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**OLDER MOTHERS' EXPECTATIONS OF INTERGENERATIONAL  
RELATIONSHIPS: THE INTERGENERATIONAL AMBIVALENCE  
PERSPECTIVE**

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**LINGNAN UNIVERSITY**

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by  
**YAN Sze Wing**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Older Mothers' Expectations Of Intergenerational Relationships: The Intergenerational Ambivalence Perspective**

by

**YAN Sze Wing**

**Master of Philosophy**

With the effects of social changes, family values have changed and tensions and contradictions are probably more likely to occur among family members. According to the intergenerational ambivalence perspective, intergenerational relationships are inherently structured so as to generate ambivalence. Ambivalence means the contradictions in the relationships between older parents and adult children that cannot be reconciled. Individuals are expected to use various strategies in their attempts to manage ambivalence at least temporarily.

Older women, who often have different life experiences than older men given the influence of traditional Chinese culture, are the focus of this research. The present study aims to explore the expectations of older mothers with respect to four specific features: marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements of their adult children and how tensions and contradictions arise in their relationships. It also attempts to identify any adaptive strategies that older mothers use to manage the contradictions in the relations with their adult children.

A focus group discussion was conducted as an exploratory stage to help design subsequent qualitative interviews. Fifteen married mothers aged 65 and above with at least one living child aged 18 years and above were invited to undertake in-depth interviews selected via a snowball sampling method in conjunction with the Fu Tai elderly center in Tuen Mun, Hong Kong.

The findings suggest that contradictions occurred when adult children remained single, childless or provided insufficient social support to their mothers. Tensions were found when older mothers received unsolicited assistance and shared the same household with their adult children. Guided by the norm of non-interference, older mothers were found to use several constructive strategies to ignore, accept or rationalize the contradictions in the relations with adult children. Destructive strategies such as overt conflicts were generally avoided to prevent intergenerational relationships from disruption.

This research suggests older women demonstrated active roles in managing the tensions and contradictions in the parent-adult children relationships. They reconstructed traditional family values and adapted to the changes in the intergenerational relationships. However, their adaptive abilities depend greatly on their options or resources. Interventions from the government and the community are to be expected to help older people to adapt and achieve active and successful ageing.

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

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YAN Sze-wing  
November 2005

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The study of intergenerational relations within families in later life is flourishing internationally in social gerontology and related areas of sociology and social policy (e.g. Bengston and Lowenstein, 2003; Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002; Pillemer and Lüscher, 2004). This interest is a response to the effect of social changes in demographic structures, especially demographic ageing, and in family norms and values during the past decades. On one hand, populations are growing older in countries across the globe. Extended life expectancies have created potential for extensive intergenerational relationships (Pillemer and Lüscher, 2004). On the other hand, the structures and values of modern family are becoming more diverse in parallel with the rising standard of living, increasing education levels, as well as urbanization, and changing in the way children are socialized (Chu and Chan, 2002; Komter and Vollebergh, 2002). Given that values and expectations are important in determining the dynamics of the relationship between older parents and adult children, contradictions and tensions among generations may be created under social and demographic changes. Greater attention should be paid as to how social changes shape intergenerational relationships because bonds between generations are significant in determining the willingness and ability of families to provide material and emotional support for older people (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005; Lye, 1996). The present study is a response to the growing importance of intergenerational relationships under global demographic changes and changes in family norms and values.

It has been argued that the study of intergenerational relationships has been dominated by the adoption of limited frameworks emphasizing either intergenerational solidarity or intergenerational conflict for over 30 years (Lüscher and Pillemer, 2002). Many studies on intergenerational solidarity assume that solidarity remains strong even if intergenerational ties are being challenged by social factors like smaller family size, higher residential mobility and urbanization (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005; Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). As far as the conflict perspective is concerned, which is less thoroughly studied, it often reflects the social isolation and loneliness of older people, especially older women. It suggests that social changes have weakened the respect and support of the older population and have endangered their well-being (Hermalin and Yang, 2004). Over the past years, “intergenerational ambivalence” has emerged as an alternative to study the multidimensional nature of intergenerational relations. This concept does not deny the positive and negative dimensions of family life. It suggests that contradictions and tensions are inherent in intergenerational relationships in later life (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). The concept of “intergenerational ambivalence” is adopted in the present study. It aims to understand the changing form of intergenerational relationships, the expectations of older mothers concerning relations with their adult children, the ambivalent experiences of older mothers with their children and how older mothers negotiate and adapt to changing relationships.

