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Bridging the 'generation gap' : understanding cross-generations' views through the visual media of the 1960s

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**BRIDGING THE ‘GENERATION GAP’:
UNDERSTANDING CROSS-GENERATIONS’ VIEWS THROUGH
THE VISUAL MEDIA OF THE 1960s**

by

LUK Kit-ling

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Chapter 1: Background and Objectives

1.1 Introduction

It has been said that there exists a large cultural (or sub-cultural) gap between generations. It is wide enough between children and parents, and is expected to be wider between grandchildren and grandparents. Efforts have been evident in recent years particularly in human service programmes for children and youth to establish a good cross-generation: “grandparent-grandchildren” relationship. Whilst these programmes are generally welcome by all stake-holders, the desired effects are not clear. With the growth of the intergenerational programs, scholarship in intergenerational studies has urged for exploring what makes intergenerational programmes effective (Epstein and Boisvert 2006).

In exploring both the effectiveness and the outcomes of intergenerational programmes, the Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies (APIAS), Lingnan University under the leadership of Prof CM Chan and Prof David R. Phillips have pioneered on inter-generational programmes and research studies that build on a partnership model in linking university, schools and local community since 2001. Through a series of well-structured programmes (including training workshops, social service projects, project report presentation and CD- ROM production, overnight camps promoting mutual care and support), the 2001 University-School Link Partnership Projects (USLP) was designed to encourage interactions and communication amongst the young and the old (Chan, Phillips and Fong 2003). A longitudinal study was conducted to measure the USLP outcomes with a particular focus on how the young and old are mutually benefited on their social competence that include: 1) perception and images of the young and the old, 2) self-confidence, and 3) knowledge and skills transfer (e.g.

computer, health care). Remarkable results were evident in the changes of the participants' social competence in general and in particular, the design of the programme in emphasizing the outcome for the two generations to accomplish some assigned tasks is found to be effective in creating impact on communications and mutual understanding amongst the participants (Chan, Phillips and Fong 2003).

Subsequently, APIAS extended the work on intergenerational programmes to pioneer on other scopes such as, gardening and farming (Chan 2005, et. al.), and life-long education on research skills with university students as tutors for older students (Luk, Lau and Chan 2004) and on applied gerontology programme with young and old both as students learning together in Lingnan university (Hong Kong Council of Social Service 2006). Despite the tremendous differences in the two generations in terms of the society they grow up, the young and old was able to connect with each other and created positive impact on each others' learning (Hong Kong Council of Social Service 2006; Chan 2006). Our observation suggested that the young and the old mixed well with each other and the youngsters seek advices from the elders when they face difficulties in their life choices including career, dating or even disputes with their parents. In their interactions, there is no evidence of generation gap as 'unbridgeable' as we believe. This is timely for gerontologists to revisit the concept of 'generation gap' or 'conflict of generations' not only with non-biological linked young and old but also to explore the conflicts or disputes in the parent-child relationship within the family. What constitutes the gap between the parent-child relationships? What are the essential elements in bridging the gaps within intergenerational programmes in overcoming the differences amongst the two generation in order to achieve effective mutual benefits? This inquiry would be crucial for the studies of intergenerational relationships in the future.

This working paper is based on the findings of the 2002 film screening cum focus group discussions amongst the young and the old organized by APIAS. Using the visual media: Hong Kong film in the 1960s as a media, the present project intends to explore the family as the social arena in addressing parent and children's contrasting views on love, marriage and its impact on their parent-child relationships. The project also aims to shed light on ways in promoting intergenerational communications via structured intergenerational programmes.

1.2 Project Objectives

1. To explore the 'gap' between the young (born in the 1980s) and the old (born in the 1940s) in terms of their attitude towards love; marriage (pre-marital sex and marital relationship) and parent-child relationship.
2. To explore the impacts of these views on the interactions and communications in the young-old relationships.
3. To reflect the ways in handling 'intergenerational programme' that aim to promote young-old interactions and dialogue.

Chapter 2: Brief Review of Related Literature

2.1. The Notion of Intergenerational Programs

As an emerging concept, intergenerational programmes of different approaches primarily aim to, “promote sharing of skills, knowledge, or experience between the old and young; and [would] provide ongoing and planned interactions designed to benefit both populations” (Sally Newman 1997, p. 55). Intergenerational programmes flourished in the United States and in countries all over the world since its early development in the 1960s. The interactions promoted are not only confined to elder and younger family members, but are targeted to non-biologically linked older and younger persons to encourage “cross-generational bonding, promote cultural exchange, and provide positive supportive systems that help to maintain the well-being and security of the younger and older generations” (Newman 1997, p. 56). In connecting the growing international field of intergenerational programmes, a colloquium on global intergenerational research, programs and policy was launched at the University of Pittsburgh in 2003. This colloquium aims to promote international dialogue and to enhance international communications in the intergenerational field (Friedlander 2004). These joint efforts suggested that, it is evident of a growing significance for human service providers to take on an intergenerational approach to “solving social problems, to understand how culture changes practice, and to appreciating the importance of protecting human values in times of technological innovation, geographic mobility, and shifting economies” (Elizabeth Larkin 2004, p. 3). The younger generations now growing up in a world that is lacking of interactions with their grandparents has led many gerontologists in assuming the inevitability of gap between the two. The present project takes on an ‘intergenerational approach to’ explore further on whether and how the changes of the values in the society will form into barriers for the communications

between the young and old generations.

