the kindergarten. She rarely received more than two stamps



and others, and they entailed an additional charge. Most of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants' children attended at least one extra-curricular course.

In all the families I knew in Sheung Shui, the mother was responsible for bringing the child to the kindergarten in the morning and picking up the child from kindergarten in the afternoon. After the children returned home, they usually ate lunch and were then immediately sent to do their homework and prepare for their weekly dictations. The mothers invested a

Figure 4.5 A spreadsheet provided to the parents about the preparations for mid-term examinations in the kindergarten

*Remarks: K2 & K3 2nd Term Final Assessment schedule:

4/7(Monday)	5/7(Tuesday)	6/7(Wednesday)	7/7(Thursday)
Study	English Dictation	Study	Chinese Dictation
Chinese Language	English	Mathematics	General Studies

Kindergarten
2011/6/24

Slip

I have read the above information.

Student's name: _____

Class: _____

Parents' Signature: _____

great deal of time and energy in ensuring that their children worked as hard as they could to complete their homework in the best possible way. Helping their children with their homework and preparing for the kindergarten's exams was a major part of the mother's afternoons, and was considered a top priority. Only after they had finished all their assignments could the children meet other children and play. While the parents received detailed information about the kindergarten's activities, there was little room for them to make suggestions or get involved. Each child had two assessment booklets; every Friday the teacher would return the booklets to the parents with a new sheet summarizing the week's activities. One booklet recorded weekly progress in the class. In this booklet, the parents were told about their child's learning progress and received some information about the materials for the next week's dictation. The second booklet was named 'Student Handbook' and recorded attendance. After reviewing the booklets during the weekend, the parents were supposed to sign them and return the booklets to the kindergarten. The child's learning achievements in the kindergarten were a major part of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants' conversations, and they took great pride whenever their child received a high score in the quizzes and exams. After returning to Israel from my first

fieldwork in 2012, Wang Jian often asked me how my daughter, who had entered the first grade, was doing in school, and if she was *nuli* ('working hard'). A few days before the kindergarten's mid-term exams, Wang Jian wrote me a Facebook message describing how her daughter was very nervous and how her daughter was investing all of her energy in preparing for the exams. She explained that the exams were very important because they would determine the kind of elementary school her daughter could attend the following year.

Although the fathers were absent during the weekdays, during the weekends they took the time to ensure that their children completed their homework and were prepared for the upcoming dictations. In most families, whenever the father was home, he took charge of the English homework and of practicing short English conversations with the child. The mothers often told me that they felt they could help their child study mathematics and Chinese, but that they could not speak 'any English'. Sometimes they mentioned that their child's English level was even better than theirs. This was another example to the hierarchy which characterized the couples' relationships: the Hong Kong spouses were perceived as more 'international', and as such their English level was perceived to be better. The mainland marriage migrants often told me that as opposed to the relatively low level of English taught in most schools in mainland China, Hong Kong schools' focus on English would increase their children's chances to succeed in life.

The home sphere was also dedicated to the child's kindergarten work. In many of the houses, graded worksheets, English words, and math calculations were hung on the living room walls and closet doors. In addition to fulfilling the kindergarten requirements, when I visited their homes, the mothers proudly showed me the extra worksheets they had prepared for their children. Wang Jian often prepared mathematics exercises for her daughter, and at the age of four and a half Linlin was already able to solve complicated multiplication problems. After her daughter received the kindergarten exam grades, Wang Jian changed the status of her QQ (a popular Chinese chat application): 'My baby is the pride of mommy and daddy, this time she got the highest score in the entire class in the mid-term. All of her scores are 100. Good luck my baby!' (*Wode baobei shi bama de jiaobao, zhe ci qizhong kaoshi quan ban di yi, mei ke chengji dou yi bai fen. Baobei jia you! Jia you*).

Blue Ocean's educational system was quite strict and demanded conformity from the children. In many conversations I conducted with local Hong Kongers, I was told that this form of education was quite typical of Hong Kong preschool education. My daughter was used to a significantly different kind of educational system and experienced difficulties adjusting

to the new norms. Since I knew that our stay in Hong Kong was temporary, I encouraged her to try to absorb as much as she could but not to worry about homework or grades, which caused her high stress. The Sheung Shui marriage migrants had a significantly different approach. During our joint gatherings, we often discussed the kindergarten's requirements and our views regarding the teachers' attitudes. The mothers knew that I did not pressure my daughter to complete her homework assignments or succeed in the examinations, and they often encouraged me to help her adjust to the kindergarten norms. In many occasions, they found my daughter's behaviour *tai tiaopi* ('too naughty') and urged me to correct her behaviour. In other cases, I was reminded that she should wear her uniform in the right manner. Occasionally they even made remarks about the colour of her socks.

Sheung Shui marriage migrants' reaction to my educational agenda was in complete contrast to the reactions I received from middle-class urban mothers during the fieldwork I conducted in Beijing (Binah-Pollak, 2014). Beijing mothers often stated that my daughter was very *huopo* ('active') and *tiaopi* ('naughty') – and that they wished their son/daughter would also be like that! A survey conducted among young urban Chinese mothers demonstrated that they had adopted many of the values that the new discourse on childhood has been promoting for the past three decades. According to the young mothers, a 'good mother': 1) puts all her energy in the child; 2) understands and respects the child the same way she respects a friend; 3) takes care of the child's safety; and 4) earns the child's trust. When the mothers were asked what they wished for their child, most mothers stated that they want their child to be *jiji* ('active'), *leguan* ('optimistic'), and *kailang* ('open') (Zhu, 2007: 104–107). Urban mothers with whom I spoke also stated that their child's *kuaile* ('happiness') was very important to them and that they let their child experience and experiment.

Parent's desires about their children's education came up in many conversations I had with young mainland Chinese parents (mostly mothers) from different social backgrounds (urban and rural, richer and poorer). While Sheung Shui marriage migrants embraced Hong Kong's schooling system, it was mainland middle-class urban parents who expressed dilemmas concerning the right educational path for their (only) child. In contemporary China, a major part of the educational discourse is that Chinese children are under great pressure and overscheduled, and as a result are missing childhood. Consequently, young parents are faced with a huge dilemma. On the one hand, they are aware of the new discourse on childhood (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Naftali 2009, 2010), which emphasizes the importance of listening to the child's wishes and following the child's dreams. But on the other hand,

parents are also well aware of the social reality that the quality even of the kindergarten their child attends might have an impact on his/her future career. In one of the playgrounds in Beijing, I met a mother with two children, a four-year-old son who was already in kindergarten and a six-month-old baby girl. One day we talked about the difference between Western and Chinese education, and I told her that it seemed as if children occupy a very important space in Chinese society and in Chinese families. She disagreed with me, stating that perhaps in the big cities children are important, but in the villages it is quite different. She explained that the pressure on Chinese children is enormous and that from the moment the child is born s/he has a fixed course, and that as a result, Chinese children are *kelian* ('miserable'). When I asked her what the most important thing was for her, she said that traditionally *Hanzu* ('Chinese people') are *tinghua* ('obedient'), but that she hoped that her children would have *gexing* ('individual personality'): 'I want my children to be special; that every child will have his/her unique character and that s/he will be happy (*kuaile*). I don't care if they learn mathematics or grammar; I want them to study what they love.' During our conversation, she kept emphasizing that Chinese children are unhappy:

From the first time my son went to kindergarten, he changed [...] but when he was little he was very happy [...] I think that when a child does something s/he does not love it is not the worst case; the worst is when you do not know what you want to do. Chinese children are 'not given any choice' (*meiyou xuanze*). I want my son/daughter to have a choice in his/her life!

This conversation demonstrates the great distress the mother felt about her children's future. While holding her six-month-old baby girl in her arms, she was already discussing how she felt that her daughter's life course was planned from the minute she was born. These kinds of comments were common when young parents discussed their only child's future with me. In one conversation with a small group of parents, they discussed the great stress that their children would need to go through while growing up. One father said that he knew his two-year-old daughter would suffer from great stress in school and the mother added that this is the reason she wished her daughter would be a *yiban* ('regular') child. The father commented that he was not satisfied with the educational system in China, where kids turn into little soldiers as soon as they enter kindergarten.

Despite these criticisms of the Chinese educational system, Liu Hong, a mainland mother to a four-year-old boy who lives in Beijing, told me that

she used to think that the Western style of education was much better than China's, but now she understood that every country is different and that what is good for one country is not necessarily good for another. When I asked her if she thought her son Yueyue would have a stressful life growing up, she said she thought so and then added: 'It is important to rest but in general the person who studies the most has better opportunities.' Everyone, including Liu Hong, seemed to conclude that there is no other choice (*meiyou banfa*) in China. Liu Hong further explained:

Chinese education is based on obedience; it's a fixed educational method [...] When the government tells you what to do, you need to listen to the government, when the party tells you what to do, you need to listen to the party, in the home, you need to obey your parents, and outside you ought to obey your leader. It has always been this way, and it has not changed in contemporary society. That is why we turned out to be a society which appreciates children who are *guai*. It is not that Chinese parents want their child to be an obedient *guai* child (*tinghua de guai haizi*); it is what society and the government have been demanding for generations. An obedient child will get candies, only an obedient child will succeed on his exams, only an obedient child will turn out to be the talented person our country needs. If a child wants to develop, s/he needs to learn to be obedient. At school, the child needs to obey teachers, at home parents. To be a *guai* child is our society's widespread image.

After Liu Hong explained the importance of conforming to the norms, she added a few words describing her opinion regarding her own son:

I hope my child won't be so obedient. I often tell him, if you think mommy is not right, then you don't have to listen to me, but you need to tell me why you think I was wrong. This is because I want him to experience different kinds of cultures, so his way of thought will expand. When he will consider things, his thought will be more diverse. He doesn't have to be *guai*, but he has to be a child who understands reason (*jiang daoli de haizi*).