This introductory chapter will first highlight demographic changes at the global level and then specifically at how demographic ageing affects intergenerational relationships. The next section will discuss how changes in family values have made family life more diverse. This chapter will review the trend of the study of intergenerational relationships and the emergence of intergenerational ambivalence

perspective. I will then shed light on Hong Kong, which has experienced rapid social changes over the past five decades. Next, the belief of filial piety and its effects on intergenerational relationships in Chinese societies will be discussed. Lastly, the purpose, significance of the present study and the organization of the thesis will be introduced.

### **Demographic change: a worldwide phenomenon**

At the global level, the population aged 65 or older was estimated at 461 million in 2004 and the annual net gain of older people in the world was estimated to exceed 10 million over the next decade (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). The “oldest old” (people age 80 or older) population within countries is also ageing more rapidly than the 65-and-older population (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). This “oldest old” population is projected to rise nearly 50 percent between 2000 and 2010 compared with a projected 24 percent increase of the 65-and-older population within the same period (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). The median age of population is expected to rise in every country (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). The median age in most developed countries, which include all European and North American countries, along with Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, is at least 32 (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). It is projected that Italy and Japan will have the world's highest median age by 2030, with half their populations age 52 or older (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). The broad changes in a nation's age structure can also be reflected in changing support ratios. Social support ratios, which indicate the number of youths and/or older people per 100 people of working age (20 to 64), are continuing to rise in more developed countries because of declining fertility and increasing longevity among the populations (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). For example, Japan's elderly support ratio

is expected to increase from 27 to 45 between 2000 and 2015, and to 53 by 2030 (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005).

Populations begin to age when fertility declines and adult mortality rates improve (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). This is referred to as a “demographic transition” which is the gradual process of change from high rates of fertility and mortality to low rates of fertility and mortality (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). Due to improvements in social health, including medicine, sanitation, nutrition and housing accommodation, most countries are experiencing a decline in mortality rate and a rise of life expectancy, especially for women. Women constitute the larger proportion of the older population in almost every country (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). The ratio of men to women at older age is well below 100, partly because of the longevity of females (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). For example, the average Japanese woman reaching age 65 in 2000 could expect to live more than 22 additional years, and the average for a man is more than 17 years (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). However, women are more likely to lose their spouses as they tend to marry men older than themselves, which can exacerbate the proportion of elderly widows in old populations.

This brief review of demographic change at the global level indicates its possible influence on intergenerational relationships. It has been suggested by Bengston and Lowenstein (2003) that the multi-generational family tree has come more to resemble beanpoles than pyramids in which each generation is smaller, with more years between each generation, but more generations coexist at any one time. Kinsella and Phillips (2005) stated that in 2000 a 50-year-old American had an estimated 80 percent chance of having at least one parent alive and a 27 percent

chance of having both alive. The increase in life expectancies has greatly lengthened the shared lifetimes of generations. Many adult children have increased their chance to interact with their parents until well into the adult children's middle age (Bengston, 2001; Pillemer and Lüscher, 2004). This has created the opportunity for older parents and their adult children to know more about each other and negotiate their relationships with one another. We may ask whether these transformations will lead to an increase in closeness between generations or bring about more conflict (Bengston, Rosenthal and Burton, 1996).

### **Social changes and family values and norms**

Many scholars have commented on the effects of industrialization and urbanization on accelerating the rate of family changes in recent decades. Several dramatic structural and behavioural changes have occurred over the past five decades: postponed marriage and childbearing, smaller family size, migration and changing patterns of work (Amato, 2004; Chu and Chan, 2002; Demo, 1992). There are increasing numbers of nuclear families in both Western and Eastern countries (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). Sundstrom (1993) finds that most Western countries and Japan since 1950 have shown a decline in the proportion of older people, particularly women, who are living with their children.

There is an almost global trend towards fewer children per family (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). In almost all more developed societies, the average number of children per woman falls below the population replacement level of 2.1 children (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). Childlessness is common in Europe and is increasing in Latin American and Southeast Asia (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). People

increasingly choose not to have any child so that the likelihood of being childless among women aged 40 to 44 has nearly doubled between 1980 and 2000 (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). This leads to lower marriage rates and reflects cultural changes which make childlessness more socially acceptable (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005).