2.2. The notion of ‘Generation Gap’

Intergeneration relationships were called into attention since the 1960s. Conflict of the generations or namely the ‘generation gap’ has been taken as an inevitable barrier for the communications between the young and the old ones. These conflicts are commonly taken as a consequence of urbanization, industrializations and family mobility (Bengtson and Achenbaum, 1993). Geographical separations and family fragmentation was evident in the 1960s and the 1970s. This physical separation of the young and the old has resulted in a lack of consistent intergenerational contact and a growth of misperceptions and misunderstanding between the young and old (Newman 1997, 56).

Becker (2000) summarized the research studies on generational differentiations and asserts that, “distinct generations emerge as a result of the effects of discontinuous macro-social change on individual behaviour during the formative period of the life course. As soon as a new generation has emerged, the development of its members before and after the formative period can be studied, together research on institutions related to the new generation” (Becker 2000, p. 117). Margaret Mead’s interesting piece, *Culture and Commitment: A study of generation gap* is the very first academic inquiry into the notion of ‘generation gap’ in relations to the rise of a new generation. In understanding the intergenerational relationship, Mead (1970, p. 1) proposed that “we are now entering a period, new in history, in which the young are taking on new authority in their pre-figurative apprehension of the still unknown future”. In asserting the “loneliness of the two radically different and closely related groups”, Mead pointed out that, “Adults today know more about change than any previous generations. So we are set apart both from earlier generations and from the young who have rejected the

past and all that their elders are making of the present” (1970, p. 79). Mead’s study has provided insight into the formation of an inevitable gap between the generations. As pointed out by Mathews (2004), this seemingly gap is still prevalent in the current intergenerational studies in terms of the gap on resources conflict between the “Generation X” and “Generation Y” in the US society (Hotlz 1995).

In relating generation gaps with the societal changes, Ward (1997, p. 21) pointed out that the changing social, cultural, and political forces that prevailed in the US society since World War II have been significant to shape the life of the young and old. Ward pointed out that the “segregation of age groups” resulted from the increasing segregation of the public recreational and social life in US in the past decade has provided a urgent need to bring the generations together as these generations are characterized with ‘little experience’ in more interactive activities with each other (Ward 1997, p. 28). The reluctance in the intergenerational relationships was also accompanied by the misconceptions amongst the generations and the emerging myths of ageing have focused on the growing negative attitude toward the older generations that widely circulated in the public and the media (for example, Gibb and Holroyd 1996; Ginn and Arber 1993).

Gutman (1985, cited in Jefferys 1997, p. 82) contended that in the contemporary society that “the present younger generation had been socialized into believing that ‘young is beautiful, old is ugly’ in both metaphorical and descriptive terms. The formation of the “myth of ageing” that put land-slide emphasis on older persons’ frailty and the anticipated decline was evident in media representations. In asserting the notion of “successful ageing”, Rowe and Khan (1998) aim to counter the myths on the frailty and

disability of ageing that was widely circulated in the US society. Misconceptions also happened in the everyday life politics within the family and between older parents and their adult children or between the grandparents and their grandchildren. From an autobiographical perspective, Margot Jefferys, a gerontologist at her eighties reviewed how she has been influenced by “the dominant themes in the burgeoning social gerontological literature, as well as by the manifestations of popular media interest in ‘problematic’ aspects of intergenerational relationships. These include such issues as ‘the generation gap’, ‘equity’, ‘reciprocity’ and the ‘burden’ of an ageing population on the rest of the society” (1997, p. 78). This has been widely discussed in current gerontology studies and developed into a substantial debate on the ‘intergenerational equity conflicts’ which has centered on “ who should benefit – or not benefit – from government entitlement programs” (Ward 1997, p. 29). New initiatives in filling the generation conflict has developed to urge for ‘generational re-contracting’ that focus on the care responsibility of the younger generations (Bengston and Achenbacum 1993) and ‘generational re-engagement’ that promoted the mutual benefit for the two generations to learn from each other (Thang 2001).

Taking on a ‘reciprocal approach’, Gordon Mathew argued that generation gap could be seen from the side of an elder of the society. In exploring the generation gap in Japan, Mathews (2004, p. 4) pointed out that, there are negative attitude of the older generations toward the young that typically focus on the inadequacies of the young and is “often taking an almost apocalyptic tone”. He further suggested that young people in Japan are depicted negatively in the media representations. In sum, Mathews (2004, p. 6) argues that, “the key underlying dynamic of the Japanese concern over the generation gap: it represents the gap between the guardians of Japanese social order, on the one hand, and the “unsocialized” young on the other”. In understanding the generation gap

or generation disconnectedness, it is necessary to situate the discussion in the social arenas that the generation gap is played out, such as the family, school and workplace. Whilst, Mathew's study focused on the young employees in the workplace, our present project takes the family as an important site for inter-generation communications and generational conflict that involve the everyday life choices (love and marriage; parental relationships) that may act as a barrier for better inter-generational communications.

In Hong Kong, parent-child relationship as part of the family harmony is one of the key topics (such as marital relationship) for family studies and civic education.