The two main discourses on childhood in China, that of 'Quality Education' and the new psychological discourse, contradict one another: while one promotes obedience for the nation's sake, the other promotes autonomy and individuality. From the examples above, it is apparent that these contradictions comprise a major part of young urban parents' caretaking style. Liu

Hong wishes that her little boy will grow up to be intelligent, open-minded, and happy. However, she seems to acknowledge the fact that to succeed in Chinese society children must be obedient and grow up according to the state's agenda. The emphasis that Sheung Shui marriage migrants placed on their children's education was also evident in how they perceived the kindergarten, the teachers, and the assignments given to their children. The kindergarten was considered the top authority and they did whatever they could so that their child would fit in, follow the rules, and achieve the highest score in the assignments and examinations. Moreover, they rarely questioned the teachers' actions and decisions. On one occasion A-lin told me that the head teacher requested an appointment to discuss her son's learning achievements. The kindergarten teacher explained to A-lin that her son did not work hard enough and that he only received 90 percent on his last quiz. When A-lin told me about their conversation she did not question the teacher's demands. She took the teacher's words very seriously and acted exactly as the teacher suggested, requiring her son to invest more time and study harder.

Mothers tended to explain that because they were immigrants from mainland China, they felt they had little to say to the local teachers about their own children's education. Wang Jian explained that when her daughter began to attend kindergarten, the head teacher used to treat her disrespectfully because her Cantonese was not very good and 'because she is from mainland China'. She then added that the teachers usually looked down at the mainland mothers and that only recently, when the teacher learned that her daughter was the best student in the class, had her attitude changed accordingly. The mothers rarely confronted the kindergarten teachers and as a result were occasionally treated by them in a condescending way. Nevertheless, they still strived to ensure that their child would act according to the kindergarten's norms. The main reason was that they knew that their children's achievements would have a major influence on the elementary school they could attend, and they believed that the kindergarten's teachers and staff could provide them with the tools to achieve the goal of entering an excellent elementary school. Moreover, the children's achievements also influenced their mothers' status in the eyes of the local teachers, contributing to the marriage migrants' feelings of belonging to society. How the child can be a means for mobility was evident from Wang Jian's account that it was only after her daughter was born and began attending kindergarten that she began to feel part of Hong Kong's society. This view conforms to long-standing Chinese notions of children as means to improve a family's status. Furthermore, it shows that the women's marginal position in society

was not a fixed position; as their children grew and took part in Hong Kong's schooling system, the mothers gradually felt less marginalized.

During my last fieldwork period in the winter of 2015, most of the Shueng Shui marriage migrants' children were in primary school, continuing their journey towards becoming outstanding children. However, I choose to end this chapter with an earlier episode from my fieldnotes. In the summer of 2012, I was invited by the mothers of Blue Ocean kindergarten to join them in attending their children's kindergarten graduation ceremony. The ceremony was held at a large hall in a newly built science and technology park. On the day of the ceremony the mothers were very excited; they woke up early, dressed nicely, and prepared for the big event. A post uploaded to Facebook by A-lin's spouse stated that it is his son's 'first important big day'. Wang Jian's spouse uploaded a photo of the small shield his daughter received for her superb achievements, and commented: 'Thank you principal, head teacher and the teachers of the kindergarten for helping my daughter achieve such a big progress.'

When we arrived, the children were dressed in white gowns, similar to college graduation gowns, and wore white socks and shoes. The ceremony's program included greetings from the kindergarten's principal, teachers, and a supervisor from the educational bureau. It also contained songs and performances by the children, in Cantonese and Mandarin but mostly English. At the end of the show, the principal asked the crowd to 'give a big hand to the graduates', and the children received a graduation diploma which stated that the child 'has satisfactorily completed the required courses of work and play in the kindergarten'. After the ceremony ended, everyone took pictures and I kept thinking that the children's graduation ceremony was also a significant step for the mothers. Because education is a fundamental part of acquiring higher *suzhi*, their children's successful completion of the kindergarten's examinations and entering of primary school situated the mothers closer to the centre.

As I have discussed throughout this book, mainland Chinese residents cross the Hong Kong-China border for different reasons. The Shenzhen *hukou* holders who hold a TWP and cross the border to consume Hong Kong's commodities can be described as 'flexible travellers'. Cross-border pupils who were born in Hong Kong and reside in mainland China and who cross the border every day to study in Hong Kong are 'flexible citizens' (Ong, 1999; Fong, 2011). They hold a HKID and are legally entitled to the social benefits that Hong Kong offers its citizens. For these children, the border is viewed as a mark of distinction for their future, their perspectives, and their identity. Although their legal status is much more settled than that of the children

of rural migrant workers in the mainland's big cities, they continue to be viewed by many Hong Kongers as 'mainland children' and 'outsiders'. From the family's point of view, children signify a better future, a way to achieve upward social mobility and integrate into Hong Kong's society. For many Hong Kongers, the growing amount of cross-border activities signifies the constant erasing of Hong Kong's unique local identity. As a result, they view the border as a valuable resource that should be kept intact. Since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, the Chinese government has not taken any significant measures to end the cross-border traffic. Further, changes in the central government's rhetoric and attitude towards Hong Kong has increased Hong Kong people's concern with their city's future and created significantly more social and political tension.

In the next chapter I examine more closely 'the Hong Kong side of the border' and the struggle, disappearance, and reappearance (Abbas, 1997; Fung, 2001) of a Hong Kong local identity vis à vis the growing number of cross-border activities, among them cross-border marriages. I then discuss young Hong Kongers' means of and motivations for striving to keep the border as a rigid divide.

5 New Voices in Hong Kong: Local Identity Formation

When I first entered the apartment where I lived during one of my research trips to Hong Kong, I was surprised to discover that an image from the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations covered the entire wall of the main room. The poster was about two meters long and three meters wide, and it depicted the square after the tanks entered Beijing and the massacre took place. This was the image of the terrible outcomes of the demonstrations – the death and wounding of hundreds of young people who believed they were fighting for a democratic China.

This apartment was intended to host artists visiting Hong Kong; I had been given the opportunity to spend the summer of 2013 there because of my close contacts with several young Hong Kong artists and social activists. The apartment was owned by the Hong Kong government, which had loaned it to a group of artists to establish a unique art-space called 'Woofers Ten'. The art-space and apartment on the floor above were located on Shanghai Street in the bustling Kowloon district. The name of the art-space – 'Woofers Ten' (*Wut faa* in Cantonese, *Huo hua* in Mandarin) – means 'activation'. According to the group's members, the idea of 'activation' was the main idea behind the establishment of the community. The members of 'Woofers Ten', mostly young artists but also older social activists and even one eighty-year-old woman, view themselves as social and political activists who are nurturing an alternative community in contemporary Hong Kong. The activities which take place at 'Woofers Ten' are mostly voluntary and include: organizing exhibitions of local and international artists, many of them political artists; promoting and selling local handmade products and artwork; holding lectures and discussions about both art and issues related to contemporary Hong Kong society; and coordinating communal activities for the neighbourhood such as English and art classes for children. Many of the group's members are also involved in other social projects around the city. These activities often include events in poor districts in Hong Kong, including Sham Shui Po where there is a large percentage of mainland marriage migrants, who often also take part in these social events. During my fieldwork, I participated in different activities at Woofers Ten and other venues and had the opportunity to learn about the group members' views on the growing number of cross-border interactions, Hong Kong's present and future political situation, and in general the relationship between mainland

China and Hong Kong. These topics appeared to be their main concerns. On one occasion, during a conversation about the events of Tiananmen in 1989, I mentioned that I had once read a study which stated that one of the reasons for the demonstrations' failure was the young students' lack of unity with other groups in society, for example farmers and workers, and that some scholars believed that the students were not completely convinced of the demonstrations' final goal. The group of artists seemed very surprised and immediately rejected this thesis, arguing that the young Chinese students were extremely brave. The artists' strong rejection of this thesis surprised me. After long conversations with the group, I realized that they understood the events in Beijing in June 1989 as one of the darkest moments of China's Communist regime. More importantly, the image of Tiananmen square was placed on the wall of the apartment not only as a reminder of the terrible outcomes of the incident, but also as a constant reminder of everything they rejected about mainland China. The hanging of the poster from the Tiananmen demonstrations on the main wall of the apartment is an example of the social and cultural boundaries drawn by many young Hong Kongers in their efforts to distinguish themselves from mainland China. The growing amount of cross-border interactions and number of mainland immigrants in Hong Kong has made this task much more difficult.

In his study of border-crossing and exchange in South China, Eric Kit-wai Ma wrote: 'This book begins in the 1970s when the mainland Hong Kong boundary was most conspicuous and ends when this boundary gradually fades away after the handover in 1997' (Ma, 2012: 1). Ma's use of the term 'boundary', as opposed to 'border' emphasizes his argument that the growing cross-boundary interactions have resulted in the blurring of the social and cultural boundaries between mainland China and Hong Kong and turned the border into an administrative rather than political one. While I agree that the border between Hong Kong and mainland China has undergone dramatic changes since 1997, one of the main arguments underlying this book is that the political aspect – which according to Ma (2012) is no longer a major characteristic of the border – continues to play an important part in the understanding of the border and of the changes Hong Kong has undergone since the handover. Sheung Shui marriage migrants and the mainland marriage migrants living in other districts of Hong Kong were not disconnected from this political and social tension.

In accordance with 'One Country, Two Systems', Hong Kong's system of governance was meant to remain unchanged for a period of 50 years, until 2047. In recent years, however, the Chinese authorities have been constantly promoting the idea that Hong Kong is an inseparable part of China, and

Figure 5.1 The poster of the Tiananmen demonstrations' outcome in the artists' apartment at Woofer Ten



Photograph taken by the author, July 2013

as a result the city has experienced concrete political and social changes. In one conversation, a young social activist named Ben explained his deep concerns to me in this way:

The Chinese are not waiting until 2047; things are already starting to change. We can't go to the streets as before [...] My friends are being arrested in protests. When we protest against the appointing of Chinese representatives in the Hong Kong government, they are warned and if they resist they get arrested; *before* [my emphasis] we didn't even need a permit to protest.

In a different conversation with Ben several months after the Umbrella Movement demonstrations ended, he further expressed his strong resentment towards the growing cross-border interactions: 'It might sound bad, and I might be wrong saying it... but... I treat the mainland tourists and the mainland marriage migrants the same way – I hate them both.' Ben's words indicate that he did not distinguish between the marriage migrants

who had obtained the OWP and become Hong Kong permanent residents and the mainland consumers and tourists who were temporary visitors to the city. Ben labelled all mainlanders as 'the other', and made an effort to draw a line between 'us' and 'them'. Such negative views of mainland China and mainlanders had a significant impact on the marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui, in effect situating them at the margins of Hong Kong's society.