Many researchers have found that intergenerational differences in family values and attitudes or the discrepancies between children's actual behaviour and parental expectations are more evident in this century (Lau and Kwok, 1997; Lee, 2004; Pillemer and Lüscher, 2004). This intergenerational gap is the result of the rapid change of a society which makes it not feasible to meet the expectations of older mothers to be taken care by their children in later life (Lau and Kwok, 1997). As familial norms set standards for behaviour and establish obligations and expectations of family members (Mangen and Westbrook, 1988), the new, diverse and complex patterns of family life provide different normative guidelines on how parents and children perform their roles and how they negotiate their relationships (Kemp, 2004). The co-existence of modern and traditional family values and norms increases the likelihood of creating tensions and contradictions between generations (Kemp, 2004). These call into questions how family roles are defined and understood in this pluralistic contemporary society and how far the filial behaviour of children meet the expectations of parents.

### **The development of the study of intergenerational relationships**

The research on family and intergenerational relationships can be described as a debate about “the decline of the family versus the high degree of intergenerational solidarity” (Hammarstrom, 2005, p.35). The earlier sociological literatures in the

1940s and 1950s primarily considered the possibility of industrialization undermining the family (Hammarstrom, 2005). This focus was as a response to Talcott Parsons who was concerned about the isolation of the nuclear family in modern industrial society. Parsons suggests that members of nuclear families are bound by duty rather than obligations (Haralambos, Heald and Holborn, 2000). During that period, much literature focusing on the frequency of contact and exchange of resources among generations was done to find out whether family functions had declined.

A series of social movements (for example, the Civil Rights movement and the Women's Rights or Feminist Movement) took place in America during the 1960s. There was a shift of focus on the study of intergenerational relationships. The nature and extent of the "generational gap", as well as the conflicts between youth and elders, both within families and society, were focused so as to investigate the possible inconsistent values across the generations (Lynott and Roberts, 1997). According to Lynott and Roberts (1997), the 'great gap' proponents focused on the relations between cohorts within society while proponents of the other perspectives focused on the relationships among family-lineage members. Bengston interviewed the members of multigenerational families concerning their perceptions of the generational gap between both their own families and society at large. His study showed that respondents perceived little evidence of a gap within their own families but a considerably larger gap between generations and society at large (Hammarstrom, 2005). Towards the end of the 1980s, political leaders and social critics began to pay greater attention to the potentially high monetary cost of an ageing society to society (Lynott and Roberts, 1997). During that period, research mainly focused on the sources of support for older people and the factors affecting

children's support, aiming to understand the burdens and stress of caregivers (Wu, 2005).

In the 1990s, there were calls for considering the theoretical issue regarding research on ageing and the family (Lye, 1996; Mancini and Blieszner, 1989). The proposal of a new theory rested on the fact that studies of intergenerational relationships have been dominated by the adoption of limited frameworks emphasizing either intergenerational solidarity or intergenerational conflict for over 30 years (Lüscher and Pillemer, 2002). In 1998, Lüscher and Pillemer proposed "intergenerational ambivalence" in the study of intergenerational relationships. They claimed that intergenerational relationships always generate ambivalence and the intergenerational ambivalence paradigm was better at reflecting the whole picture of family life consisting both solidarity and conflicts (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). Contradictions which are inherent in the relationships between older parents and their adult children occur in two dimensions: 1) contradictions at the macro-social structure in roles and norms; and 2) contradictions at the psychological-subjective level, in terms of cognition, emotions and motivation (Lowenstein and Ogg, 2003). After putting forth this concept, there was a wide theoretical discussion on intergenerational ambivalence in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* in 2002 (e.g. Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry and Silverstein, 2002; Connidis and McMullin, 2002; Curran, 2002; Lüscher, 2002). More works on conceptual and methodological frameworks, and empirical studies are found in Volume Four of the *Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research*. Studies of intergenerational ambivalence have expanded from Europe, United States and to Eastern societies such as Singapore (e.g. Teo, Graham, Yeoh and Levy, 2003) and recently Taiwan (e.g. Wu, 2005).