There is overwhelming emphasis on the roles and functions of the family with a particular in the respect and responsibility for the young to take care of the old (for example, HKSARS 1997). However, studies and research suggested that the changes of the role and status of the older people in Hong Kong has led to the difficulties for the older generation in commanding the obedience of their children and enjoying the same kind of respect (Chow 1996, 2001). Studies in intergenerational relations have been focus on the filial responsibility of the children in taking care of their elder parents when they becoming more dependent on their children (for example, Lee 2004; Lee and Kwok 2005). The practices of Xiao were outlined by Chow (2001) and the primary concern lies on whether the filial responsibility of the children to provide parents with necessary materials for the satisfaction of their physical needs and comforts are fulfilled. However, Chow also explored whether children show their respect to their parents by paying attention to parents' wishes and obeying their preferences. His finding suggested that, "children nowadays are not as keen to consult their parents as in the past" in both the aspect on marriage and job seeking (2001). Chow explained that, "the social situation has changed so much that it has often made the advice of parents irrelevant and

in applicable". Though modest, the tendency for children to pay attention to their parents' advice when considering marriage as showed in Chow's study that is higher than in job seeking (Chow 2001). Tensions lie in the societal expectations of children to obey their parents and also in parents' expectations on their children in respecting their advices. This paper argues that the failure of the children in fulfilling parents expectation on obedience when making their life choices is one of the crucial factors in the formation of the 'generation gap' in the Hong Kong context. However, is this 'gap' unbridgeable? Some gerontologists argued that 'intergenerational ambivalence' rather than conflicts can better explain the changing form of intergenerational relationships and its negotiation process (Pillemer and Luscher 2004). Do differing views on love and marriage will develop into a barrier for their communications or can it be bridged via structured intergenerational programs where mutual communications and understanding are emphasized.

The finding of this project will provide a better understanding of the generation gap that might exist amongst the young who born in the 1980s whilst the older generations who born in the 1940s (of forty years of differences). A sharing platform amongst the two generations would be useful in observing first-hand information in how intergenerational programmes can enhance the mutual understanding of the two generations and in promoting effective communications between parents and child in the contemporary Hong Kong society.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study is a qualitative research which attempts to explore the way of communications and the interactions between the young and the old, who participated in the film appreciation and the focus group discussions. A special focus was put on the issues of love, marriage and parental relationship which were reviewed in the selected 1960s Hong Kong film, *Devotion*. The investigation consists of two parts, i.e. film appreciation and focus group discussion.

The choice of a qualitative research strategy aims to explore the process of the communications and interactions amongst the young and old. Margot Jefferys, a social gerontologist has using a qualitative approach in reviewing her intergenerational relationship. In adopting an auto-biographic approach, Margot Jefferys reviewed her interactions with her grandchildren. Through an interactive process (inviting her grandchildren to give response to her writing on her experiences of their relationships), Jefferys is able to clarify the differing expectations on their relationship between her and her grandchildren and at the same time, she taken this as an exercise to work through her disappointment on her grandparent-children relationship. Her study suggested that an interactive platform is essential to clarify misconceptions and misunderstanding between generations. In reviewing her own experiences in her intergenerational relationship with her grandchildren, Jefferys highlighted their reluctance and the distancing during their adolescence. She recalled:

“we did not discuss events or ideas which mattered to them. They seemed positively to avoid topics relating to their future career or leisure plans, even when my experience or network of friends and colleagues might have had something to offer them. They seemed afraid of

developing any sense of obligation to me”. (Jefferys 1997, p. 83).

However, with the response from her grandchildren on their reasons for this type of distancing, Jefferys is able to get fresh insight into their relationship and comes to realize that her ‘aggressive manner’ in conversations, how the lightness of touch and humour might have seduced her grandchildren into more exciting and satisfying dialogue. Drawing insights from Jefferys’ study, this present project would take the discussions amongst the film viewers on a 1960s film focused on love and marriage choices of two generations, as a sharing platform for non-biological linked older and younger generations in reviewing their perceptions towards each other on the choices of love and marriage and their parent-child relationship. This interactive platform will be provided for the young and old as a mixed group in the focus group discussions.

3.1 Film Appreciation

In April 2002, the Centre for Humanities Research in Lingnan University (CHR) organized an international Conference on “Hong Kong Culture and Hong Kong Cinema: Motion Picture and General Investment Company (MP & GI) Symposium” (香港文化與香港電影：『電懣』研討會) in conjunction with the Hong Kong Film Archive (香港電影資料館). A series of seminars, workshops and film screening were organized to discuss Hong Kong cinemas in the 1950s – 1960s and their relations to the Hong Kong society and culture in the early days. MP & GI was a film studio that had a tremendous influence on the Hong Kong film history. By 1970s, MP & GI under Cathay Organisation had made over 250 films which were distributed widely in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. The classic comedies and musicals and stars had become an integral part of many moviegoers’ growing-up experience. As Law (2002) described:

“From day one, MP & GI had in mind the notion to incorporate elements of the East and West in their film, or more aptly put, the tendency to modernize the traditional”

Film selection

A film appreciation and seminar were organized on 13 April 2002 in Lingnan University to provide chance for a dialogue amongst the young and old audience. *Devotion* (母與女), a film adapted by Chin Yin from story of Chi Ren in 1960, was chosen as the film for screening to a mixed group of young and old audience.