After the handover: Hong Kong people's (growing) sense of belonging

'Do you travel to China (*Zhongguo*) on a regular basis?' was one of the questions I often asked Sheung Shui marriage migrants during our conversations. A common reply I received was: 'We are in China right now; you must mean mainland China (*dalu*).' Similarly, when I asked a mainland Chinese student I met in Israel about his experience studying in Hong Kong, he replied, 'It was wonderful; Hong Kong is China's best city!' In June 2014 China's central government issued 'an unprecedented' White Paper stating that the central government holds 'comprehensive jurisdiction' over Hong Kong and is the source of its autonomy. The statement claimed that 'many wrong views are currently rife in Hong Kong' and that 'Some people are confused or lopsided in their understanding of the policy [one country, two systems] and the Basic Law' (*South China Morning Post*, 2014). Similar arguments have dominated the speeches of prominent Chinese political figures in recent years. For example, in his marathon speech at the start of the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party, President Xi Jinping declared that Hong Kong and Macau could govern themselves, but only 'with patriots playing the principal role' (Buckley and Bradsher, 2017).

The responses I received from my interview partners echoed the Chinese authorities' recognition of Hong Kong in terms of a geographical containment of the local population, not as a distinct identity. Nevertheless, as I discuss in this chapter, the conception of a unique Hong Kong identity by many Hong Kongers is historically and culturally real (Fung, 2001: 595). The terms 'Hong Kong people' and 'Hong Kongers' (*Heunggongyan* in Cantonese and *Xianggangren* in Mandarin) signify a separate identity of which many Hong Kongers are currently proud. This classification affirms their distinctive and compelling shared values, norms, and ideologies (Fung, 2010: 595).

In addition to the young Hong Kong activists, Hong Kong men who had married a mainland woman also expressed negative views about mainland

China and mainland Chinese immigrants. For example, Wang Jian's husband Lau explained that he personally believed that all mainland people want is to take advantage of Hong Kong's resources. The Sheung Shui marriage migrants seemed to accept this structural condition and were often quite empathetic towards these negative views. A-lin and Wang Jian, for example, explained that many cross-border marriages are indeed *jia* ('fake'), and that the Hong Kong authorities had no choice but to limit the entrance of mainland women who try to enter Hong Kong and use the city's welfare system. In this sense, while Sheung Shui marriage migrants viewed Hong Kong as a part of China (*Zhongguo*), they also enjoyed feelings of belonging to Hong Kong (as a separate and unique entity) and what it represented. As I have described throughout this book, Sheung Shui marriage migrants tended to draw a line between their previous lives as rural labour migrants and their current lives as Hong Kong permanent residents. Part of drawing this line was related to viewing cross-border interactions as a threat to Hong Kong's unique identity. Since they had already received the OWP, they felt they belonged with those who are already on the 'Hong Kong side of the border'.

The scholarly work on Hong Kongers' changing identity and shifting sense of locality after the handover presents a complex picture. Mathews, Ma, and Lui recognize three 'types of identities' that constitute the contemporary Hong Kong identity: a *historical Chinese identity* (Wang, 1991), which is based on a sense of belonging to the Chinese civilization; a *cultural identity* with a distinctive ethos, comprised of 'a flexible and inclusive identity which absorbs Chinese, and non-Chinese, elements as related to a set of loosely defined ways of life attached to the Hong Kong community'; and a new *national identity*, which is the outcome of the process in which Hong Kong people are adjusting and learning to belong to their (new) nation (2008: 113). Mathews, Ma, and Lui's main conclusion is that many of the negative perceptions that Hong Kongers had about China before 1997 have now become less prominent. They argue that in the first few years after the handover, Hong Kongers had come to feel much closer to China in terms of economic values but still far apart in terms of political values (Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2008: 113). Fung (2010) emphasized the link between Hong Kongers' feelings of resistance after the handover and the establishment of a Hong Kong identity. After Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, the local media had a major role in incorporating the local identity into the national identity. This renegotiation of the social and cultural boundaries between mainland China and Hong Kong by both the Chinese government and different social agents in Hong Kong, such

as the media and the schooling system, has caused many Hong Kongers to want to preserve their local identity and alienate themselves from the economic, social, and political life of mainland China (Mathewes, Ma, and Lui, 2008; Fung, 2010). During my fieldwork, the close connection between who Hong Kongers say they are and which others they identified as 'not us' was very prominent.

After the handover, Chinese interference in Hong Kong's affairs became a major trigger for resistance on the Hong Kong side of the border. Every year since 1997, the PRC celebrates Hong Kong's return to the motherland on the first of July. On that day, a festive parade takes place in Hong Kong in the presence of high government representatives from mainland China and Hong Kong. Alongside the official celebrations, demonstrations also take place in different locations around the city and hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong demonstrators rally against the official festivities and against China's political interventions. On 1 July 2012 two major events took place in Hong Kong: the election of Leung Chun-ying as the new chief executive of Hong Kong; and the fifteenth anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to mainland China. Due to the significance of these two events, Hu Jintao, China's paramount leader between 2002 and 2012, arrived in Hong Kong to personally take part in the inauguration ceremony and official celebrations. Estimations are that 400,000 people participated in the demonstrations on that day – the largest demonstration since 2003. The demonstrations were an expression of the general frustration with Chinese interventions into Hong Kong affairs and more specifically with the method of the election of the new Chief Executive (*BBC*, 2012).

Cheng is a forty-year-old Hong Kong man who is married to A-lin, a mainland marriage migrant whom I have discussed throughout this book. Cheng and I often had conversations about the changes that Hong Kong has gone through since the handover, and during our conversations Cheng often expressed his contempt for mainland China and especially the Communist Party. He told me that he had attended the fifteenth anniversary parade, which turned out to be a mass demonstration. Cheng described how Hu Jintao lifted his hand in the air during the parade and waved to the crowd, only to receive a scolding from thousands of Hong Kongers. It was very clear from Cheng's facial expression that he could not identify with Hu Jintao as 'his' president. Cheng's expression demonstrated the distance, or even aversion, he felt towards the Chinese 'leader'.

In interviews, Hong Kongers from different social backgrounds expressed their longing for how things were *before* 1997. Wang Jian's spouse Lau told me that 'life in Hong Kong was much better before 1997'. He explained that

before Hong Kong had returned to Chinese sovereignty, there were not so many regulations influencing everyday life. During our conversation at the couple's apartment, Lau went to his bedroom and returned with a 100 Hong Kong Dollar bill. He showed me the bill and explained that he keeps this bill as a reminder of life before 1997: 'you see this bill; there are not any Chinese characters on it'. Lau concluded our conversation with a pessimistic projection: 'in a few years the Chinese will not need Hong Kong. It will not be anything special to them; it will be just like Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen.' In another interview, an established local artist named Lam also emphasized the connection between Hong Kong's distinct currency and the city's uniqueness. Lam explained that the local currency is very important for Hong Kong's identity: 'after we won't [*sic*] have our own bill, there won't be any Hong Kong left.' These excerpts from interviews I conducted with Cheng, Lau, and Lam, three Hong Kong men from different social and economic backgrounds, represent a relatively common opinion in contemporary Hong Kong, especially among the younger generation. These views demonstrate that the changing nature of the social and cultural boundaries between mainland China and Hong Kong and the growing interference of the PRC into Hong Kong's affairs have resulted in feelings of alienation and acts of resistance.

The Umbrella Movement demonstrations in the fall of 2014 further signified Hong Kongers' deep concerns. The movement was organized mainly by The Hong Kong Federation of Students and the Occupy Central with Love and Peace movement (OCLP). During the twelve weeks of events, the protestors first occupied public space in Admiralty, Hong Kong's Central Government Offices area, and then spread to Causeway Bay and Mongkok (Veg, 2015, 2016). According to two university polls, 18 to 20 percent of the local population, or 1.3 to 1.45 million people, participated in the movement (CUHKCCPOS, 2014; HKUPOP, 2014). The participants included people from different social and economic sectors. Although the governments of both Hong Kong and China attempted to label the participants as 'youths', probably implying that they should not be taken seriously, in fact only about a quarter of the participants were students and about 58 percent were white-collar workers. A poll conducted during the events shows that 61 percent of the participants were under 30 years old and 85 percent were under 40 (Cheng and Yuen, 2015). The Umbrella Movement demonstrations began as a response to the National People's Congress Standing Committee's (NPC-SC) decision on 31 August 2014 to restrict the open selection of candidates for the position of Hong Kong's chief executive in the city's first democratic elections scheduled for 2017. Instead, the Chinese government

decided that a panel would select two or three candidates to run. What began as a relatively spontaneous demonstration was fuelled by public outcry over the use of tear gas to clear the first protestors by the local police. The use of tear gas was shocking for many Hong Kongers, and it mobilized close to 100,000 people to take to the streets. Veg (2016) argued that, as opposed to participants in the 1989 democracy movement, many of whom expressed their personal sacrifice as done in the name of the future Chinese nation, the Umbrella Movement represented 'a culturally hybrid democratic community' (675) and 'a far more heterogeneous notion of China' (674). In his excellent paper, Veg analysed over 1000 slogans and other textual and visual materials to understand the notions behind the Umbrella Movement. For the purpose of my argument, I would like to focus on Veg's discussion about the demonstrators' framing of China and their understanding of Hong Kong's identity. Veg maintains that while almost none of the slogans called for independence, they did affirm Hong Kong's distinct local identity. Slogans such as 'Hong Kong I love you' and 'The most beautiful thing in Hong Kong is its people' expressed ideas of pride and of belonging to a 'home'. However, Veg argued that while 'us' is clearly defined as Hong Kong, the category of 'them' is left unclear. For example, in slogans such as 'Protect our home, resist dark forces' or 'protect our home from darkness', what lies outside the home remains vague, and in only a few cases is China explicitly presented as 'the other' (Veg, 2016: 679). I believe that the reason 'the other' was not clearly mentioned is not necessarily because the identity of 'the other' was unclear to the protestors – it could also be part of protestors' attempts to decrease the risk of prosecution. In conversations I conducted with participants in the Umbrella Movement, they clearly emphasized that 'the other' is the PRC.