**Beliefs in intergenerational relationships in Chinese societies**

Countries in East Asia have a predominantly Confucian culture that originated from China, and Hong Kong is no exception (Phillips, 2000). The ideology of Confucianism traditionally places filial piety at an important level. Filial refers to “pertaining to or befitting a son or daughter”, where piety implies “devotion to duty and devoutness” (Ng, Lee and Phillips, 2002, p.138). Filial piety is a broader concept more than filial obligations and parental care (Cheung, Lee and Chan, 1994). Traditionally, filial piety not only included the provision of care, comfort, respect and glory to parents by children, but also giving birth to a male offspring and the worship of ancestors (Kim, Kim and Hurh, 1991; Osako and Liu, 1986). Family continuity is an important issue in Chinese societies (Chow, 2000).

According to the Book of Rites, there are five basic human relationships – ruler and minister, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife and friend and friend (Kung, Hung and Chan, 2004). The relationships which are gender hierarchical are those which are male dominated and generational hierarchical (Kung et al., 2004). Women in the past had been expected to follow “three obediences and four virtues” (三從四德): to follow their fathers when young, to follow their husbands after marriage and to follow their sons after the death of spouses (Tsui, 1991). Thus, mothers may have different expectations of filial responsibilities of children.

Today, the concept of filial piety has been modified in Hong Kong. The traditional significance of filial piety has been affected by factors like Westernization, modernization and industrialization. The practice and implementation of filial piety

has faced many challenges (Ng et al., 2002; Yang, 1988). In attempt to investigate to what extent older mothers uphold these traditional values of filial piety and their expectations concerning children's filial responsibilities, the present study focuses on four themes: social support, living arrangements, marriage and childbearing. These are believed to constitute family continuity by supporting the old, forming one's own family and continuing the family line. The review of literature on the change in these four aspects is presented in Chapter Two.

### **Hong Kong - a modern and ageing society**

In this thesis, I adopt a new starting point to explore the ambivalent experiences in the intergenerational relationships in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a good context for analysing the effects of social changes on intergenerational relationships. During the past fifty years or more, Hong Kong has experienced tremendous economic growth as well as structural changes and has transited from being an entrepot in the 1950s to a high income financial series and business center today. Hong Kong is already an ageing society. With medical advancement, the crude death rate has remained low during the last 50 years. People have longer longevity than before. The life expectancy at birth of Hong Kong people has risen from 72.3 for men and 78.5 for women in 1981, to 78.6 for men and 84.6 for women in 2004 (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). The median age also increased from 31 in 1991 to 38.6 at mid-2004 (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). In total, there were 818,800 older persons aged 65 or above who accounted for 11.9 percent of the total population in 2004 (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). Moreover, women made up the larger proportion in the older people population. The sex ratio (number of men per 1000 women) was 1087 in 1981, as compared with the overall sex ratio of

929 in 2004 (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). It is thus intriguing to understand the nature of intergenerational relationships of women in later life.

Besides demographic ageing, there are also changes in the power of the generations. Hong Kong is a part of China and has inherited the traditional Chinese Confucianism culture. Family has an important status. Intergenerational relations have emphasized harmony, stability, generational hierarchy and gender hierarchy (Kung et al., 2004). Patrilocal residence, patrilineal kinship patterns and large extended family are said to be the major characteristics of a traditional Chinese family (Wolf, 1972). However, Hong Kong was a British Colony for 150 years. Its citizens have been continuously exposed to the forces of Westernization, industrialization and urbanization. They have experienced the intense Western influence which stresses companionable, love-based, egalitarian, exclusive, and lasting marriage (Kung et al., 2004). The parent-child relationships tend to be based on love and companionship and become a bilateral one (Kung et al., 2004).

In addition, changes in family norms have evolved, for example marital and reproductive behaviour. Marriage rates have declined and marriage has also been delayed. The median age at first marriage increased from 27.8 for men and 22.9 for women in 1971 to 31.1 for men and 28.1 for women in 2004 (Figure 1.1 in Appendix I) (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). Over the past 30 years, the crude marriage rates increased from 5.6 in 1971 to 8.4 in 1981 and then decreased gradually to 6.0 in 2004 (Figure 1.2 in Appendix I) (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). In terms of reproductive behaviour, the crude birth rate decreased from 35.0 per 1000 population in 1961 to 7.2 per 1000 population in 2004 (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). The total fertility rate fell from 3459 children per

1000 women in 1971 to 927 children per 1000 women in 2004, which dropped below the replacement level (2100 children per 1000 women) (Figure 1.3 in Appendix I) (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). Moreover, now people tend to prefer small family size and/or remaining childless and this may affect intergenerational relationships. Young people tend to move out and start their own families after getting married (Lee and Kwok, 2005). The social support ratios, which are also known as dependency ratios, have decreased from 774 in 1961 to 370 in 2004 (Figure 1.4 in Appendix I) (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). However, the elderly dependency ratio has increased from 50 in 1961 to 163 in 2004 (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). This may affect the quality of social support from children.