The film reviewed how the two women of two generations (the mother and the daughter) faced similar kind of disapproval by the older generations (parents) in making decision to their marriage. Under the considerations of class differences in marriage, the mother was unable to get married with the man she loved. The daughter again fell in love with a rich young man, but, in contrast, she was able to break through the boundaries set for marriage (for example marriage of two persons with a similar class background) and get married with someone she really loves. The film was produced in the early 1960s, representing the Hong Kong society at that moment filled with the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ ways of thinking. The key coordinator of the film event, Leung P. K. (2002, p. 16) stated that:

“The society in the 1960s was, no doubt, already highly diversified....Comparing with the Cantonese films of the 1950s, ethical concepts, marriage and love or the family were more predominant in MP & GI productions, and they were made to underscore subtle changes through the employment of urban imagination”.

Many children now grew up in an age-segregated world with which older adults were unfamiliar. The visual medium chosen in this study was not considered as a relatively neutral or transparent “tool” for understanding the past, but was rather because of its theme on “the generation gap in the conflicting views on love and marriage between the old generations (the parents and grandparents) and the young generations (their children)”. As part of the intergenerational programmes, the film screening served to build a common focus for the after-screening discussions amongst the focus group participants. The participants were provided with a space for interactions amongst them in discussion on the free choice of love and marriage, parent-child relationship and the communications between generations that might represent their present experience in the similar way.

3.2 Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The participants were invited and then randomly assigned into two mixed (male/female; old/young) groups placed in separate rooms. Older persons of both sexes were mainly the members or affiliates of two elderly centers located in Tuen Mun. Elderly participants were selected randomly from the participants’ list submitted by the two centers. Younger participants were secondary schools students (both female and male) of Forms 2 and 3 from two schools, one in Kowloon and the other in the New Territories. Focus group discussions were organized immediately after the film screening. Each group discussion lasted from 35 minutes to 45 minutes. Each discussion group was led by an experienced facilitator and a recorder. Older participants were invited to reflect on their experience in marriage whether such experience was consistent with the objectives of the film or not. The younger groups were also invited to reflect on their views and opinions on love and marriage, and to share their ideas with

the elders in the succeeding discussions. Their views on selected life domains, such as expectation on marriage, parental communications and relationships were recorded during the focus group discussions. The discussion was video-recorded and edited. The arrangement for the discussion was explained before the discussion commenced and all participants in the discussion were required to sign a letter of consent. A brief report on the findings of the project was submitted to the relevant committee in 2002. As outlined in the proposal, the video clips on selected themes were uploaded to the archive of the IHSS seminar and workshop in 2002 as a form of deliverables.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1. Profile of Respondents:

A total of 26 participants joined in the two discussions. There were 14 older participants aged 65 to 74, of whom 8 were females and 6 were males. There were also 12 younger participants who were students of Forms 2 and 3 and aged 15-16, of whom 9 were girls and 3 were boys. The composition of the participants was listed below:

| | Focus Group 1 | | Focus Group 2 | |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| | <u>Female</u> | <u>Male</u> | <u>Female</u> | <u>Male</u> |
| Older participants | 3 | 4 | 5 | 2 |
| Young participants | 3 | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| Total | 6 | 7 | 11 | 2 |

4.2. Film Viewing

In the beginning of the focus group discussions, the participants were asked to recall the episodes of the film that impressed them most. Most of the older participants found that the film enabled them to refresh on the 'old' society once they experienced. They thought that the film could reflect on the society's practices in marriage and parents' arrangement in the early 1960s when they were young. Most of them enjoyed the film as a memory reminding them of what the past was like. Nevertheless, some older participants would think that the 'old' society and the practices in marriage arrangement were not without exceptions. A few older participants (mainly male) shared their experience in freedom of love and marriage when they were young even though they presumably represented the so-called, 'old generation'.

Most of the young participants asserted that the film did provide them with a chance to know about the world in the 1960s which seems not so real in the present world. They were particularly concern about the parent's authority in making decisions for their children even if it violated the children's view though none of them agreed on pre-marital sex. They also showed their disagreement on marriage not based on love and the unequal status of husband and wife in old marriages. Compared with the contemporary films in Hong Kong, they described the story was too 'old- styled' (老套) and 'funny' (好笑). They also found that the acting in the film was not 'natural' (不自然). Apart from the contrasting views of the young and old viewers in the ways of expressions in the film, the young and old participants could refer to the specific episodes in the film that emphasis the differing attitude toward love and marriage in the changing society. Also in their subsequent discussions, they freely reviewed their views on marriage and love and also their expected parent-child communications.

4.3. Contrasting Attitudes toward Love and Marriage

4.3.1 Older Participants' Views:

Marriage is for life-long

Older participants recalled the ways that marriage was primarily arranged by their parents and they were not allowed to have free choice in dating. They also revealed that some couples had to tolerate and to stay on for life even though they did not get on well. In their discussions, they also contrasted the old practices with the views on marriage in the contemporary society, or more specifically the views of the young generations. The following is an extract from a focus group discussion on old participants' views on marriage at that time:

“Tse (old male): In the past, if a woman married a man, she would have to stay forever. Nowadays, marriage is too vulnerable. In the past, it was difficult to think of divorce.”

“Leung (old female): In older days, parents would arrange their children to get married as early as ten and when you were at 16 or 17 then you would be considered to be ‘over-age’ to get marry.”

“Wong (old male): It depended on whether our parents were ‘open-minded’, or whether they allowed us to communicate, or whether they would just scold or even hit you... In the past, they made decisions by relying on the birth date and hours (時辰八字) of the women and would consider whether the women were considered to be harmful to her husband (克夫) according to their birth date and hours.”

With regard to the marital relationship, the old participants also reviewed marriage lasted because women obeyed men or playing a submissive role in marriage of the older days.

