CAN CHINESE WOMEN’S SOCIAL NETWORKS MIGRATE?*

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Short title: Women’s social capital

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**Synopsis**

This paper analyzes how dual-career couples from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) organize care for their children prior to and following immigration to Canada. Using the concepts of social capital and life course, we examine the problems Chinese immigrant women face in rebuilding their professional careers due to loss of social capital. In the PRC, childcare is provided by a dense web of formal institutional and informal arrangements, with the family playing an important role. After immigrating, most need to rebuild their careers and develop social capital to help them combine child care and career rebuilding. Women’s careers suffer more than that of their husbands. Our data come from interviews with 50 PRC couples, aged in their 30s and 40s, with young children, who immigrated to Canada after 1996 in the skilled worker class.
INTRODUCTION: WORK AND FAMILY NETWORKS

With the globalization of production and services, professionals from Asia increasingly migrate to enrich their work experiences and their family economies in new countries (Castells, 1989; Sassen, 1991). These moves often disrupt their professional employment and family support networks, which they must mobilize anew (Levitt & Schiller, 2003; Portes & Borocz, 1989; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). Our “Immigration from China” project explores how social networks bridge settlement of professionals who immigrated to Canada in the skilled worker category. We look for those features in their social networks that they share with others and those which are distinctly rooted in dual career families. This paper analyzes how migration alters the family support system, how couples adapt to reduced social capital for childcare, and how this impedes career opportunities of skilled women in particular.

A number of writers have studied how social networks meet the needs of working class women migrants (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). We need to learn more about the social networks of skilled workers, a significant category of international migrants (Kofman, 2000). Canada’s immigration policies grant permanent status to “independent” immigrants. Typical PRC immigrants to Canada are married professionals, who apply to immigrate based on their skills, without having been offered jobs, or preceded by other family members. In China, they had built collegial social networks during their education and careers (Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981). After immigration to Canada, to get appropriate positions they search for local work related network partners which are rooted in the occupation, not in kinship or the ethnic enclave (Gold, 2001; Poros, 2001; Salaff, Greve, Wong, & Xu, 2003a,b).

Family needs also require social network support, but of a different sort. Professionals are likely to marry other professionals, and both want to develop their careers. To do so, par-
ents with young children draw on complex support systems which, unlike job networks, are based on kinship. Like other migrants, they also have to mobilize family related social networks over immense physical distances (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; House, 1999; McArdle, 1999).

Rebuilding work related and child care social networks after they migrate is difficult, partly because this reconstruction occurs at the same time. Further, these multiple social networks are based on different types of relationships, intended for different purposes, entailing even more work to revamp them (Man, 1995, 1997; Preston & Man, 1999). These problems affect women and men differently and hit the careers of professional immigrant women the hardest (Willis & Yeow, 2000a).

Drawing on work and family biographies, collected from 50 PRC couples who immigrated to Canada from 1996 to 2001 in the skilled worker class, we first outline concepts of migration, social networks, and the life course. We then introduce some background materials on family support systems in China and Canada. Part II discusses our sample and qualitative research procedures. Case studies in Part III describe parents’ strategies in mixing formal structures and informal relations in China and Canada to get help with young children.

Social Networks: Migration and Social Support

Social networks play diverse functions in international migration (Delechat, 2001; Massey & Garcia Espana, 1987; Portes & Borocz, 1989). International migrants depend on social networks to find a job, start a business, or other career needs (Burt, 1992; Min, 1988). In addition to career exigencies, new arrivals need to find a place to live, get information and advice, emotional support, and help with childcare from others, the topic of this paper
There are social class distinctions; while kinship ties are important extra-market resources for working class immigrants, highly educated people are more likely to seek collegial and organizational ties for equivalent positions in the host country (Findlay & Li, 1998; Gold, 2001; Hardill & MacDonald, 1998, 2000; Iredale, 2001; Li, Findlay, Jowett, & Skeldon, 1996; Meyer, 2001; Meyer & Brown, 1999; Poros, 2001; Salaff, Fong, & Wong, 1999; Wong & Salaff, 1998). Further, links of social networks between spheres differ by gender. For instance, women’s social networks join work and family spheres but may fall short of getting them good jobs, but at the same time women rely on those networks to enable them to work. Men’s social networks more effectively join work and community spheres (Beggs & Hurlbert, 1997; Hagan, 1998; Johnson, Bienenstock, Farrell, & Glanville, 2000; Stoloff, Glanville, & Bienenstock, 1999; Wellman, 1992).