A survey conducted in June 2014 revealed that the importance of the term 'Hongkonger' (*Xianggangren*) has increased, as opposed to the terms 'Chinese' and 'citizen of the PRC', which considerably dropped in terms of usage between 1997 and 2007. When 'identity indices' were used in the same survey, Hongkongers identified most strongly as 'Hongkongers', followed by 'Asians', then 'members of the Chinese race', 'global citizens', 'Chinese', and finally 'citizens of the PRC' (Public opinion polls, 2014). The survey shows that embracing the terms 'Hong Kong people' and 'Hong Kongers' as a mark of local identity has become a useful way for the local population to resist national assimilation. While this survey was conducted among the entire Hong Kong population, a survey conducted by Hong Kong University among the participants in the Umbrella Movement revealed that 81 percent of the participants identified themselves as Hong

Kongers, far more than the 40 percent of the general population (Cheng and Yuen, 2015).²⁸

During the period of the demonstrations, even Hong Kongers who did not take an active part in the events tried to be involved in different ways. For example, Cheng told me that he wanted to take an active part in the demonstrations, but could not. He explained that since his company was linked to a mainland company, they had received emails telling them not to participate. However, during the period of the demonstrations, as an act of empathy or identification with the movement, he changed his Facebook profile picture to the yellow ribbon which was the symbol of the movement. I did not know any Sheung Shui marriage migrant who actively participated in the demonstrations, but some of them also changed their Facebook profile pictures to the yellow ribbon and others shared videos that supported the demonstrations. It is important to note that not all of the marriage migrants agreed with the demonstration; some of the women did not quite understand why the activists were disturbing the social order. However, the fact that some of the Sheung Shui marriage migrants did take part in the protest in showing solidarity demonstrates the complexity of their social position, and especially their desire to belong to the Hong Kong side of the border.

Differences of political values continue to be a major trigger for demonstrations in Hong Kong. The main reason for the 2003 mass demonstrations was the rejection of the proposal to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law, and the Umbrella Movement began as spontaneous opposition to the Central government's interference in the 2017 elections. In other words, as mentioned by Mathews, Ma, and Lui (2008), it is China's political values that many Hong Kongers wish to differentiate themselves from. While this distinction has clearly been a major part of defining Hong Konger's local identity, I argue that the endeavour to draw a line between 'us' and 'them' cannot be separated from the way many Hong Kongers feel towards the growing amount of cross-border interactions. In other words, resistance to China's political system is only one factor in the distress about their city's future that was expressed by many of the Hong Kongers I interviewed and talked

28 In an article which discusses the mechanisms by which border policing and immigration law enforcement enable inclusion or exclusion, De Genova (2013) argues that anti-immigrant populism in contemporary Europe tends to use the idea of national belonging as a disguise for racism. In other words, instead of emphasizing that anti-immigrant ideas are a result of a: 'pluralistic and differentialist incompatibility between the national culture and the 'foreignnes of the migrants' certain groups promote the category of 'nativeness' which is based on birthright entitlements of 'the nation' and 'its people' (De Genova, 2013: 1192). This mechanism basically prioritizes the 'natives' or 'locals' over 'outsiders'.

with. In the following section, I focus on other forms of opposition I came across during my fieldwork in Hong Kong – emphasizing that, as opposed to Veg's argument (2016) that the 'other' was undefined, the practices I encountered explicitly highlighted China as the 'other'.

What can 'we' do?

The third sector²⁹ and civil society organizations (CSOs) have had a significant part in the development of the community in Hong Kong ever since the territory was ceded to Britain in 1842 (Yuen, 2003). The make-up and character of the CSOs was influenced by British traditions, and voluntary associations such as service provision, advocacy, and various forms of civic participation served important social functions. Religious organizations have also had a central role in building community; for example, foreign missionaries were responsible for the opening of schools as well as The Medical Missionary Hospital of Hong Kong in 1843. This hospital was the first to provide western medicine to local Chinese people. In addition to welfare organizations and religious institutions, guilds were also formed to establish business regulations and to promote and defend workers' rights (Civil Society Index Research, 2006). There has also been a strong civic contribution to areas such as arts and culture, sports, immigration, education, and healthcare.

The end of the civil war in China in 1949, together with the political upheavals of the 1950s and 1960s, triggered an influx of mainland Chinese refugees into Hong Kong. Yuen (2003) argues that the fact that Hong Kong's society is comprised mostly of refugees is one of the main reasons for the establishment and considerable development of CSOs. Yuen claimed that due to the lack of resources, the colonial government was reluctant to provide suitable community services, leading to the development of self-help and communal help organizations. Nevertheless, as the number of refugees increased, the local CSOs were not enough to cater to the needs of the new inhabitants, and funding was therefore sought from the colonial government as well as overseas countries, organizations, and aid agencies (Civil Society Index Research, 2006). Until the 1970s, the civil organizations in Hong Kong dealt with a variety of social issues such as campaigning for different public causes and the promotion of specific social interests, as well as dealing

29 The term 'Third sector organisations' refer to organisations that are neither public sector nor private sector. These organisations include voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises, and co-operatives.

with highly political issues, for example participating in riots against the colonial government in 1956, 1966, and 1967 (Lam, 2004). Changes in Hong Kong's civil society were the result of several factors. First, with the rapid economic development that began in the 1970s Hong Kong people began to demand social reforms and livelihood improvement. With increasing public resources available, the colonial government was under pressure to take on more responsibilities for providing different types of welfare services. Second, the government realized the benefits of cooperating with the civil society organizations and started to use them as an interface between the citizens and the colonial government. In this way, links between the non-profit and public-private sectors were initiated. Since 2003, the SAR government has been nearly the sole source of funding for education, health, and welfare (Yuen, 2003: 91-92). The social movements of the 1970s, in this sense, marked an important period of community- and identity-building and joint engagement between the state and the society (Ma, 2007; Lui, 2002).

The political and socioeconomic environment before the handover also contributed to changes in Hong Kong's civil society organizations. The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on 19 December 1984 and the subsequent debate about the future political formula turned the attention of Hong Kongers, and the mass media, towards constitutional rather than livelihood issues (Lai, 2000; Lui and Chiu, 2000: 13). A new class of educated youth who had been born or brought up in Hong Kong began to show a better sense of belonging to Hong Kong, and as a result there was a rise of social and pressure group movements. At the same time, the colonial government allowed more tolerance of social protest and petitions (Lui and Chiu, 2000). The traditional social organizations that had been active in the 1950s and 1960s gradually gave way to new organizations comprising mainly the younger generation. During the 1970s, the young activists were mostly focused on correcting the problems of the colonial regime and improving the quality of life in Hong Kong (Lau, 1984; Lui and Chiu, 2000; Ma, 1997: 200-201). Although some groups were politically active and critical of the colonial government, most organizations remained financially dependent on and close partners with the colonial government (Lam and Tong, 2007).

A survey conducted in 2002 by the Central Policy Unit (CPU) of the HKSAR estimated that Hong Kong's third sector accounted for between 4.6 and 11.4 percent of the total workforce (Lou, 2007). Between 2004 and 2005, the Civil Society Index (CSI) program was carried out by CIVICUS, an international alliance of civil society organizations, in order to assess the situation of the Hong Kong's civil society. According to the CSI official website: 'The main goal of the program is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a country's

civil society and to suggest the kinds of action needed to further strengthen civil society and its contribution to social change' (Civil Society Index, 2006: 1). Based on the international criteria used by CIVICUS, Hong Kong's civil society was examined from four dimensions: 1) the internal structure of civil society; 2) the political, socio-cultural, and legal environment in which civil society operates; 3) the values supported by civil society actors; and 4) the impact of the civil society with regards to governance and meeting social needs. The research results formed a 'Civil Society Diamond' in which the dimensions of values (2.0) and impact (1.9) received higher scores than structure (1.3) and environment (1.6). Overall, Hong Kong's civil society was described as 'vibrant but loosely organized' (Ibid: 6).

Since the 1970s there was a wide scholarly debate about the nature of political attitudes in Hong Kong. Although the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong has been advocating for the democratization of the electoral system, in practice democratization has hardly made any progress in Hong Kong. Lau (1984) explains that, although Hong Kong people were entitled to directly vote for District Committees, very few did so because they did not believe that their vote could make any difference. Lau's findings show that 91.1 percent of his interview partners believed they did not have any ability to influence the SAR government. Even more striking is that 96.7 percent of his interviewers believed that they could not influence government policies at all. Hong Kong's low voter rates in the Urban Council elections, along with Hong Kong people's strong belief that 'nothing can be done' has led scholars to the conventional argument that Hong Kong people are 'politically apathetic' (Hoadley, 1970, 1973; King, 1981; Lau, 1984). Lam (2004) explains that this contention was supported by two major arguments: first, that Hong Kong is largely a refugee society, and refugees do not have the resources to become politically active; and second, that these refugees came from mainland China and thus were influenced by Chinese culture, which is often characterized by 'family-oriented, apolitical values and submissiveness to a paternalistic government' (Lam, 2004: 8).

In *Understanding the Political Culture of Hong Kong: The Paradox of Activism and Depoliticization*, Lam (2004) identifies methodological problems in Hoadley (1970, 1973), King (1981), and Lau's (1984) studies. Here, I choose to focus on one element of Lam's thorough analysis: his critique of the fact that the earlier scholars based their conclusions on a narrow definition of political participation. While some scholars also referred to Hong Kong people's participation in organizations with electoral agendas as political participation, they still based their conclusion on the analysis of voter registration and turnout rates. Lam concludes that these scholars ignored

the important area of informal politics which should be based on public involvement in social and political issues. In the same study, Lam (2004) discusses Siu-kai Lau's theories (Lau 1978, 1981, 1982, 1983), which were published in the late 1970s and early 1980s and have been influential in the field of the political culture of Hong Kong until today. Lau's main argument was that Hong Kong people were politically passive because they had a limited understanding of the role of the government and as a result believed in political powerlessness. In addition, Lau claimed that most Hong Kong people take part in political activities only to advance their individual or family interests. According to Lau, these two reasons resulted in only limited political participation of the community. Lam claims that, while Lau tried to object to using political apathy as the major variable to explain political stability in Hong Kong, in practice he simply replaced the idea of political apathy with that of 'political aloofness' – i.e., that Hong Kong people are generally trying to avoid political participation and that they have limited expectations from their government (Lam, 2004: 12-13).