As illustrated above, there has been a remarkable change in population structures and family structures in Hong Kong over the past five decades. Hong Kong has a unique fusion of Chinese and Western cultures where the old and the new family values and norms go side by side. This probably suggests family life in Hong Kong is becoming more diverse. It raises a question on whether generations share a single, uniform change or if there are any discrepancies of expectations across the generations in Hong Kong. It is thus intriguing to understand how these changes in norms and values might influence the interaction between older mothers and their adult children and how older mothers adapt to these changes.

### **Purpose of the study**

As noted earlier, research on intergenerational relationships is mainly along two axes of solidarity and conflict. These approaches are believed to fail in understanding

the whole picture of family which is characterized by both harmony and conflicts (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). The adoption of the concept of “intergenerational ambivalence” aims at having a better understanding on the diverse nature of modern family life. Moreover, the present study explores the ambivalent experiences in the areas of social support, living arrangements, and family formation, including marriage and childbearing, in the relationships between older mothers and adult children in Hong Kong. These four aspects are focused on because they are the important elements that contribute to family continuity. Hence, this thesis aims at finding out how older mothers view childbearing, marriage, social support and living arrangements of and with their children and to see if there are any contradictions between the actual behaviour of children and their own expectations, or to see if tensions arise in their close relationships. Also, it tries to find out how older mothers adapt and manage possible contradictions in their relations.

### **Significance of the study**

#### *Theoretical significance*

The study of intergenerational relationships has predominately adopted either intergenerational solidarity or conflict perspectives (Hammerstrom, 2005). Family solidarity and conflicts have been studied separately as both perspectives viewed conflicts and solidarity as opposites (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). Postmodern and feminist theorists have shown dissatisfaction towards this dichotomy of social facts (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). This dichotomy undermines the dynamic nature of family ties and neglects the multifaceted family life and the diverse interests among family members (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). In the present study, “ambivalence” is introduced in the study of intergenerational relationships in later

life which suggests intimate relationships are inherently laden with tensions (Lang, 2004). It aims to adopt the concept of “intergenerational ambivalence” in the understanding of intergenerational relationships in Hong Kong.

### *Practical significance*

Social changes in family structures and family values are clearly evident in international literature, and Hong Kong is no exception to this (Komter and Vollebergh, 2003; Lang, 2004; Lau and Kwok, 1997; Ng, 1991, 1992; Teo et al., 2003; Wu, 2005). Hong Kong is always said to represent a convergence of traditional Chinese and Western culture, where traditional and modern values co-exist together. These diverse values provide different normative guidelines of how people behave and would generate contradictions between generations of what they expected. Ambivalence may also be generated.

Older women are the primary focus of the present study for two main reasons. First, older women make up the larger proportion in population aged 65 and above in Hong Kong as in many other countries (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002; Phillips, 2000). Second, older women may generally have different developments in their life courses in Chinese societies according to feminist perspective (Teo et al., 2003). The processes of ageing and the quality of life in old age are often very different for men and women (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002). This affects the distribution of power, privilege, and social well-being of both men and women. In addition, older women are more vulnerable to social, economic and health problems. It raises the question of what filial responsibilities older women would expect of their children.

Family is placed in a central place in traditional Chinese societies under the influence of Confucianism (Kung et al., 2004). The traditional values may have a stronger influence on older women who were born before the industrialization or urbanization of Hong Kong in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This cohort of older women might hold traditional values towards family. As society has changed rapidly in the last fifty years under the influences of individualization, modernization and Westernization, it is important to understand older women's adaptive behaviour of how they respond to these social changes and the possible tensions and contradictions in the intergenerational relationships.