Social networks can supply or fail to deliver help, and we reserve the term social capital for the successful provision of scarce resources through membership in networks or broader social structures (Portes, 1995:257). Social capital is embedded in specific social contexts, and the structure of their social networks and types of relations within the networks shape the kind of help people get (Aldrich, Elam, & Reese, 1997; Granovetter, 1985; Wellman, 1999). Depending on the resources that the network contacts can offer, they can provide different types of support, but one contact can rarely cover a broad spectrum of services. Support may be located in diverse parts of a person’s network. Further, different forms of social networks give diverse kinds of assistance over time (Menjivar, 1995; Poros, 2001; Portes, 1997). Therefore, people need a variety of contacts to get the kind of support they need. Childcare is one of many services that people can get through their social networks. However, this delicate type of service involves considerable trust, and only a few members of a social network can offer the different types of assistance that
childcare encompasses. This can be seen when we discuss types of relations and social networks that offer these resources.

First among the relations that build trust are multiplex relations. Multiplex relations involve more than one type of tie between people. People interact in several contexts, each surrounded by others who reinforce the relationship. By bridging more than one type of relation in a dyad, multiplex ties connect several different networks, which open access to a wider number of trusted people. Strong multiplex ties generate trust, and are fundamental in mobilizing informal social support. We more readily trust the friend of a friend than we do an unconnected stranger. Indeed, if they have analogous shape, a friend’s network relations may be seen as equivalent to our own, and thus broaden the specter of help that a social network can offer (Ibarra, 1992; Krackhardt, 1992).

Most social networks that offer tangible services as childcare depend on location and proximity. These are difficult to mobilize across continents, and when people migrate, they leave this kind of social capital behind. However, some network ties, for example kinship relations, are institutionalized roles. Strong kinship ties are fixed at birth, and hence not easily entered or left behind. Such ties contain a set of expectations and obligations and they are the basis of help in childcare. Precisely because they are committed, people may make extraordinary efforts to maintain their kinship ties. Hence many have found that kin related social networks may be portable across the seas (REFS). Most of these studies have covered working class migrants. Therefore, we need to know more about how skilled immigrants deal with their childcare needs, and how they can adapt their networks to new requirements. Skilled, or professional migrants participate in very different network structures than working class migrants. The networks of skilled migrants are mainly centered on their professions and careers, and we question if they can mobilize kin to the same extent as working class migrants.
Life Course Structure

In each society, family and career trajectories unfold in an expected timing, figuring in the immigrant family dilemma. A career is one’s work-life history, with long-term progression structured by the institutional and normative arrangement of roles (Scott & Burchell, 1994). The profession sets the expected timing of employment and career development (Pfeffer, 1997). There are also expected family sequences based on parents’ and children’s biological maturation, articulated with marriage, school, and other institutions (Clausen, 1986).

Since the biggest demands from work and family come at the same time, a crucial problem for dual career couples is balancing their work and family careers. State legislated family policies to support social reproduction often fail to provide effective support to dual-career families. Few countries effectively organize public childcare and employment to support dual career families. Those that do may favor some sections of the work force with childcare more than others (Buchmann & Charles, 1995; Moen & Firebaugh, 1994).

It is typically women who try to mesh these dual work-family demands. Women may adopt sequential work and family courses, focusing more on each role at different times. They might first study, then raise children, then return to the labor force. This staggered approach often runs against the demands of expected professional career sequences. Simultaneous roles allow attention to both family and career courses. Here, role conflict takes a toll on women’s ability to do both without substantial help (Han & Moen, 1999, 2001; Marshall, Heinz, Kruger, & Verma, 2001; Moen & Yu, 1999). Men commonly adjust their family life to their careers, while wives employ long term, reciprocal support strategies to bridge formal and informal structures and attain work and family goals.

The difficulties that PRC immigrants to Canada encounter when they transfer between two different social contexts is central to their reconstructing work and family lives as new
immigrants. Social structures, typical ways of building careers, and state family policies designed to support social reproduction differ from one setting to another, and entail considerable readjustments. Without flexible informal social networks parents have trouble bridging formal structures, and women assume most of this integrating work.

**Work-Family Roles in China**

Educated Chinese women have public and private roles that are both sequential and simultaneous (Giele, 1998). The education of young Chinese professionals and skilled workers is sequential, determined by examinations that lead from one stage to the next. State educational and job placement systems and their own performance and interests channel the educated elite into their adult roles. In force when most of our respondents got their first jobs, this system began to change in the 1980s following the introduction of a private labor market with great consequences for their careers (Bian, 1994; Nee & Matthews, 1996). After graduation from college, they find jobs, and begin to build careers. They marry and bear a child within the first year, (Zeng, 1962, p. 6; Robinson, 1985; Whyte & Parish, 1984). Having few children is a political requirement, allowing them to devote themselves to work. The family is now seen as a smaller, leaner, even residual unit, whose tasks have lessened (Croll, Kane, & Davin, 1985).