After my first visit to Hong Kong in 2010, I often heard similar remarks from colleagues outside Hong Kong who told me that Hong Kong people were simply accepting the inevitable and 'learning to belong to their nation' (Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2008). Nevertheless, during my fieldwork I often came across empirical data that supported Lam's argument that 'the words "apathetic" and "passive" are hardly the appropriate descriptions of the general public in Hong Kong' (Lam, 2004: 19). In fact, the group of artists and social activists I came to know in Hong Kong were just the opposite; perhaps they were not 'doing politics' in the conventional form of placing their vote, but they found alternative, and often very creative, methods of expressing their political agenda. Further, they saw themselves as (political) activists.

Studies that challenge the assertion that Hong Kong people are 'politically apathetic' tend to focus on the rise of anti-government demonstrations and riots. Very few pay attention to informal political acts. An exception is Cheng's (2014) edited volume *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*, a section of which is dedicated to the rise of social movements in Hong Kong. Cheng (2014) argues that political participation includes actions by which individuals aim to influence government policies or structure. In this sense, these 'new trends' of social participation do take a political form. Following Degolyer and Scott (1996) – who maintain that political participation encompasses a wide range of social engagements and expression of political concerns, aims, and degree of loyalty –, Lam (2004), and Cheng (2014), in the following pages I offer a fresh angle on contemporary political participation by Hong Kong people.

The group of artists and social activists I came to know during my fieldwork in Hong Kong invested a significant amount of their time in raising political consciousness through social and cultural activities. The importance young Hong Kongers place on civil society is evident in the following excerpt from an interview I conducted with Julia, a young Hong Kong artist who dedicated most of her time to initiating and participating in voluntary social activities. Julia was also part of the group who ran Woofers Ten (the art-space I described above). In an interview at Woofers Ten, she told me about her family's roots and their relationship with her political and social awareness. Julia's parents immigrated to Hong Kong after escaping from the Chinese Communist Party. She remembered that as a child her parents used to tell her 'very bad things about mainland China'. Yet, even though her parents ran away from the Communist Party and had lived in Hong Kong for many years, her mother still believed that 'authority [referring to the Communist regime] is the biggest power'. Julia's emphasis on her mother's past demonstrated that her mother still perceived the CCP as very influential, and perhaps even a threat. Julia argued that, as opposed to Hong Kong people, mainland Chinese people 'choose to obey the government' and that 'the concept [of obeying authority] is very strong inside them'. It was important for Julia to emphasize that Hong Kong people were different: 'Hong Kong people have their own power [...] so I think that working for the community is very important to me, and to the development of Hong Kong'. During the interview, it was clear that Julia criticized her mother's admiration of authority. Julia concluded our conversation by stating the importance of 'power which comes from the people'.

Julia's views about the importance of Hong Kong people's own actions were expressed in the numerous social and political activities she and her friends had initiated and participated in during the previous few years. The views of Julia and her fellow activists supported the idea that political activism should not be analysed in a narrow form. By initiating and participating in communal activities, these activists also emphasize that Hong Kong people have the will and ability to freely choose and act – something they believed was in complete contrast to the situation in mainland China. In other words, constant engagement in social activities and the building of the community, as suggested by Julia and other activists I came to know, was an alternative way for them to distinguish themselves from mainland China, and to demonstrate their high political awareness. In the following section, I discuss several case studies of young Hong Kongers who are not only politically active, but are also resisting the current system by emphasizing Hong Kong's unique characteristics and drawing a line between 'us' and 'them'.

Urban Resistance

In the summer of 2013, Woofer Ten, the art-space Julia and her friends ran in Kowloon, hosted a group of comic artists named 'Comic Daemons'. The name of the exhibition was 'Universal Suffrage Now', and its main objective was to display the cartoon artists' feelings and concerns about Hong Kong's future. Figure 5.2 below is an example of one of the main messages that dominated the participants' artworks. The painting contains an image of a well-fed cat lying on his back with a crown on its head. Without using explicit Chinese symbols, the artist implies that the cat symbolizes the Chinese state: the red colour of the ribbon on the cat's neck and the crown on its head imply that the cat stands for China, or perhaps the CCP. There are doves around the cat, holding signs and protesting 'no cats allowed'. Although the cat seems satisfied and tired, it has still managed to catch one dove. It is clear that the cat is well-fed and does not need the dove, but it wants to grab it anyway – perhaps just because it is able to. The message delivered by the painting is quite clear: the doves, which symbolize peace, are in great danger; they do not stand a chance when confronted by the cat.

In 2013, I accompanied an exchange project between Israeli and Hong Kong artists. The name of the project was 'Metropolin: Topology of Urban Resistance', and it was curated by Amir Pollak, an artist from Israel, and Lau Kin Wah, a social activist, art curator, and lecturer from Hong Kong. The basic idea of the exhibition was quite simple: the Israeli artists exhibited their art in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong artists exhibited their art in Tel Aviv. The topic of the project was urban resistance, but as each place provided a different political, economic, and social context, each group dealt with its own understanding of resistance. The use of art to express a political agenda is obviously not new, but what was rather fascinating was the Hong Kong curator's point of view about art's role in contemporary Hong Kong society. The following quote is taken from the exhibition catalogue:

In these recent years, I deliberately pushed my understanding of political art and its local contextualization to the extreme. For it seems to me, too many things are deteriorating in Hong Kong. Our society is at a state of emergency, which demand our constant attention, frequent action, and a drastic value re-formulation. Making a living in the city, managing one's own life within it, requires every bit of one's energy already. Keeping one's principle and staying decent inevitable requires an even greater effort. Art in the scene, gradually seems something too luxurious to me, especially when they were not being mobilized for fighting these battles. So please

Figure 5.2 'Fighting for freedom', 2013

Painting by the artist Xiao Hua

pardon me for being straightforward, but I believe that art resources should be challenged to the resistance in real. Since this is not possible in this occasion, I didn't have much interest taking part in the project. For personally, I am just too poor and strained in life, obsessed with the local, and a farming existence [...] Art (or even the good-hearted) has really too little to offer to all the different locally meaningful resistance, while having the danger of drawing away the tiny bits of the precious resources which are needed or should be reserved for a longer sustainable resisting survival. (Hanina gallery, 2013)

Lau's words demonstrate his distress and fear of Hong Kong's contemporary social and political situation. Lau used to be a very vibrant curator, but as he told me in one conversation, in recent years he started having doubts about the role of art in society. He explained that art should not only be about resistance or reflect political point of views; instead, it should be used to mobilize resistance.

Another interesting phenomenon that demonstrates a change in young Hong Kongers' perspectives is their move from Hong Kong's urban areas to the villages in the New Territories. I have met several artists who left Kowloon to live in villages in Hong Kong's New Territories, more than an hour's drive from the city. Based on our conversations, it was clear that this was their way to connect to Hong Kong's land and demonstrate their true resistance. Young Hong Kongers' involvement in agriculture is a relatively new phenomenon. This topic is not the focus of my study, but during my ethnographic work I met activists who had moved to Hong Kong's villages and started growing vegetables or becoming involved in ecological and agricultural projects. On one occasion, I was invited to attend a breakfast on the roof of one of the buildings in Kowloon. The uniqueness of the breakfast was in consuming vegetables which were not imported; many of them were grown by the participants. During the event, one of the participants discovered an okra on one of the plants on the roof. He carefully picked the okra, cut it into small pieces, stir fried it, and distributed to his friends. It was very small, but everyone seemed extremely excited by the discovery. Growing vegetables on Hong Kong soil signified a connection to the(ir) land.

In recent years, more and more young Hong Kong activists have formed small groups intended to either resist mainland China or fight to maintain what they perceive as Hong Kong's unique identity. In 2007 Hong Kong's Civil Engineering and Development and Planning Department initiated the project 'North-East New Territories Project'. The main objective of the project is to build thousands of housing and commercial buildings in Hong Kong's New Territories, which are situated near the Hong Kong-China border, and to enable mainland Chinese to enter the area without needing to apply for the TWP. The initiation of the project resulted in a great deal of resistance from Hong Kong young activists. Several groups have been protesting against this project, claiming that it means the dissolution of the Hong Kong-China Border. One of the initiatives that is currently resisting urban development in the New Territories is Mapopo Community Farm. The farm was established in 2011 by two young social activists named Becky Au and Cho Kai-kai, who 'felt that the time for more action had come' (Tsoi, 2012). The farm is located in Mo Shi Po village in Fanling. On a visit to the farm in the summer of 2013, I was quite surprised to discover that it was located in the middle of a residential area and mostly surrounded with high-rise buildings. The farm seemed to be one of the last pieces of rural land left in the area. The farm consists of a small rickety house in which the activists reside, and fields in which organic vegetables are grown.

Although according to the farm's webpage the main objective is to practice sustainable agriculture, when I interviewed one of the farm's members, the first thing she mentioned was their resistance to the 'North-East New Territories Project'. She took out a map of the planned project and explained that they had set up the farm to delay urban development as well as to resist China's interference in Hong Kong's affairs. In an interview with Ben, one of the protestors against the project, I asked him about his resistance to the project:

Ben: It seems that the economic status has been swapped. Capital from the mainland has changed the structure of Hong Kong's economy. Underlying policies have also been adjusted gradually. An obvious feeling comes from Hong Kong people is that they feel Hong Kong is being changed to serve the economy of China not Hong Kong itself. Hong Kong people [...] easily read the project as an action of erasing borders, merging Hong Kong into the planning of the Greater Pearl Delta Region.

Avital: Why do you think the Hong Kong government supports the project?

Ben: It is obvious... The Chief Executive and his team are not elected by Hong Kong people, and half of our legislative council members are not elected by Hong Kong people too. Projects like "the north-east" do not need to concern the benefit of Hong Kong people and the future of this city indeed. You may say that Hong Kong is part of China, and why I said that the development or policy making do not concern Hong Kong people. The truth is that even in Mainland China, the benefit does not go to the people but only to the rich. Hong Kong in the eyes of Chinese government is a useful place to trade, to develop real estate property for the rich. What is the benefit and future of Hong Kong, who cares?

Ben's words demonstrated how it has become harder to maintain the social and cultural boundaries between Hong Kong and mainland China in recent years. Considering these recent changes, Hong Kong young activists strive to preserve their unique local identity. In a conversation with Ben in the winter of 2015, a few months after the Umbrella Movement ended, he told me that most Hong Kong people blame mainland China for Hong Kong's social and economic problems:

Regarding to the 'One Country, Two Systems,' you may see how Hong Kong people react to the constitutional reform of 2017 [...] The political and cultural difference between the two places still cannot be broken easily. While facing the 'north-east project,' or similar issues, Hong Kong

people will act in a protective way against them. You could say it is about fear, and Chinese government is using such strategy to make Hong Kong people scared. We feel insecure about our city's future.