“Lin (old male): In the older times, there were not much quarrels amongst couples since men were more respectable than women. Women just tolerated men’s scolding.”

Also they reviewed women in the old times were bounded by the ‘ignorance’ that sustain the marriage.

“An old female: In the past, we did not study, had no televisions, and knew nothing. If pregnant before marriage, we felt embarrassed. The only way was to hide the body with very large clothes so that people would not notice that until it came near to child-birth.”

Obedience to parents' arrangements or wishes in marriage choice

In old society, children tend to obey their parents even if they don't agree. The obedience to the parents' wishes and expectations come in higher priority in their consideration of their freedom of choice in love and marriage.

“Wong (old male): In the film it clearly shows how parents at that time control children's marriage and the emphasis is on class differences and conflicts. It is similar to the reality. For example, my sister fell in love with the brother of her classmate, but our parents objected her choice. Finally my sister gave up and followed the arranged marriage system. Though she got married with a university graduate, she is now at 88 still can not agree with our parents' decision on her marriage and feels regretful about that experience. Though her husband is the head of a hospital, she still feels bad about her life.”

The participants reminded us that there were diversified experiences amongst the 'old' generations and some did not agree with the arrangement at that time.

“Chu (older female): I don't think it is all the same for the old generation that they tried to stay with only one partner in their whole life.”

“Tse (old male): I think it is true that old persons are stubborn and they take their views as being always right. However, my own experience of marriage was not controlled by my parents. It was because my father died early and my mother allowed me to choose on my own. But I kept my marriage for life-long.”

In sum, older participants reviewed marriage in the older times are mainly arranged by their parents depending on the parents' choice, their birth dates and hours; their classes rather than by freedom of love. They also expressed their obedience to the parents even though they do not agree. Some older participants would think it is natural for the younger to follow the arrangement of their parents but some would think it is too rigid. It was also reviewed that women's subordination in the marital relationship also help to sustain the marriage for life-long.

Comments towards youngsters' attitude towards love and marriage

In reviewing their sufferings of parents' control in the old days, some older participants did not agree with the arranged marriage and the gender inequality that they had experienced. Nevertheless, the older participants also expressed their disappointment towards youngsters' attitude on love and marriage in contemporary Hong Kong.

“Wan (old female): but I wonder if nowadays that is common for such a so committed relationship (as shown in the film) amongst the couples. Now, it is difficult to sustain love and relationship in marriage.”

Older participants argued that marriage is falling apart because of the following two reasons: youngsters do not possess a proper attitude towards marriage and they do not follow the guidance of their parents. In addition, the old participants also expressed that they could not agree with the attitudes of the young generations toward taking marriage not seriously.

“Wong (old male): I think most youngsters of this generation, male and female, are active and smart. However, they are childish. I don’t mean their knowledge but I think they are childish or immature in handling personal relationships. They have an ideal type of the life-long partner. Sometimes they think it is fine if they can talk along. Then they fall in love in ignorance and ...eventually they live together. This is ‘modern people’s love’.”

“Chan (old male): the young generations do not “think” or give sufficient considerations to whether the chosen ones deserve you to commit your whole life and to think about what will happen after marriage. They need to consider the consequences of their decisions in more details.”

Youngsters’ rejection on parental guidance

Older participants also expressed that they did not agree with the parents’ control on their children’s choices in marriage. Most of them admitted that the society has changed and parents should not expect their children just to follow their instructions. They agreed that parents need to communicate with their children in a different way. However, children should also respect their parents and take their experiences and views as reference for making decisions.

“Kam (old female): In the past, children had to listen to their parents. There was no TV and no compulsory education, so that you could not know too much and children dared not to object their parents. They would not argue with their parents.”

“Wan (old female): In the past, it appeared that children were more willing to follow instructions by their parents. In reality, it is just because parents have their authority. They think that their sons and daughters should be governed by them. But now it is different. Now we have to respect freedom, the children are better educated and they take parents’ words as an advice only.”

Though admitting the societal changes, some older participants expressed their disappointment for their children’s rejection on their advices.

“Choi (older female): As a parent you won’t point your children to a dark road.”

Wong (older male): I don’t agree with parents controlling their children. But it is also wrong to resist their advices simply because they try to give you some advices. Some youngsters blamed the parents for brining them to suffer in this world. The parents could also feel suffering when children did not follow their advices. The parents love you so they are so eager to intervene.

4.3.2 Youngsters' Views and Responses

As younger participants compared the practices in older days with the practices in nowadays, they all showed their disagreement on marriage need to be life-long and they also rejected that parents' arrangement.

Marriage is for happiness

They would prefer to have free choice in choosing their partners. To them, marriage is for happiness and love and hence once this could not fulfill these objectives, they would not 'keep' this relationship as the older generations do.

“Student A (female): As compared with the past, nowadays we are freer to make choices. And it is very important”.

“Student B (male): My concern would be the women's dependence on men. The problem is that not every man is treating the women well. Women are forced to comply solely because of their economic dependence, or they even tolerate violence. It reflects the unequal status (of the two sexes). Moreover, actually they can't give to the other what they need, and they cannot be happy.”

“Student D (female): In the past, men and women were not equal. Nowadays, youngsters consider more practical issues i.e. happiness on marriage and they are more open-minded toward marriage and love.”