Women and men remain in the labor force throughout their working lives. Educated women have made inroads into demanding professional, administrative, and skilled manual occupations, although assignments are gendered, and males and females work in different sectors (Ngo, 2000). With the market reforms, successful professional and skilled workers increasingly earn high incomes, rewarding women for remaining on the job (Meng & Kidd, 1997).
Women take on the primary responsibility for child rearing and other caring roles. While they downplay their careers when it conflicts with their families, institutional and personal support systems help ease balancing simultaneous careers and work family roles (Becker & Moen, 1999; Moen & Yu, 1999; Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Chinese family policy helps parents combine public and private roles. The city and the largest state work units operate day care and nursery school places. Although there are institutional shortages, there are adequate places for professional dual career families. Moreover, with flexible hours, parents can use around the clock services.

Mutual obligations between family members also provide social capital to ease meshing of work-family systems. These norms are traced back to the patrilineal Chinese family. Respect for broad family obligations continues, but is more mutual and negotiated today, giving family members a range of social supporters (Whyte & Parish, 1984). Each generation expects to benefit in the long run from mutual assistance (Yang, 1996). The elder generation wants to help professional sons and daughters, substantial earners in the family, meet their work responsibilities. The professional wife's job earning potential is worth more than the time she might spend at household and other reproductive chores. At the same time, children are the whole family's responsibility (Chen, Short, & Entwisle, 2000).

Many parents of our elite couples were themselves professionals, who worked in the urban state sector and retired early, while still in good health. With small families themselves, grandparents are not overwhelmed with care requests. Coresidence also contributes to shared reproductive tasks. There was no private housing market until the mid 1980s and housing, provided by their work unit, was in short supply (Walder, 1986). Couples delayed marriage until they had an apartment, or accepted living with the older generation, who often had better housing than the younger generation. The seniors first give young mothers child care help; later, they receive personal care (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). As a result,
in the 1980s, an estimated 25 percent of younger parents lived together with their own parents (Chen, et al., 2000; Davis, 1993; Tien & Lee, 1988).

In these ways, features of the wider context ease reciprocal care between generations. If proximity, social norms and structures underlay the social exchanges between female generations, how do transnational migrants get the help from kin they need to work?

**Work-Family Roles in Canada**

North Americans integrate their work and family life courses in diverse patterns. Women go in and out of school and paid work, at different times (Gerson, 1985; Giele, 1998:234-5; Partridge, in press). Jones, Marsden, and Tepperman (1990) point out that Canadian women adapt to paid work by individualizing their life patterns, including an increasingly fluid movement between adult statuses in domestic work, full time and part time work and education.

North American working class women finish school, start their careers, marry and bear children, then leave the labor force to cope with household burdens (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). In 1995, one-third of Canadian women did not work when their children were infants. Other working mothers look to kin or neighbors for help, or take alternate shifts to care for their children (Deutsch, 1999). Immigrants may have split households, in which the mother works in North America while the children live with their kin in the home country, sometimes until they are teenagers (Hodagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parrenas, 2001).

Earlier cohorts of educated women returned to work after their children were older, often in new careers (Ginzberg, 1967). Professionally trained women today postpone having children until finishing their training. They may then stay in the labor force, finding other
caregivers, paying for nannies, often new immigrants of color, work part time, or telework (Hardwick & Salaff, 2003; Parrenas, 2001).

Lack of state commitment to child care facilities contributes to this fluidity. Due to the incoherent and costly early childhood education system, Canadian child care has become largely the private responsibility of parents (Doherty, Rose, Friendly, Lero, & Hope, 1995; Vanier Institute of the Family, 2000). Parents engage in considerable private strategizing in order to combine professional work and family roles (Hochschild, 1990). Much of this is the work of women.

METHODS

To understand how they reconnect social networks to do their employment and family roles, we studied 50 dual career couples from China over time. We contacted approximately half of our sample through a large NGO immigration agency in Toronto. The other half were “snowball” contacts, introduced by the original sample. While our small sample cannot represent the many Chinese immigrants to Toronto, our respondents are typical of emigrants from China’s urban centers (Liang, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2001). With dependents to support, all needed to earn money immediately. We excluded those that originally came on student visas and investment immigrants, who do not immediately enter the labor force.

They averaged 35 years of age at immigration, most with BA degrees or higher. Two-thirds have careers in engineering, medicine, accountancy and computer science. Men, somewhat better educated, were concentrated in engineering and computer fields. Women were also well trained and working in careers in accounting; computers, engineers, humanities, and medicine.
In China, these parents had only a single child, as dictated to the urban elite; three bore their first child in Canada. Seven had a second child while living outside China. Over half the parents, whose children are 10 and under, have to find childcare in order to work.

We interviewed couples in their native language. In the first 3-hour session, we gathered material on the husband’s and wife’s work, family histories, other personal experiences and their social networks. Follow up interviews and phone calls brought us up-to-date on these topics. We translated the taped interviews and analyzed them for themes, using N-Vivo, a qualitative software package. The text draws on our latest information for the respondents, unless otherwise noted. We maintain contact with nearly all of them through December, 2002, and continue to correspond with a considerable number through December 2003. In this paper we quote directly from their comments, giving them pseudonyms and adding their gender in brackets after the comments.