The main purpose of the social activities I describe above is to emphasize Hong Kong's unique identity, especially in comparison to the mainland. However, young Hong Kong activists also initiated and participated in activities that were directly related to mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong. The major reason was that many of the activities were targeted towards Hong Kong's marginalized populations, so mainland marriage migrants who lived in poorer districts of Hong Kong also took part. An example of such an event took place in the summer of 2013. The event was called 'Sham Shui Po Cherish Food', and its main purpose was involving the women of the neighbourhood in raising awareness of sustainability.

The event included the participation of Sham Shui Po housewives, who, together with the young activists, learned how to cook several local dishes. Although the event was not specifically targeted at mainland marriage migrants, one of the coordinators explained to me that most of the participants were in fact mainland immigrants who lived in the area. This event serves as an example of the complexity that characterized young Hong Kongers' actions: while many of the activities were targeted at differentiating themselves from mainland China, some of the activities involved mainland immigrants. The activities did not include a dialogue about cross-cultural interaction, however: the meeting point between the volunteers and the mainland marriage migrants included 'teaching' the marriage migrants about local values or helping them adjust to local norms. In Sheung Shui, where most marriage migrants did not experience concrete financial difficulties, there were relatively few activities aimed at increasing their social and political awareness. Instead, the meeting point between Sheung Shui marriage migrants and the young Hong Kong activists was at the marriage migrants' home sphere, where they often discussed Hong Kong's social and political situation with their spouse.

Concluding Thoughts: Home Is not where the Heart Is but where it Wants to Be

When I look back at the past six years of fieldwork in Hong Kong, the word that comes to my mind is *change*. As an Israeli, I often listen to the news. Many radio stations in Israel broadcast the news every 30 minutes; since there is a constant feeling of urgency, I often feel that if I miss the news, I probably miss the report of an important event which just took place. After I returned to Israel from a long stay abroad, I remember turning on the radio in my car. The news was on, and I anticipated hearing some new report. But the tone of the narrator, the rhetoric, and the intonation all made me feel as if nothing had actually *changed* during all those months. On the other hand, each time I went back to Hong Kong, whether for a long or short visit, over the past six years, it seemed as if the winds of change were constantly blowing. Perhaps because I do not have an 'outsider' view I have become numb to any significant *change* in my own society. But this contrast was still very apparent to me.

Each time I went to Hong Kong, everyone around me was preoccupied with *change*, especially the changes Hong Kong has experienced since the handover. In migration research, *movement* from one place to another or from one social position to another is an important part of the analysis. However, studies that focus on the motivations and experiences of migrants often tend to look at either the flow or restriction of movement, overlooking situations where movement and confinement define each other (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013; Hackle et al., 2016). In this closing chapter, I would like to put the spotlight on *change*. By this, I do not mean simply describing the changes that took place in my field, but rather trying to treat *change* as an emic term, and as an immanent construct in the analysis. I believe doing this exposes the spaces and situations in which the interface between mobility and immobility takes place in contemporary Hong Kong.

Inclusion and Exclusion

Migration is a socially embedded process that reflects and reinforces a specific legal and social structure. As such, migration is conceived as linked in its meaning and operation to changes in the economic, social, and cultural

landscapes of which it is a part. 'The social embeddedness of migration' means that feelings of inclusion and exclusion are not simply a result of structural conditions. They are organized and ascribed meanings in, and through, the existing hierarchies of a specific context (Silvey, 2005: 138). This analysis is highly relevant for understanding cross-border marriages. As my findings show, cross-border marriages between mainland women and Hong Kong men reflect and reinforce the specific social organizations that exist on both sides of the border.

As I have discussed throughout this book, on the Chinese side of the border Sheung Shui marriage migrants' motivations to pursue mobility are closely related to China's *hukou* system, the gap between the rural and the urban sector, the marginalization of women in their families and in society, and contemporary discourses related to the idea of improving the 'quality' of the population. The idea of mobility becomes more complex because even after working in Shenzhen for several years the marriage migrants I came to know in Sheung Shui were unable to change their *hukou*; as labour migrants they were situated at the margins of society, and their *suzhi* remained low in the eyes of the local population.

In her study of female migrant workers in a factory in Shenzhen, Pun Ngai has shown that the rural women workers in Shenzhen continue to be viewed as peasants, especially by their employers. For example, during one inspection the manager found cartons that had been brought by the workers to make benches in their rooms. In response, he loudly told the workers, 'Let me repeat, you are working now in the factory, and the bad habits you bring from the countryside should be given up. No spitting on the floor and keep your bunk and room clean' (Ngai, 1999: 5). In other words, from the point of view of the manager geographical mobility did not help the migrants shed rurality and gain *suzhi*. The subordination, peripheralization, and exploitation of the rural migrant by her urban employer were not only related to class differences or the rural/urban division, but also to the situating of the migrant as subaltern and an outsider. My findings revealed that physically crossing the border to Hong Kong did not allow the women to 'shed' many of the qualities that were their main reasons for out-migration. In fact, similar mechanisms to those that contributed to the marginalization of the women in China's rural areas and in Shenzhen also persisted in Hong Kong.

My empirical data illustrates the centrality of emotional dynamics in the marriage migrants' lived experiences. Some of the 'spaces of marginality' (Salazar, 2010: 58) they wanted to escape from in mainland China reappeared in Hong Kong. For example, the marriage migrants' feelings of exclusion were closely related to their relationships with their spouses. Most of the

women were bound to an unsigned 'gendered contract' which left them in the home sphere – the same social role they wanted to escape by leaving the village. Furthermore, the spouses' absence from their everyday lives brought them closer to other mainland marriage migrants who underwent similar experiences. Another important mechanism that contributed to the marginalization of the women is the increasing anti-China sentiments in Hong Kong. Often the marriage migrants conveyed that although they had lived in Hong Kong for several years, their friends in Hong Kong were all originally from mainland China; Hong Kong women looked down at them. In a study about marriages across the Taiwan Strait, Friedman has argued that the Chinese marital immigrants to Taiwan are viewed as potential threats to the nation, and as a result are treated as 'exceptional citizens' (Friedman, 2010: 74). The social exclusion that Sheung Shui marriage migrants experienced in their everyday life is closely related to Hong Kong people's fear for their city's future. The marriage migrants spent most of their time with other mainland migrants; they were considered 'mainlanders' and often experienced feelings of exclusion from the local society. However, I have also shown that although many social and cultural boundaries have 'moved' with the migrants, physically crossing the Hong Kong-China border has also allowed some boundaries to be crossed to a certain degree. Their legal citizenship in Hong Kong granted the marriage migrants many of the social benefits they lacked as rural *hukou* holders or rural labour migrants to one of China's cities. Hong Kong's social benefits, especially the educational system which allowed them to build 'quality' into their children, moved them closer to the 'centre' and contributed to their feelings of belonging to Hong Kong's society. As time went by and the women felt more secure in Hong Kong, even the gender contract became less fixed, and the women managed to find spaces where they could exert agency. In other words, even though they were confined within certain social and cultural boundaries, they also managed to negotiate those boundaries in their everyday lives.

Mobile identities

During the last lesson of a course about migration in contemporary China that I taught at Tel Aviv University, I asked my students whether they thought 'a migrant' could ever become a 'non-migrant'. One of the students raised her hand and very passionately told the class that even though she had immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union when she was only 10 months old, she still felt like a migrant. On a recent visit to a friend's home

in Israel – a family consisting of an Israeli husband, a mainland Chinese wife, and their three-year-old daughter – I noticed a box of Chinese instant noodles in the refrigerator. The family had just returned from a one-month visit to mainland China and brought the box of noodles back with them. I asked my children if they wanted to taste the noodles, but my friend immediately said: ‘I am awfully sorry, but your children cannot eat the noodles. I keep the noodles for desperate time[s], when I feel lonely and I miss my hometown [...] It is the only thing that brings me back.’ These two examples, which raise issues of belonging and exclusion, exemplify one of the key questions which underline this book: what boundaries have Sheung Shui marriage migrants managed to cross? And how has the physical move to Hong Kong changed their feelings of belonging?

My fieldwork in Hong Kong began towards the end of 2010 and my last visit before completing this book took place in the spring of 2018. Over this long period I witnessed changes in the marriage migrants’ lives, which proved to be extremely important to my understanding of their experiences as marriage migrants, mothers, and mainlanders in Hong Kong. The first change was related to how the women perceived Hong Kong. Over the years, their image of a ‘flawless’ Hong Kong has changed, and when I returned to Sheung Shui in the winter of 2015 I occasionally heard complaints about the housing situation and the high cost of living. In one of our conversations, Wang Jian even told me that she was not satisfied with her daughter’s schoolteacher’s behaviour – a kind of complaint that would have been inconceivable earlier. Complaining about the Hong Kong system situated the migrants – at least to some extent – as ‘locals’, who often criticized Hong Kong’s social, economic, and political situation. The second significant change was related to their children growing up, and the influence of this process on how the women spent their days, their employment opportunities, their social networks, and their relationship with their spouse. The changes that I witnessed during my long-term study meant that there was no simple way to answer my intended research question. I realized that rather than trying to understand whether the women had managed to obtain upward social mobility, or whether their legal citizenship also granted them cultural citizenship, I should instead focus on the marriage migrants’ changing subjectivities, which are an important aspect in the understanding of mobility processes.