### **Organization of thesis**

This thesis contains four major areas of study: marriage, childbearing, social supports and living arrangements. After the introductory chapter, the next chapter is a review of literature which includes theories regarding intergenerational relations and previous studies on the above four major areas. The next two chapters present the theoretical framework and research design of the present study. The findings driven from the 15 in-depth interviews are presented to explore the expectations of older mothers on marital aspects, reproductive behaviour, social support and living arrangements of their adult children, the actual behaviour of and with their adult children and the strategies they used to manage the tensions and contradictions in the intergenerational relationships. The last chapter summarizes the major findings of the present study and points out the limitations as well as a recommendation for future study.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **A review of the literature on intergenerational relations and ambivalence**

Intergenerational relationships, which are also known as intergenerational ties or intergenerational linkages, are a kind of social relationships. The relationships can be found in both the family and the society that involves community and neighbourhood (Bengston and Harootyan, 1994). At the microsocial level, it strictly refers to interactions and relationships between parents, children, grandparents and grandchildren (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). Abundant literature on intergenerational relations can be found in the areas of sociology, gerontology and social policies. Research has tended to focus on the quality of these relationships because these relations are significant in determining the willingness and ability of families to provide material and emotional support both by and for the older people (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005; Lye, 1996).

This chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first section presents the theoretical perspectives to have a better understanding about the nature of family relations in later life. In the second section, a review of literature on social support, living arrangements, marriage and childbearing is presented.

#### **Theoretical perspectives on intergenerational relationships**

A number of theories have been developed which help to understand the dynamics and nature of the intergenerational relations and how the generations relate

to each other. In this section, the main paradigms, i.e. the solidarity and conflict models, exchange theory and filial piety, are discussed which help in understanding the dynamics of intergenerational relationships. The following is an analysis of these models or theories, their critiques, and the reasons for shedding light on intergenerational ambivalence in recent years.

### **The intergenerational solidarity model**

The construct of intergenerational solidarity has developed since 1971, during the debate surrounding the supposed decline of family versus the high degree of intergenerational solidarity (Hammarstrom, 2005; Lowenstein, 2000). This paradigm, which is based on exchange theory, views family solidarity as an important component of intergenerational relationships (Lowenstein and Ogg, 2003). Family solidarity means “the whole range of domestic, affective and financial services that are shared by those connected by kinship links” (Bawin-legros and Stassen, 2002, p.243). Shared values across generations, normative obligations to provide help and enduring ties between parents and children are emphasized (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). The existence or absence of intergenerational solidarity is crucial to self-esteem, psychological well-being as well as the giving and receiving of help and support and for successful coping and social integration in old age (Bengston and Roberts, 1991; Lowenstein and Ogg, 2003).

Bengston and Harootyan (1994) found that intergenerational relationships are multidimensional and reflect exchange relations. Solidarity between generations is defined as a multidimensional structure expressed in six distinct but interdependent dimensions of structure, association, affect, consensus, function and norms:

- *Structural solidarity: living in geographic proximity*
- *Associational solidarity: frequency of interaction among family members*
- *Affective solidarity: nature and extent of positive feelings towards family members*
- *Consensus solidarity: likeness of values, attitudes, beliefs among family members*
- *Functional solidarity: degree to which family members exchange support or service*
- *Normative solidarity: perception of and adherence to norms of family solidarity.*

*Source: Bengtson and Harootyan (1994)*

An early formulation of this model assumes that these six dimensions are inter-related and in aggregated represent solidarity or family cohesion (Daatland and Herlofson, 2003). Further studies recognize that the correlations among these dimensions are low (Daatland and Herlofson, 2003). Since then, Bengtson and his colleagues argue that conflict, which can be resolved eventually, is a natural and inevitable aspect of family relations (Daatland and Herlofson, 2003; Lowenstein and Ogg, 2003). The concept of conflict is incorporated and allows for resolving issues in order to enhance the overall quality of the family relations (Lowenstein, 2002).

### ***Critique***

There are several criticisms of the intergenerational solidarity model concerning its theoretical incompleteness (Connidis and McMullin, 2002; Curran, 2002; Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998; Marshall, Matthews and Rosenthal, 1993), theoretical basis (Hammarstrom, 2005) and measurement (Lettke and Klein, 2004).

*Theoretical incompleteness*

Some scholars (e.g. Curran, 2002; Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998; Marshall et al., 1993; Sprey, 1991) have criticized the failure of solidarity model to depict family life, which is often characterized by both harmony and conflict. For example, Marshall et al. (1993) say the term “solidarity” emphasis on “consensus” is too normative (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). This model assumes personal feelings, such as affection, attraction and warmth, which maintain cohesion within the family (Sprey, 1991). Any negative aspects of family life are viewed as an absence of solidarity. Some scholars argue that the world is more complex, conflicted and dynamic so that people often have conflicts of interest (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). The overly positive and consensus bias of the solidarity perspective hides the undercurrents of conflict and abuse residing within families (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). This leads to an incomplete picture of family life (Curran, 2002).