WORK-FAMILY ROLES IN CHINA AND CANADA

Social Support for Work-family Roles in China

These parents met their range of child care needs through complex patterns of family obligations and institutional care in China. If their elders are available, the young couples initially turn to them. Seventy-one percent of the couples received substantial child care help from their seniors. Grandparents might take over the entire childcare burden to help their children build their professional careers. Going abroad for jobs or school (six couples), was a recognized career advancement. Their child stayed behind with its grandparents.

Housing and child care. Complex arrangements to get this help begin before marriage, and included moving in with their parents. Parents might prefer more authority over their children, but few had the time or the skills.
Ying Ying (F), a computer scientist, married to Chen Hung, an architect, relied considerably on her kin because of their international moves.

My husband’s working unit was going to assign apartments, so we got married. But even after we had the baby, we hadn’t got the apartment yet. My father-in-law held a senior position, so he had a large apartment, and we lived with them. It was close to my work place. Later my working unit assigned me an apartment, but we didn’t move there [so as not to lose their parents’ help]. We lent it to my colleague.

*Getting help for further study.* Their help went well beyond occasional baby-sitting. Although they finished their basic training before marriage, several returned to school for post-graduate study. Wives’ increased dual burden brought several family members into play.

Cheng Li (M) was a metallurgical engineer, whose parents were retired teachers. First an engineer in a large public metal works, he transferred to a trading firm in charge of technical products. When the firm went downhill, Cheng Li returned to school for a MSc in another city. Throughout, his wife, Xing Ying, who worked as an administrative assistant, remained in her in-law’s home to get help with family. Her own mother, a retired factory worker, was ill and could not care for grandchildren. Xing Ying explained: “We could have gotten our own flat if we wanted (from the enterprise). But how could I take care of my baby on my own? I needed the help of my mother-in-law.” Xing Ying’s mother-in-law continued to care for the little girl in China for two years after the couple moved to Canada. With her burden reduced, Xing Ying became a student and reoriented her career.

Studying abroad created even more demands on their kin. When his son was four years old, Chen Hung (M) won a coveted job in the home office of the Japanese architecture branch where he worked. Ying Ying visited for a year, leaving their son in Beijing. Unable
to find work in Tokyo, she returned to Beijing. A year later, she went to Holland to take an MSc in Computer Sciences. The whole family reunited in Toronto several years later. Throughout the couple’s overseas sojourns, Chen Hung’s mother cared for her grandson.

Some coordinated their housing, further studies, and child bearing plans, in an all round support system. Liuma (F), a doctor married to Zhu Ji, an electrical engineer, lived with Liuma’s parents after marriage, until Liuma’s father, a plant director, arranged a nearby apartment for them. When Liuma had a son, she moved back to her parents’ home, hired a baby-sitter, and her mother also helped after work. Liuma’s family continued their help for a year after the couple immigrated to Canada and could get on their feet. She recalled, “I never felt the burden of raising a child!”

*Multiplexity.* Our couples could rarely designate one grandparent to take responsibility throughout the child’s early years. Grandmothers have their own life course and it was not always possible to meet patrilineal goals. As a result, most combined helpers from either side, or both, at different times. The main caregiver was usually a grandparent, the second a grandparent on the other side, or a servant. Arrangements were flexible. If they sent their child to nursery school, they might use fewer helpers. If they delayed school until kindergarten, they drew on more helpers. Of the 32 parents that gave help to their grandchildren, two-thirds were the wife’s parents.

For example, QuPing (F), with a BA in social science, and her husband, Hu, a computer scientist, grew up in Beijing, and got good private firm jobs in Shenzhen. After their son was born, Hu’s mother came to care for the baby. At the same time she brought her youngest son, a recent graduate, to look for a job in Shenzhen with Hu’s help. When QuPing’s son was 2 1/2 he was sent to Beijing, where QuPing thought schools were better, and lived with QuPing’s parents. But the boy could not adjust to the nursery school routine, and returned to Shenzhen. QuPing took care of him, sent him to school in the morning and
fetched him after work. Servants were hard to find, and QuPing was afraid of bringing a stranger into her home. She raised the example of a friend who hired a maid off the street, with tragic consequences. Her friend had just been robbed, apparently by the servant, who left without a trace. “Fortunately her kid was staying with relatives outside of Shenzhen, and was okay.” The many services available made it easy for QuPing to handle her household responsibilities after her child returned from school. “There wasn’t so much household work to do, so I could handle it. When we returned home late, we could easily find a place to grab a bite.”

Wei Li (F) and her husband Jigan (M) likewise used a number of helpers, mainly arranged through the wife’s kin. Jigan grew up in Hangzhou and went to university in Jilin province, where he met Wei Li, who was born in Jilin. Wei Li took a government job in Beijing, and worked up to the position of vice-director of the division of a Ministry. From that position, she helped Jigan get his first job in a research institute. Now they were some distance from both their parents. The couple married and when they had a daughter, complex childcare arrangements began.