Men and Women are equal in marriage

To the youngsters, open-minded in marriage are men and women means that they enjoy freedom in keeping or breaking up their marriage. Moreover, the couples should be treated equal in their marital relationships. Female students expressed more strongly on this.

“Student C (female): In the past, men could not allow women to work or to learn. It might be because men were lacking self confidence. They were afraid that women would resist their control if women learnt the world well. Men made use of the subordination of women to maintain marriage”.

Despite younger students all supported that they should enjoy freedom of marriage, none of them expressed that they agreed that on pre-marital sex as shown in the film. The main reason is not moral but it would cause oneself into trouble and it will greatly disturb their future.

Parent-child relationships

According to the student participants, nowadays, the parent-child relationship is changing and parents no longer retain their authority. If parents' attitudes are supportive, students will talk to them and will take their advices serious. If parents keep scolding or blaming at them and do not listen to them, they will not obey because they won't accept straight forward authority or suppression. They would rather choose their own even though it is wrong if their parents have a negative attitude towards them.

“Student J (female): It can’t solve the problems by scolding (as showed in the film). They (parents) don’t have a solution if we simply scold each other. If their attitudes are good, I will talk to them and take things serious. If they keep scolding or blaming at us and do not listen to us, I will not obey because I won’t accept straight forward authority or suppression. I would rather choose my own way even though it is wrong if they have a negative attitude towards me.”

“Student K (female): Sometimes, I just tolerate it if they (parents) scold me.”

“Student L (female): Yes, I think if parents scold us, we should not argue with them. Otherwise, it will only turn into quarrels.”

“Student M (female): It will hurt each other in quarreling. It is not appropriate. I think if the seniors would educate the young generations, they would need to be careful about their attitude. If they just shout (呼喝) or they not taking us serious (睇死我地), I won’t accept that.”

“Student M (male): I think it is very important for the parents or the old generations to have a positive attitude on communicating with us. If they are doing things very rudely and pushing us to follow their instruction, then youngsters normally do not accepting their authority.”

4.4. Exploring more effective communications in parent-child relationship

After the sharing of their differing views, the young and old start to clarify each other views. The youngsters seized the opportunity to explain to the elders that not every youngster is so ‘loose’ in their attitude towards love and marriage. The elders showed that they were convinced by the youngsters that they should not generalize the younger generations. Then the young and old then are invited to more focus on their concern on effective communications of the two generations. The older participants agreed that parents should not make choices for their children. Since they would think the society has changed and they should allow them to choose for their love and marriage. However, they expressed that it is necessary for both, the young and the old to review their attitudes in order to strive for a better parent-child communications.

“Wong (old female): Indeed, both of the young and the old (in the film) needed to review on their attitude. The elders should not restrict their children’s choices because if they did, both parents and their children would suffer. Parents would not feel good as well. But the youngsters were also wrong. Parents wanted their sons to be DRAGONS (望子成龍), so their children should not do what they liked to do.”

“Chan (old female): I think we should let youngsters make their choices. But at the same time, youngsters should think carefully parents’ advice as a reference or a reminder when they are making choices for themselves.”

“Lau (old female): Youngsters nowadays need to review themselves. They should respect their elders (including their parents)... They should

take their parents' advice for reference. As for us as parents, we should review our ways to communicate with our children to see how we can do better.”

“Wong (Old male): I am not sure if we can do this. I think we should talk with them (children) individually. Everybody, not even my wife, would like to be respected. We also need to nurture our youngsters to have self esteem.”

Some students respond and review their parent-child communications:

“ I think this pa pa's [伯伯] view is right. It is very good that he can communicate in this way with his children. If our parents choose a 'good' road for us, but they simply do not allow us to do as we choose, such as saying no good to fall in love, on the one hand, and not allowing us to choose friends, on the other hand. Then, if I have any problems, how can I discuss with my parents?”

Some other students shared that they are satisfied with their parent-child communications.

“Students N (female): We just like friends. I can make jokes with my parents. Sometimes, I say something to tease them, they won't get angry. I think in the old times, the mother-in-law's authority and control pass on [the ways of communications] to the daughter-in-law from generation to generation.”

However, a few students showed that they are lacking of confidence in achieving better mutual communications with their parents.

“Student O (male): Of course, it is always good to have mutual communication but in practice, most parents will choose what they think are good for their children. For example, they think that children are too young to start dating or to fall in love. Children, of course, are not willing to talk with their parents.”

Whilst some other students expressed further on the difficulties in handling the parent-child relationship in their family, the older participants suggest ways (for both generations) to effective communications that they could practice.

“Another Wong (old male): You can explain things to your parents. If you are mistaken, your parents have to say sorry. I think it is important for the parents to say sorry.”

In the discussions, older participants show their appreciation of the youngsters’ effort in exploring more effective communications.

“Chan (old male): No matter which generation is, it is very important to tolerate (包容) each other. If we can do that, it will be good for all of us.”

4.5. Observers’ Report

4.5.1 Film critique as a focus of discussions

The film served as a focus point for guiding discussions amongst the group members.

For the older participants, they recalled their own experiences through the film, *Devotion* which was produced in the 1960s when they are young. They would think the film really representing some of the very ‘typical’ situations. For examples, the children have to obey their parents’ decision in the arrangement of marriage and they were bounded by the class and the older rituals in making these decisions for their children. As for the younger participants, they would take the film as a reference of for them to understand the old society and how marriage was arranged at that time. They could not imagine this as they have no experience of the older society which was 40 years earlier. Hence, visual media could serve as an effective means for the participants to focus their discussion on the film they just watched. Some of the participants also referred back to the film to illustrate their attitude towards pre-marital marriage.