To understand the marriage migrants’ changing subjectivities, I have emphasized the transnational dimension of the phenomenon. As I described in the introduction, the transnational turn within migration studies has contributed to the understanding that, instead of putting the spotlight on migrants’ integration into their destination, more attention should be paid

to their feelings of belonging to two or more destinations (Altik and Weedon, 2010). In recent anthropological studies, transnationalism has manifested in the stories of female migrants who have taken on the simultaneous roles of main income-earners and mothers. These studies have mostly focused on the left-behind families; i.e. on situations where mothers migrate and leave their children with grandparents or other family members (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2001). Recent studies have concentrated on the reproductive labour of migrant care workers and their reproductive lives in host societies (Constable, 2014; Kemp and Kfir, 2016). Nicole Constable's (2014) study focuses on babies born to foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong, highlighting the complexities that arise when a domestic worker becomes a mother. One of her main arguments is that the women's changing role from 'domestic worker' to 'mother' is perceived by the host society as abnormal and a 'problem' to be solved. Another important example is a study by Adriana Kemp and Nelly Kfir (2016), which explores how migration policies control the reproductive lives of migrant care workers in Israel. Kemp and Kfir (2016) demonstrate that, while the Israeli state welcomes the women as migrant care workers, it creates migration regimes which not only situate the pregnant women and/or the mothers as unwanted, but also turn the mother and her child into 'illegal families'. By focusing on women's complex experiences, these studies highlight the close connection between labour migration and familial, social, institutional, and global dynamics.

Instead of focusing on the integration of the marriage migrants into Hong Kong, I have paid attention to their feelings of belonging and obligation to both mainland China and Hong Kong. I have also reflected on their social position: how do the women perceive themselves and how are they perceived, legally and socially by others? Moving back and forth across the border allows me to highlight the idea that their place of origin and the symbolic baggage it carries has continued to impact their experiences at their destination. I suggest that there is no single point in time when the women in my study became non-migrants, or a moment when a new social identity was formed. Instead, the women's social identity is constantly negotiated, contested, and transformed. In this sense, the term 'Sheung Shui marriage migrant' best describes their 'current' social identity.

From border to boundary

In this book I have discussed three types of 'border': the political border between Hong Kong and mainland China; the social and cultural boundaries

Hong Kongers try to maintain between them and mainland China; and the boundaries that Sheung Shui marriage migrants constantly draw and negotiate in their lived experiences in Hong Kong. Sheung Shui marriage migrants' legal status has turned the border from a barrier into a resource, and although in recent years it has also become a resource for Hong Kong entrepreneurs and others (Ma, 2012), for many Hong Kong residents (especially the young generation), these increased cross-border interactions are seen as a source of instability and insecurity. As demonstrated by the pro-democracy protests of the Umbrella Movement, the flow of tourists and immigrants, together with mainland China's political intervention in Hong Kong affairs, has not resulted in Hong Kongers embracing the nationalistic discourse. To the contrary, many Hong Kongers have sought more segregation from mainland Chinese people, and their desire to differentiate themselves from mainland China has grown.

In July 2017, a short while before the completion of this book, I travelled to Hong Kong for a very brief visit. A good friend of mine who is also a local artist and activist was waiting for me at the airport. We only had a few hours to spend together, and she suggested that we visit a new exhibition at the City Hall in Central. On the train from the airport my friend mostly talked about the feelings that she and her friends share regarding the massive changes that Hong Kong has experienced in the past few years. She explained that the political situation is very tense and that in general, they all felt that the Umbrella movement has 'failed'. She did not only seem worried by this; she seemed sad. My friend was deeply concerned about her job stability, her housing situation, the political circumstances, and her professional future, and she attributed these worries to the recent socio-political turmoil, mostly caused by China's growing interference in Hong Kong affairs. She felt sad because these changes were happening too fast and could not be stopped or even slowed down.

When we reached City Hall, I discovered that the exhibition's name was 'Very Hong Kong, Very Hong Kong'. Because my friend is a political artist who used to curate highly political exhibitions, I expected this exhibition to have a political agenda as well. However, I was surprised to discover that the exhibition was part of the twentieth anniversary of Hong Kong's handover from Britain to China. According to the catalogue, the theme of the exhibition 'implies dual meanings. The first "Very Hong Kong" pays tribute to local culture; the second "Very Hong Kong" stands for creative excellence that influences our daily life.' The catalogue further stated that the purpose of the exhibition is 'To look back, re-discover and foster discussion of the best in Hong Kong design and creativity'. Although the exhibition lacked a

concrete political statement, the most prominent thing was the absence of mainland China. It was a tribute to Hong Kong's local culture.

After we left the exhibition I took a train to Sheung Shui to meet two of my closest friends: A-lin and Wang Jian. When I met A-lin and her family, I learned that A-lin's spouse Cheng was no longer working as manager in a big company outside Hong Kong. He told me that A-lin had convinced him to quit his job and start working at a local company. Cheng explained that his wife wanted him to return home every day. I was truly surprised. When I first met Cheng he had often talked about his high paying job; he used to purchase famous brand names and in general seemed to enjoy his lifestyle. Now, he described his 'new life' after quitting his job in a very negative way; he explained that it had become extremely difficult to find a high-paying job in Hong Kong, and that he was dissatisfied with the current employment situation. Cheng told me that he 'forgot who he was' and that he stayed up every night until two AM to enjoy the things he loves to do. I looked at Cheng and could not help comparing his feelings to how my artist friend, whom I had just met, felt.

What was also surprising in these winds of change was that A-lin and Wang Jian told me that they do not go to Shenzhen as often as before. I wondered if this was because they felt less marginalized – does Shenzhen becoming less relevant for the women mean that they were feeling more 'Hong Kongers'? But Wang Jian explained that everything they used to purchase in Shenzhen could be found in Hong Kong, so there was no need (to cross the border). We were sitting in a Cantonese restaurant in Sheung Shui centre and I wondered if the women had contributed to the expanding of the border more than I thought. I realized that one of the implications of cross-border marriages, as well as the rising numbers of children born in Hong Kong to mainland mothers, was the changing nature of the border. Is Shenzhen 'China' and is Sheung Shui 'Hong Kong'?

On 23 September 2018 the cross-border high speed rail link connecting Hong Kong to 44 mainland Chinese cities was opened. Public opinion about the project is mixed. Supporters of the rail link claim that it enables passengers to travel faster and more conveniently to new destinations in mainland China. The opposition question the high cost of its construction and oppose the eviction of villages that was required to build it. Furthermore, many Hong Kongers critique the 'co-location arrangement', which means that part of the West Kowloon terminus on the Hong Kong side of the border has mainland checkpoint officials. Under this arrangement, the terminus area is under mainland jurisdiction and anyone who enters the area is subject to Chinese national laws (Lhatoo, 2018; Siu, 2018). The rail link is another

example of Hong Kong's integration with the mainland, and it is expected that more changes are yet to come. The cross-border marriages, as well as other new forms of mobility and regulations, are causing the expanding and blurring of the Hong Kong-China border, so that there is a much wider strip area where the dichotomies of the rural/urban, periphery/centre, and hybrid identities/nationalism take on new and more complex meanings.

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Index

- agency
 - female migrants 17, 21, 89
 - Sheung Shui marriage migrants in Hong Kong 26, 106-108, 113, 169
- Article 23 of the Basic Law 49-50, 155
- Article 22(4) of the Basic Law 53
- attitudes of Hong Kong people towards
 - mainlanders 11-12, 18, 23-24, 29, 55-56, 65, 105, 110-111, 129-132, 145, 147-156, 160-165, 169
- baby milk powder 82-88
- Basic Law of HKSAR 45-46, 49, 53, 150, 155
- Beijing 12, 17, 31, 41, 44-46, 65, 124, 140-141, 147-148, 153
- border
 - and culture 27, 36-38
 - and identity 35-40, 172
 - and the state 15, 37-40, 50, 52-53, 56-57, 86, 148, 155n28
 - as a theoretical construct 13, 27, 35-41, 50, 52-54, 171-174
 - symbolic borders/social and cultural borders 12-13, 18, 20, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35-41, 52, 58, 73, 80, 122, 148, 151, 153, 164, 169, 171, 174
 - see also* Hong Kong-China border; social and cultural boundaries between mainland China and Hong Kong
- borderlands 37-38
- British Colonial government/rule 13, 41-44, 45n8, 46, 73, 156-157
- Cantonese language
 - and rural labour migrants 96
 - proficiency of female marriage migrants 96-100, 143
 - use in Hong Kong 98, 133, 135, 144
- Century of Humiliation 42
- changes, social and political changes in Hong Kong 11-13, 22, 30, 43-50, 52, 77, 81, 85, 96-98, 131, 148-149, 152-153, 157, 163-165, 167, 170-174
- children
 - of Sheung Shui marriage migrants 11, 27-32, 65, 71, 76, 80, 84-85, 95-102, 104-110, 112-113, 115-117, 120, 126-129, 135-140, 143-145, 169-170
 - quality (*suzhi*) of 18n4, 27-29, 67, 71-72, 85, 88, 115, 121-126, 129, 131, 169
 - and education 28-29, 62, 76, 80, 93-94, 100, 104, 115-145, 170
 - methodological issues regarding 29-32
 - and mobility 56-58, 61, 62n14, 67, 71-72, 96, 115-120, 127-129, 132, 139, 143-145
 - see also* Family Planning Policy; maternity tourism of mainland women in Hong Kong
- Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Communists 13, 42-43, 45, 47, 61-63, 73, 91-92, 108, 124, 148, 150, 152, 160
- citizenship and migration 20, 53, 56-58, 90, 123
- citizenship of Sheung Shui marriage migrants in Hong Kong 29, 33, 35, 58, 75, 89, 169-170
- civil society in Hong Kong 147-150, 152-165
- commodities/consumer products in Hong Kong, quality of 80-88
- Confucianism 90-91, 95, 113, 121
- cross-border interactions 12, 51-52, 74, 83-85, 148-149, 151, 155, 172; *see also* Hong Kong-China border
- cross-border pupils 132-135, 144-145
- Cultural Revolution 42, 62, 73
- democracy 80, 154, 158, 172; *see also* Umbrella movement
- demonstrations, in Hong Kong 12, 49-50, 76, 86-87, 149, 152-155, 159
- Deng Xiaoping 44, 47, 63
- discrimination towards mainlanders in Hong Kong *see* attitudes of Hong Kong people towards mainlanders
- division of labour 17, 71, 95-96, 98-102, 109, 112-113, 137, 139
- economic development/changes in mainland China 13-14, 13n3, 23, 25, 28, 42-43, 51-52, 61-63, 66, 68, 70, 73, 78-79, 88, 91, 95, 109, 117-118, 124, 126, 151
- economic mobility of migrants 20, 115; *see also* rural-to-urban migration in China
- economy/economic changes, Hong Kong 11, 13-14, 18, 28, 41, 43, 47, 51-52, 54, 73-74, 76-77, 81, 88, 101, 157, 161, 164, 170
- education
 - and migration/mobility *see* children and mobility; education in China; cross-border pupils
 - in China 23, 61, 62n14, 64, 66, 78, 80, 92-94, 109, 115-126, 134, 140-143
 - of mainland marriage migrants' children *see* children and education
 - see also* Hong Kong's education system; Raising the Quality of the Population (*tigao renkou sushì*)
- emigration from Hong Kong 45
- employment of mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong *see* female marriage-migrants in Hong Kong, employment opportunities of
- English language
 - and mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong 99-100, 127, 136, 139
 - use in Hong Kong kindergartens and schools 127, 135-136, 139, 144