1988. Wei Li gave birth to her daughter in Hangzhou. Jigan’s mother helped care for her.

mid-1988. Wei Li and child returned to Beijing. She took a further half year leave to care for the child.

1989. Wei Li returned to her government job. Daughter went to Hangzhou to stay with her paternal grandparents.

1990. Daughter returned to Beijing for nursery school. Wei Li and Jigan took turns sending and fetching her. Jigan recalled: “I stayed at the state-owned research enterprise for five and a half years and took very good care of my daughter. Sometimes I skipped work
and was often late. At state-owned enterprises, you make less money but you have a lot more free time.”

1992. Daughter was sent to Hangzhou for primary school.

1993. Jigan went to work at a foreign company. The couple moved into a larger apartment. Jigan’s mother moved to Beijing and lived with them, and took care of her granddaughter for half a year.


Jigan recalled, We changed several baby-sitters. Wei Li’s relatives introduced three helpers, including my wife’s niece. We paid her, but she didn’t work much; she was lazy at our place. My wife ended up doing a lot of housework. Luckily, the other two baby-sitters from Jilin did a lot of work. So for five years, I never bought groceries or cooked. My wife seldom did any work, either.

In these ways, their wider kin and a range of helpers backed the career moves of these young parents.

*Caring for their own children.* Nine percent of our couples, primarily those with no elders available, took primary responsibility for their child. The amount of time they spent on the job was central to how they combined work and family roles. When both spouses held state sector posts, they often had a more relaxed schedule. In contrast, professional mothers that worked long hours could not squeeze in much child care. Conditions in the private sector were especially demanding.

For instance, Hung’s (F) son was born during her light teaching stint in a Communist Party College, and Hung’s flexible job freed her to care for her child for a year. When her son
turned two, Hung’s mother had retired from her factory job and helped look after her grandson. When, by the third year, he was old enough for nursery school, Hung and her husband shared responsibility for dropping him off and picking him up.

Many private sector and some state jobs required long hours or travel. Xu Fang (F), with an accountant’s degree from Shenzhen University and a French MBA. Her husband had an MA in biochemistry. They helped manage a branch of Xu Fang’s family’s private paint products firm. “In China, I didn’t have Saturday or Sunday free, every day was busy. I couldn’t even look after my baby, I hired two people to take care of him.”

Scaling back. With overall responsibility for their children, and even with the help of others, many women altered their professional goals. Some wives deliberately slowed their careers, taking jobs that did not demand long hours and travel, and transferred to more flexible jobs to care for their children. Reluctant to leave the stable state sector, fewer moved over to private sector jobs. For instance, a couple, both engineers, grew up in large peasant households and met when both were assigned to the same factory in Beijing, far from their families. The wife recalled,

Both of us needed to work and no one helped us to take care of our child, so I shifted to teach in a secondary technical school. Because there were winter and summer holidays, it was more convenient for me to look after a child. I didn’t totally give up my major, but used it just in a supplementary way.

Education was another example. More men (30%) than women (6%) had further training after they had married, including all the Ph.D.s (four men, one woman). While their husbands returned to school, wives maintained the family, enabling their husbands to have both a family and career. Nevertheless wives still continued their careers.
Wives quit their formal employment entirely and cared for their children, in only three cases. However, working from home, they continued to use their professional skills in the private market. For instance, one woman quit her engineering job when one of her twin sons fell and broke his arm. She traded stocks from home, while caring for her toddlers.

Institutional care. A minority of our respondents that used state day-care facilities for very young infants and toddlers did so when there were no kin available.

Lei Min (F), a pediatrician, who came from Szechuan, lived in Beijing. She recalled her long hours and the difficulties of balancing demands. “In China, I was so tired. When I had seriously ill patients, I couldn’t go home for days until their babies were out of danger. My husband took care of home and the child, when he was available. His parents were busy and couldn’t help us. Once, when I picked my daughter up from the kindergarten, she was the last one left. She was crying. Sometimes I asked my neighbor to pick her up.”

Part of women’s mothering roles of bridging work and family was ensuring their child had a supportive home environment. School was often strict, instilling moral training, and requiring much independence. Parents wanted their children to have intimacy and personal care. Moreover, they did not want to deny the older generation the chance to care for a grandchild. Hence, most placed their children in formal child care institutions only after they were three or older.

Institutional care lacked the flexibility of grandparental care and the contrast was hard to bridge. However, it was possible to use formal day care for short term needs to fill the breach. When their kin were ill, or when both parents’ jobs suddenly required them to travel, some turned to crèches as their last minute support system.

After a maternity leave of four months, Ye He stopped breast-feeding and went to work. She left her daughter to her mother-in-law’s care. After work, she fetched her daughter
home. It was tiring for her, because the little girl awoke at night. At age three, Ye He’s daughter went to a kindergarten near her mother’s home. It was difficult for the first several days, because her daughter had been used to her grandmother’s ways. The child would cry and Huang He had to bring her back home early. Eventually, Ye He’s mother decided to take her granddaughter to the kindergarten herself.