4.5.2 Chances for clarifications amongst the young and old participants

During the focus group discussions, there are incidents of young-old participants tried to make clear each others’ points of views. The younger participants clarified their attitude towards love and marriage that they feel that they were misunderstood.

“Student P: By comparing the present and the past, nowadays we are freer [to choose marriage]. However, it is never the same in handling the marital relations amongst youngsters. Not everyone is so ‘care-free’ as you [伯伯] have described. Still there are lots of us who takes marriage seriously.”

“Student G (female): You can’t generalize this to every youngsters. We are different.”

“Student I (female): I do disagree that the youngsters’ attitude toward marriage is bad. Maybe there are misrepresentations in the news media.”

Some students also showed their agreement with the older participants and they also think some of the youngsters are too care-free in love and marriage.

“Student J (female): I think some of the youngsters today are not well understood what they want in their love and marriage. I agree with these older participants that they should take these more seriously. But not all of us are the same. We are different from each other. Myself is very serious about marriage”

In other occasions, the older participants tried to share their disappointment for children rejecting their advices and they feel that they are not respect. Also, older participants reflected that the motivations of the parents in giving instructions to their children were simply because of love and care. All these, served as a very effective way in providing chances for the young and the old to listen to each other and to clarify their points. The focus group discussions in a closed setting with facilitator and clear discussion guidelines is found to be an effective way to create a supportive environment that allows for clarifications on the possible misconceptions on the young and old. These were significant for intergenerational programs to observe.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

The present project first explored the ‘gap’ between the young and old generations on 1) attitudes towards love and marriage, per-marital sex and 2) the expectations of parent-child relationship by comparing the world in the 1960s (that represented in a 1960s’ film) and nowadays. The differences of the views on the young and old were shared in the discussions after the screening.

In this study, findings suggested that there were different attitudes and views on love and marriage; and on parent-child communications. For the younger generations, marriage is a personal choice and is based on love and happiness. They resist the arranged marriage by parents who made the choices based on class or the birth time and date. They would expect a more equal relationship between men and women within the marriage. As reflected by the older generations that they agreed that parents should ‘let the children to make their choices’ but they would expect the younger generations would respect the advices of the parents.

As reflected in the discussions, the source of the differing views appears to come from 1) the changing social status of women, 2) the changing view on marriage and love choices and 3) the changing meaning of Xiao in the contemporary society of Hong Kong. The study also showed the lacking of opportunity to clarify and to try to understand each other would cause a lot of troubles to the parent-child relationship and further widen the generation gap. As we could see that the young and the old both caught in the tension between ‘new’ and ‘old’ thinking in the society which is the primary source of ‘generation gap’.

However, the study as an intergenerational programme, demonstrated that it was possible to bridge the gap or narrow the gap between the two generations through organized activities and programmes that aimed at promoting their clarifications for each others' view point.

The organized activities in this study were:

1. Use of visual media. As discussed earlier, the visual media, (i.e. the film in the 1960s in this project) would be one of the effective means in focusing the discussions and in helping the youngsters to understand what the older generation had experienced. Chances of clarifications of the older times by the older participants also are effective in understanding the diversities within the society.

2. Structured focus group discussions. The interactions of the young and the old in the discussions which were led by a facilitator (such as teachers, social workers, researchers) served as an important tool for a mutual communication where the young and the old had a chance to express and to listen to each others. Through the frank and sincere sharing including the conflicting perceptions between the young and the old (e.g. the youngsters' care-free attitude and the old parents' authoritative control), they could achieve an effective communications. The young was able to clarify their own positions as taking marriage seriously while the old could clarify their advices based on love and care. These clarifications were important for the two generations in exploring more effective ways of parent-child communication in the real world.

Nevertheless, the present study was limited by the single focus group session. Continuity of the programmes with follow-up study in exploring how the participants

had shared their experiences with each other (for example their parents or children) and how they applied this to their everyday life would be contributive to the social inquiry into intergenerational studies.

5.2 Recommendations

Intergenerational programmes that refer to cross-generational interaction, typically amongst the old and the young have experienced rapid development over the past three decades (Newman 2003, p. 1). The emerging field of intergenerational studies was evident in the publication of the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships: Programs, Policy, and Research* (JIR) in 2003. According to Newman, the JIR is the only international journal focusing on the intergenerational field and it serves as, “a global forum for discussion and exchange of ideas about the growth, development, and impact of intergenerational approaches to social issues, to family connections, and to new social structures” (p. 2).

However, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) pointed out that there were still loads of discussions on the ‘generational warfare’ amongst government officials, business and academic leaders, journalists they contacted in their 2003 trip to Europe. They warned that it was dangerous to frame intergeneration relationships in terms of resources competitions, prioritizing one over the other and these would lead to a ‘generational clash’ over resources and jobs that would be harmful economically, politically and to society-at-large (AARP, 2003). The present study serves as a new initiative in enhancing mutual communications to overcome the possible gaps caused by the changing societal values and belief between generations. This study reflects that a platform that allows the open sharing amongst the young and the old is effective in overcoming misconceptions and misunderstanding that divide or separate the

generations. It could be a main focus for intergenerational programmes to work on.