- Family Planning Policy 67, 71, 92-94, 124-126
- Family Responsibility System 63, 79
- feelings of belonging to Hong Kong *see* identity of Hong Kongers
- female labour migrants in China 17, 68-71, 89, 168
- female marriage migrants in Hong Kong
and social and cultural boundaries 12,
18, 20, 25, 27, 29, 35, 80, 169; *see also*
marginalization of female marriage
migrants in Hong Kong
- agency of 26, 106-108, 113, 169
- employment opportunities of 24, 65, 96,
98-102, 107-108, 112-113, 128, 170
- experiences of 12-13, 18, 24-30, 33, 35, 40, 50,
60, 78, 89, 99-108, 113, 115, 137-139, 168-170
- identity of 24, 26, 151, 155; *see also* female
marriage-migrants in Hong Kong,
subjectivity of; transnational/
transnationalism
- integration of 24-25, 97, 171
- living conditions in Hong Kong of 60, 72,
77-78, 81-82, 104-105, 127-129, 170
- marginalization of 12, 18-19, 24, 26, 28, 96,
98-99, 101, 105-106, 108, 113, 128-129,
143-144, 150, 165, 168-169, 173
- motivations to leave the village 12-13, 18n3,
26-27, 31, 58-60, 64, 66-72, 89, 109,
113, 120, 168; *see also* rural-to-urban
migration in China; Raising the Quality
of the Population (*tigao renkou suzhi*)
- motivations to marry a Hong Kong man
12-13, 26-27, 31, 58, 64, 69-72, 80, 120, 122,
127; *see also* children of Sheung Shui
marriage migrants
- parental practices 31, 116, 137-141, 143-144;
see also children of Sheung Shui mar-
riage migrants
- perceptions of Hong Kong 13, 73, 75, 77-82,
126-127, 151, 155, 170
- perceptions of mainlanders and mainland
China 74-75, 78, 81-82, 111-112, 151
- relations between husbands and wives 21,
28, 60, 65-66, 89, 95-102, 105, 107-113, 115,
128, 137, 139, 165, 169-170, 173; *see also*
gender contract; gender relations
- relations between wives and in-laws 60, 95,
98, 102, 108, 112-113, 128
- relations with natal families 19, 75, 77-78,
84, 98, 104, 109-113
- relations with other mainland marriage
migrants 59, 101-108
- subjectivity of 14, 25, 28, 89, 107-108, 170
- first world education 120
- flexible citizenship 144
- floating population 64, 79-80; *see also* rural-to-
urban migration in China; *suzhi* discourse
in mainland China
- food safety
in Hong Kong 81-88; *see also* baby milk
powder
in mainland China 77-78, 81-84
- gender and citizenship 56-58
- gender and mobility/migration 14, 15-21, 26-28,
56-58, 68-72, 168, 171; *see also* female labour
migrants in China
- gender contract/relations 21, 26, 28, 71, 89,
95-96, 98-103, 108-113, 139, 169
- gender disparity in China 68-69, 71-72, 90-95,
108-109, 111, 113, 168
- gender roles 11, 20, 71; *see also* gender contract/
relations
- Great Leap Forward 42, 61-62
- Guangdong Province 14, 41, 51-52, 60, 82, 88,
96-97, 103, 119
- Handover, Hong Kong to China 11, 41, 44-50,
148, 150-152, 157, 167, 172
- healthcare
in China 61, 64, 77-79, 92
in Hong Kong 73, 75-78, 81, 88, 130, 133, 157
- history, Hong Kong and mainland China
41-42
- Hong Kong artists/activists 28-29, 32-33, 76-77,
85, 147-150, 155, 157, 159-165, 172-173
- Hong Kong-China border 13-14, 19, 22, 26-30,
35, 40-41, 44, 50-58, 80-88, 111, 129, 132-135,
144-145, 148-149, 151-153, 155, 163-164,
168-169, 171-174
- changing nature of 13, 26, 35, 50, 52, 85, 145,
148, 153, 171-174
- Hong Kong government 49, 53, 87, 147, 149, 164
- Hong Kong husbands' motivations to marry a
mainland wife 24-25, 90
- Hong Kong Identification Card (HKID) 19, 27,
53, 65-66, 75, 80, 127, 132-133, 144
- Hong Kong, perceived by mainlanders 12n2, 43,
73-74, 78, 82-88, 115-117
- Hong Kong's education system 28, 76, 98,
115-117, 126-140, 169-170
- Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty 22,
44-50, 52, 54, 82, 129, 131, 145, 151, 153
- Hu, Jintao 152
- Hukou 29, 61-62, 64, 68-69, 71-72, 75, 77-80, 116,
133-134, 144, 168-169
- identity
and migration/mobility 17, 24, 26, 35-36,
38-40, 89, 167-171
- Hong Kongers 12-13, 28, 33, 43, 45-50, 73,
85, 111, 134, 145, 150-157, 160-165, 169,
171-172
- mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong
see female marriage migrants in Hong
Kong, identity of
- institutional mobility 13, 68, 72, 75-79, 83, 89,
90, 116, 169-170
- Jiang Zemin 121
- kindergarten 11, 29-30, 32, 65, 82, 93, 96, 98-100,
102-104, 115, 127-128, 133-141, 143-144

- labour migration 14-15, 17, 27, 57, 60, 68-72, 118, 171; *see also* rural-to-urban migration in China
- Mainlanders, immigration to Hong Kong 22-25, 42-43, 54-56, 73, 156
- Mandarin Chinese 33, 97-98, 101, 135, 144, 147, 150
- Mao Zedong, Mao era 61-62, 73, 79, 124
- marriages, mainland China 13, 69, 71-72, 91, 95, 108-109
- marriage-related migration 14, 16, 19-22, 27, 60
- maternity tourism of mainland women in Hong Kong 11, 54-56, 115-116, 129-135, 151
- media, Hong Kong 11, 45, 47, 82-83, 85, 129-132, 151-152, 157
- methodological nationalism 39, 52
- migration
 and affects 89-90, 102, 168
 and education 115-120, 127; *see also* children and education
 and gender *see* gender and mobility/migration
 and identity *see* identity and migration
 see also rural-to-urban migration in China; marriage related migration; identity and migration
- milk powder *see* baby milk powder
- mobility 13-15, 17, 20-21, 26-27, 29, 33, 39-40, 55-56, 58, 60-61, 66, 68, 70-72, 75, 89-90, 108, 115-116, 118, 120-121, 127, 143, 145, 167-168, 170, 174
 as a theoretical construct 59-60, 167, 169
 social mobility 68, 70, 108, 119, 120, 121, 145, 170
 see also children and mobility; social class and mobility, gender and mobility/migration; identity and mobility; institutional mobility; *suzhi* discourse in mainland China
- nationalistic sentiments in Hong Kong *see* identity, Hong Kongers
- New Territories, Hong Kong 11, 32, 41, 44, 163-164
- One Country, Two Systems 13, 44-45, 148, 150, 164
- One Way Permit (OWP) 22, 54, 56, 60, 65, 80, 116, 127-128, 150-151
- Open Door Policy 60, 62, 109
- Opium Wars 41-42
- Pearl River Delta Region (PRD) 14, 51-52, 164
- political influence of mainland China in Hong Kong 45-50, 52, 77, 145, 149-150, 152-157, 161-165
- public housing in Hong Kong 76, 127
- Quality education *see* Raising the Quality of the Population (*tigao renkou suzhi*)
- Raising the Quality of the Population (*tigao renkou suzhi*)/Quality Education 18n3, 66, 117-118, 121-126, 131, 142, 168
- Right of Abode in Hong Kong 52, 54, 129, 133
- riots in Hong Kong 157, 159; *see also* demonstrations in Hong Kong
- rural conditions in China 58-62, 64-65, 68-70, 77-79, 109, 116-120
- rural-to-urban migration in China 17-18, 25, 27, 59-61, 63-72, 79, 97, 109
- rural/urban dichotomy in China 18, 62-64, 67-72, 75, 77-80, 88, 116-120, 168
- serial migration 14, 60
- Sham Shui Po 127-128, 147, 165
- Shenzhen 11, 14, 17, 19, 51, 60, 65, 68-70, 78-79, 81, 83-84, 87, 97, 104, 106, 127-128, 133, 144, 168, 173
- Sino-British Joint Declaration 22, 44-45, 157
- social and cultural boundaries between mainland China and Hong Kong 12, 20, 27-29, 33, 56, 73-75, 148, 151, 153, 163-165, 169, 171-174
- social benefits, Hong Kong 22, 25, 27, 29, 43, 65-66, 72, 75-77, 80-81, 89, 116, 132-133, 144, 169
- social class
 and mobility/migration 15-16, 18, 20
 of Hong Kong spouses 24-25, 65
 of mainland marriage migrants in Hong Kong 12, 24-25, 32-33, 140
- South China Morning Post* 77n18, 130, 150
- Special Economic Zones (SEZ) 14, 60, 63, 68
- suzhi* discourse in mainland China 17-18, 27-28, 66-67, 69-71, 75, 80, 85, 88, 101, 116-126, 129, 144, 168; *see also* Raising the Quality of the Population (*tigao renkou suzhi*)
- Taiwan 19, 22, 46, 169
- Thatcher, Margaret 44
- Tiananmen Square incident 45, 147-149
- transnational marriages 19-20
- transnational/transnationalism 13, 18-21, 38, 89, 108-113, 123, 170-171
- Treaty of Nanjing 41
- Two Way Permit (TWP) 54, 83, 144, 163
- Umbrella movement 12, 49, 149, 153-155, 164, 172
- Unequal Treaties 41-42
- WWII 42, 67
- Xi Jinping 52, 150
- Zhao Ziyang 44