Few women were on their own caring for their children. The majority drew on their social capital. They expected to work, and their kin expected to help them work as a boost to the family earnings and future generations. Most got help from their personal relations or others connected through them. Past that, they could draw on the state-run crèches for child care. By supplementing kin support with their own work, and scaling back on their demanding jobs, they carried work and family responsibilities first sequentially, then simultaneously.

Social Support for Work-family Roles in Canada

From positions of relative gender equality, where they were embedded in structures that backed their careers and family roles, wives have trouble gaining professional acknowledgment abroad (Salaff & Greve, 2003). They have to get Canadian professional certification, which in several cases entails doing most of the education they have over again. They also bear much of the family responsibilities. No longer in a sequential stage as in China, if they have young children to care for, they have heavy simultaneous roles. Although their kin relations are far away, building supportive social networks for their reproductive roles is central to their career edifice, and it is their double burden.

Their experiences as new immigrants in Canada. Foreign earned credentials are rarely recognized by Canadian organizations. Few locate well paying jobs, and most revise their career goals (Basran & Zong, 1999; Salaff, Greve, & Xu, 2002; Spitze, 1984).
Eighty-four of our 100 respondents have experienced downward mobility compared to their position in China.

With their professional credentials and experiences unrecognized, they need to retrain. Their choice is dyadic, both parents’ skills need upgrading, both are responsible for their child, and need to combine their household resources. Couples decide whether both should try to break into the labor force at the same time, each carrying simultaneous roles, caring for their children, working, and retraining. Or should they negotiate a sequential life course—going to school full time, finding alternative care for their child, then getting a suitable job?

By engaging in sequential roles in turn, one spouse works full time, even at a minimal wage job, to support the family, while the other returns to school to upgrade the credentials needed to adapt to the local labor market. They then switch. When the wife’s English proficiency is better than her husband’s, and the job she seeks does not need long term reaccreditation, she may be the first to try. If her English is worse and she has trouble fitting their technical and professional jobs into the acceptable Canadian jobs for women, she waits (Salaff & Greve, 2003). Most working parents compromise. Those with successful second careers scale back, reducing their goals, changing jobs slowly, finding help where they can, and building new relations in Canada turning acquaintances into multiplex relations (Hochschild, 1990).

For instance, Jun (F) a dedicated manager and computer programmer in a private company lived with her husband’s parents and even with their help, she lessened her work in a fast paced field. She admitted,

After the baby was born, I changed a lot. Before, I worked like crazy, but now it seems I don’t care about it much. Work is not the focus of my life, taking care of the baby and the family is the focus, instead. And it’s very demanding.
After moving to Canada, she quickly found a computer programmer’s job. No longer under her in-law’s thumb, Jun was happy to take on more parenting. However, she has even less time to spend with her son than in China. Since her job earns more than her husband’s, he scaled back his career goals. They work their shifts to care for their child. Her husband Tang works three days on, and three days off duty to help with childcare. In emergencies, they use the help of their neighbor QuPing, a former classmate in China, and one of our respondents. Tang: “I think the public day care environment is best for my son. What we’re concerned with most is illness spreads fast. He has been sick three or four times so far.”

Q: Then how do you deal with it when he’s sick?

Tang: If I’m off, I’ll take care of him. If I’m not, my wife will ask for leave from work to take care of him. Once both of us couldn’t make it, we asked QuPing to take care of him.

Jun explained that her husband has delayed changing his job,

[Now] his salary and his working time fit [our family needs]. For example, our baby was sick for a long time. In China, his grandma took care of him. Now, I have to do it on my own. It’s so hard. I asked for leave for enough days so my husband could change his shift with somebody else so that he could stay at home and take care of the baby. That’s very convenient. So for now, if our parents can’t come to help us, it’s good that he stays in that company.

A year later, their child had adjusted to day care, and Tang could seek a more demanding job.
Most commonly the wife’s career is placed second. Without a way to care for a child, longer to go to upgrade her degree, wives are more likely to work at low paying jobs. They shape their job search around their responsibilities to the home, and hence their child’s age figures in couples’ plans. To suit their family roles, those with young children take short term, English as a Second Language (ESL) courses (a non degree program) while their children are at school. Short term accounting courses improve their skills and get them entry level jobs. By going to school part-time, women combine home making, reproductive labor, and job preparation.

Lian (F), a former accountant, weaves her ESL study with her son’s primary school hours:

How many hours do I study at school? Everyday I send my son to school at 8:30, then I go to my school from 9:15 am till 2:45 pm. When I get home, I study 10-20 minutes, then I go to pick up my son.