With a growing older population in Hong Kong and the promotion of the notion of “Active Ageing” and “Healthy Ageing” by the Hong Kong government and the Elderly Commission’s campaigns since 2001, a total of 566 “Opportunities for the Elderly Projects” were launched in 2003-05 by welfare agencies, district organizations, schools, volunteer groups and residents’ associations to organize a wide range of programmes and activities, of which intergenerational solidarity and community participation were in practice (Social Welfare Department 2006). It is evident that an emerging movement of older persons seeking to stay active and trying their very best to engage in activities and programmes in the local community. Many of these programmes have been organized with a theme in promoting interactions amongst the old and the young. These programmes have served as an important platform for ‘cross-generational interactions’. Hence, it would be possible to direct these programmes towards concrete outcomes in

- 1) improving the youngsters’ understanding of the older society that the old generation has experienced;
- 2) decreasing the differences between the young and the old generations by means of these programmes and in the use of visual media.

It is important for the government to put extra effort in supporting research studies on exploring the impact of those programmes. Further studies can focus on the exchange of views and ideas amongst the stake-holders in the intergenerational studies, and to explore the possible impact in the participants’ communications in the real world. These intergenerational programmes would be possible to consolidate the successful experiences in bridging the ‘generation gap’ and in exploring effective model for practices in intergenerational programmes achieving generational cohesions.

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Appendix 1: Synopsis of the film “*Devotion*”

Title of the Film (in English): Devotion

Title of the Film (in Chinese): 母與女

Release Date: 21.04.1960

Production Place: Hong Kong

Production Company: Hong Kong: MP + GI (Motion Picture & General Investment Co., Ltd.), 1960.

Director: Tang Huang, Script writer: Chin Yu

Synopsis:

When Chia-ho comes back to Hong Kong from England for a holiday, his mother tries to force him to marry his cousin to gain some financial benefit. As Ho doesn't want to tell her that he already has a girlfriend, he uses his wish to continue his studies as an excuse to resist her persuasion. In fact, Ho is in love and has already had a physical relationship with a servant, Mrs Shi's daughter, Ling-ling. Then, World War II breaks out, and Ho has to cut short his stay and return to England. Before leaving, he promises to come back and marry Ling. When Ho's mother finds out that Ling is pregnant with Ho's child, she dismisses Mrs Shi and Ling, and tells them that Ho has already been married in England. Ling dies heartbroken after giving birth to a girl, Lin Hsiao-ling. Mrs Shi brings Hsiao-ling up as an educated individual. Hsiao-ling, however, decides to help out the family and quits school to become a singer in a night club. She soon meets and falls in love with Chi-tang, a rich boy who has been interested in her for a long time. However, both families are opposed to the idea of the two getting together for different reasons. On the one hand, Tang's family do not want their son to be involved with a night club singer, and on the other, Mrs Shi doesn't want her granddaughter to suffer the same fate as her poor daughter. They forbid the young lovers from seeing each other. When Tang is attacked and hospitalised, Hsiao-ling visits him in the hospital. There, she meets her real father, who is the doctor in charge of the hospital. Ho, after hearing their story, encourages Hsiao-ling not to give up the love of her life easily simply because of differences in social standing. Finally, Hsiao-ling and Tang pluck up the courage to overcome their difficulties and finally decide to get married.

Casts: Ting Hao (as Shi Ling-ling, Lin Hsiao-ling), Chang Yang (as Lin Chia-ho), Roy Chiao (as Yuan Chi-tang), Wang Lai (as Mrs. Lin), Ou Yang Sha Fei (as Mrs. Shi), Tien Ching (as playboy), Liu En-chia (as Chao), Wu Jiaxiang (as Manger Chang).

Appendix 2: Discussion Guideline for Focus Group Discussions

Name of Observer: _____

Focus Group: FGD 1/ FGD 2

Name of Facilitator: _____

| Items | What do you see in the film? | Current situation from your experience / observation |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| 1. Filial respect | | |
| - parental authority | | |
| - interactions (frequency) | | |
| - communication pattern | | |
| - communication content | | |
| - responsibility of the young | | |
| | | |
| 2. Sexual and marital relations | | |
| - who makes the decisions | | |
| - frequency of their interactions | | |
| - communication pattern | | |
| - communication content | | |
| - responsibility of both party | | |
| | | |
| 3. Other observations | | |
| | | |
| 4. Perception and Attitude towards the older generations | | |
| - Negative | | |
| - Positive | | |
| - intergenerational relationships | | |
| 5. Observers' Notes on the young-old interactions in the FGDs | | |
| 1. Do the young-old interact with each other? (frequency) 2. Do the young- old clarify each other's view point? 3. Any clarifications on attitudes toward older perception and the society at that time? 4. Others | | |

Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies (APIAS) at Lingnan University

HISTORY

The Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies (APIAS) was established as a University-wide institute in 1998 and has been operating as one of the research centers in the Institute of Humanities and Social Science (IHSS) since September 2001. The mission of APIAS is to facilitate and develop research in gerontology and issues related to population ageing in Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region.

OUR MISSION

“To develop a better environment for older people and their families in Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region.”

OUR OBJECTIVES

- To develop an area of research excellence in programme evaluation and action research; both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.
- To strengthen our collaboration within the Lingnan University and the local communities, particularly in relation to student learning.
- To strengthen the collaboration and network amongst the Asia-Pacific region.

For further information on APIAS and opportunities for research collaboration and affiliations with the Centre, please contact us :

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