Developing new supports. Those with young children share their child care responsibilities with kin, friends and neighbors. Migration has not severed their family relations (Boyd, 1989), and kin are the most important support for those that are upgrading their skills. Just under half had children who were born since 1993 (and are under age ten at time of writing). Of these, 63% receive care for their children from kin, a proportion is close to that in China. The child’s grandparents immigrate or apply for shorter term visitors’ visas to help. Parents send infants and toddlers back to China to be reared by their grandparents. Parents plan for the children to remain in China for the two years they need to take courses to recertify in professional fields, fetching the youngster back in time to enrol in primary school in Toronto.

In the following two cases, parents depended on their kin to retool. In the first case, both spouses recredentialed at the same professional level they had enjoyed in China. In the next case however, the wife gave up the quest to continue her profession.
After working for Xu Fang’s (F) parents’ chemical firm, Xu Fang and Bofu (M) immigrated to Toronto. They took turns recertifying. Bofu first took a low waged job, while Xu Fang took short term accounting courses in a local college. Then Xu Fang got a junior accounting job in a Chinese firm while her husband took a short computer course. During the time that each spelled the other, one earning money while the other taking community college courses and caring for their toddler, neither got well paid jobs. Finally, the couple enrolled in graduate school to get fully requalified. Bofu brought their two year old son to China to be cared for by Xu Fang’s parents until they re-established their careers. Xu Fang complained:

We don’t have a strong economic base. If you ask someone to help you care for your child, you halve your income. If you ask me what’s the most difficult part being here, it’s that we’ve brought our child. Because of this child, we wasted half a year. I feel if I had gone to that school earlier, I could have found a job very soon. I think in your research, [you should point out that] this is the main difficulty. We wasted the time because of the child.

During their first summer in graduate school, Xu Fang’s parents, and elder brother visited them, bringing their son along. When they saw how both were busy studying, they brought the lad back to China with them. Upon graduation, Xu Fang attained a good accountant’s job in a bank. Bofu returned to China to start his own business; the son remains there with him. They will be reunited when the family economy is stronger.

Jun (F) graduated from a leading Shanghai University, majoring in obs/gyn, and after graduation worked as an ophthomologist in a hospital attached to her university, qualifying by studying on her own. She passed several written English tests for her professional title, but seldom practiced English. Although Tang, her husband, was a proprietor of a computer company, Jun did not like to depend on him. She travelled four hours by public transporta-
tion every day to work, and her salary was not even enough for her daughter’s expenses. Tang’s mother cared for their small child. After landing in Canada, Jun could not find a job. She took care of her daughter herself for 6 months. Then Tang’s parents arrived to stay with them and took over the job. Jun studied ESL for one year, moving on to electrocardiogram at a Career College which gave her work-study experience in Chinese medical clinics. After graduation, she remained in a Chinese clinic which needed a person with an optical background. She accepts the low $12 CAD an hour wage, because she can remain in the medical field. The clinic wants her to start working full time, but Tang told us, “I want her to have time to take care of our daughter, and working full-time won’t bring in a lot more income, just more tax.”

On the days that Jun works, Tang sends their daughter to kindergarten, their neighbor whose daughter is in the same class picks her up and she stays there until Tang is off work and fetches her. In exchange June helps the neighbor with their daughter when she is not working.

They also mobilize friends for backup care. Former colleagues have an established base for trust. They meet others in their course of every day life, who are embedded in similar networks and share a common background, which conveys cultural similarity. These form the new multiplex networks.

Wei Yang (F) has her new roommate as backup support for her 10 year old daughter. In China, a major in Chinese literature and former Vice-Principal of a high school, Wei Yang cannot get a similar job in Canada. Her husband is an “astronaut” who manages his computer sales business in Beijing. He visits several times a year, leaving child care entirely to the wife. A virtual sole parent, Wei Yang is reluctant to return to school or take a demanding full time job. She first tutored her daughter and other youngsters part time in Chinese, as a service to the Chinese community. She next sold products part time in a multi-level
marketing position. Wei Yang finally found full time work at a Chinese job agency, as a receptionist. Her daughter, now used to Toronto, walks to the nearby primary school on her own. Wei Yang’s family sublets a room of a 2-bedroom high rise flat from another Chinese immigrant woman, with a daughter the same age. Her roommate watches out for Wei Yang’s child after school. Unlikely to regain a supervisor position at the level she had left in China, Wei Yang works with what is available in a Chinese environment, turning to sales and service work in the Chinese community. She finds social capital from her Chinese roommate. At age 10, her child does not need a lot care, and her roommate helps out when needed.

Ying Ying (F) took up an invitation to live temporarily at a friend’s that turned into a longer term responsibility.

Our first summer in Toronto, my husband’s friend –whose wife was still in China–invited us to stay at their place (we had just arrived and had no place to live). After a few days, their son got chicken pox. My son got it, too. So the whole summer I was busy taking care of the two boys.

Although it is part of their social capital, they cannot turn to friends for the even longer term support needed to return to school to requalify for professional positions. In this manner, neighbors stand in for each other and become social capital. Many negotiate exchanges with neighbors for routine help, such as when women with a neighbor with the same age toddler who shares child care. Neighbors are also likely to give emergency help. But there are limits to what friends and neighbors can and are willing to do on a long term basis.

Children’s roles. Children play a role in the family restructuring as well. Some parents send their child to be cared for by its grandparents. Others give up the hoped for pro-
fessional job for reinvented motherhood. In the end, their children grow up quickly and help the parents.

No longer part of an on-site three generational household, without additional family help, mothers bear considerable household burdens (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001). Parents demand a lot from their children, justifying coming abroad as a benefit for the youngsters. Their children take on an immigration burden, becoming independent, working hard, and assuming the reason for having left China. Children care for themselves and the family more than they had done in China. Teenagers get their first part time jobs, the help out in the family business. They study hard, and several parents proudly informed us that their child had gotten into the gifted primary school program. Older children were accepted into university with scholarships.

A few examples show how children manage on their own. Wei Yang’s (F) younger daughter goes to the neighborhood school on her own. Ying Ying’s (F) teenage son makes his own lunch in the microwave. On his summer holiday from his computer engineering studies, Jiang Jing’s (M) son works in a factory and fills in the family store in the evenings.

Q: You work at the same shift as your husband, so what about your daughter?

Lei Min (F) (with demonstrable pride): We prepare dinner for her and bring our dinner to work. She can take care of herself. She’s very independent. My husband said he didn’t shed a sad tear over the hard life here, but when I told him that she got second in her class during the first semester although her English was still not so good, his happy tears mixed with the sweat of his laboring job.

When Lei Min opened a hostel for new immigrants in her home, her 14 year old daughter spent the summer greeting guests.
Intensifying Family Roles. Some women find new family roles. In contrast to China, where bearing a second child was politically damaging for those with high standing, in Canada two children are “natural.” Six of the couples had a second child in Canada. Nearly all with a second child had first borne a daughter.

Hen Rong (F), a former accountant in China, became a textile laborer in Toronto. Becoming pregnant, her kin and friends pressured the couple to give birth to the second child. “This is your last chance,” her mother admonished her pregnant daughter. Her mother had cared for the couple’s eldest daughter, and the couple sponsored her to immigrate. The older woman beamed as she toted the baby boy around.

A former pharmacist, now a sales clerk, justified her second pregnancy by what she saw around her,

“We see Canadians around us having a child, and so decided it was natural.” Unable to resume her profession, she finds a new role in intensified motherhood. Her church members celebrated the pregnancy with showers and gifts.

The second child not only meets a long cherished value of bearing a son for the family. The newborn turns an aborted career, with a confusing prognosis, into the respected career of motherhood. None of the new mothers re-established their careers. Without childcare support in the new location, gender roles may become entrenched (Lee, Chan, Bradby, Green, 2002; Man, 1995; Willis & Yeoh, 2000a, 2000b).

DISCUSSION

Transnational migration affects women and men in gender-specific ways and places a heavier load of responsibility on women’s shoulders. This occurs both in the home and in the host countries, but migration makes this integration work difficult. Women assume
more work because they undertake the meshing of work and family systems. Taken for granted work institutions, retirement schemes, and formal and informal childcare are rarely well integrated. When they do not easily come together, women’s personal actions make these arrangements run in an expected manner. Women must organize support that require creative re-organization of their social capital, under the new conditions.

Since work and family institutions are organized differently in every country, when catapulted into the new social system, new immigrants’ experiences conflict in timing of work and family courses. In China, professionals completed training before bearing and rearing children, following the sequential life course model. Most drew on multiplex ties to make work-family obligations function, while they built their careers. They also obtained public institutional support for child care, thus lessening the many activities they had to do simultaneously.

Arriving as professionals in Canada, where their qualifications are not recognized, with small children to care for and a household to run, they have heavy burdens. They must both requalify and mobilize support for their family roles at the same time. The formal institutions and informal, personally constructed arrangements that provide childcare support differ from those in China. When the social arrangements in Canada do not match their needs, women either leave the labor force or call on previous agreements, turning to their multiplex arrangements. They may bring their parents to Canada or send their children to China. For many, social capital is transnational.

Transnational motherhood is not limited to the working-class poor, but also is known by middle-class, highly educated Chinese. Professional, career-oriented Chinese immigrants command a future promise of good resources and earnings for their wider families, if they get support. They bring their mothers, and mothers-in-law or send their children back to China. For some women, this support lets them reconstitute their careers. Others suffer
considerable downward professional mobility. Transnational social capital facilitates, but does not guarantee a rejuvenated career.

Work-family role conflicts are public issues needing institutional solutions, but few countries define them this way (Folbre, 2001; Mills, 1957). Societies rarely acknowledge the informal work that people do to mesh institutional structures. People draw on personal relations to resolve inconsistent demands. The plight of international migrants outlines the problems encountered in using personal solutions to meet public issues.

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