*Theoretical basis*

It has been argued that the theoretical assumptions of intergenerational solidarity, “mechanical solidarity”, are not appropriate for analysing relations across family generations, neither on theoretical nor empirical grounds (Hammarstrom, 2005). Mechanical solidarity, which was proposed by Durkheim, has been used to analyze the changes of society in the process of industrialization in Western Europe, in terms of a change from mechanic solidarity to organic solidarity, a move from Cell 1 to 4 in Figure 2.1. The society characterized by “value similarity, reinforced by repressive laws and coercion, based on low degree of division of labour” is transited to a society characterized by “a high degree of division of labour and a subsequent low degree of

value similarity” (Hammarstrom, 2005, p.38). Bengston adopts the mechanical solidarity concept in family relations which implies “relations between family generations in modern society may be characterized by a value of similarity based on a low degree of division of labour” (the case in Cell 1) (Hammarstrom, 2005, p.38).

Figure 2.1 The relationship between division of labour and similarity in values, norms, etc.

		Division of Labour	
		Low Degree	High Degree
Similarity in Values, Norms, etc.	High Degree	(1) Mechanic Solidarity	(2) Traditional Family
	Low Degree	(3) Modern Family	(4) Organic Solidarity

Source: Hammarstrom (2005).

Hammarstrom questions the applicability of “low degree of division of labour” and “value similarity” in understanding the modern family. In terms of degree of division of labour, Hammarstrom argues that mechanic solidarity is not appropriate to describe a traditional family because traditional society and traditional family are different. The ideal type of traditional family (Cell 2) is not identical to traditional society (Cell 1) in terms of division of labour. Family members in traditional family have a clearly specific division of labour between gender and generations (Cell 2). There is a clearly defined authority structure governing the relations between parents and children. In contrast, low division of labour is found in traditional society (Cell 1) so that there are relatively less occupational roles.

In terms of value similarity, mechanic solidarity does not seem appropriate for

studying intergenerational ties in modern family. Families in modern society tend to be nuclear in nature and family members are interdependent on each other emotionally and functionally. There is relatively less far-reaching division of roles and more diffuse role expectations (Cell 3). Relations in later life are found to be independent with regard to value similarity (Hammarstrom, 2005).

### *Methodological problems*

The standard measures of emotional, consensual and normative solidarity may overlook the mixed feelings of respondents (Lettke and Klein, 2004). For example, Bengston and his associates captured normative solidarity between parents and adult children by asking respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with various statements about what family members should do in their relationships (Lettke and Klein, 2004). They then calculated the similarity of expectations. Lettke and Klein (2004) criticize that this scoring ignores situations in specific, in which there are high expectations in one area and lower expectations in other areas.

### **Role theory**

This well-established general theory in social gerontology states that people play a variety of roles, such as a student, daughter, mother, and wife, throughout their lifetimes (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002). Each role is associated with a set of expectations that shape the manner in which people in social institutions are expected to play them (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002; Merton 1957). All roles tend to be related to a given self-concept and identity and hence give people a sense of social being (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002; Ng et al., 2002).

These social roles are often related to age or stage of life and are often organized in a sequential way in the life course (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002; Ng et al., 2002). Age norms, which assume what people should do or when people should ease certain activities, open up or close off the roles that people of a given chronological age can play (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002; Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). This means that role changes along the life courses of individuals involve role gains and role losses. As people get old, for example, they may lose the roles as husbands or wives after the death of their spouses. People may lose the worker roles after retirement. They may take up volunteer roles if they do the community services or have grandparent roles after their children give birth to a child.

People may play different roles, which consist of elements that are inherently incompatible, at the same time (Goode, 1960; Merton, 1957). Hence, they have to constantly adapt and negotiate role definitions they can accept in order to fulfill normative role-related expectation and achieve social integration (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002). This theory provides insights for the understanding of how older mothers adapt and negotiate the relationships with their adult children in the present study.

### **Exchange theory**

This theory is based on economic costs and rewards and the concept of reinforcement from behavioural psychology (Davey and Eggebeen, 1998). It assumes social behaviour is an exchange of activities (Hammarstrom, 2005) and suggests that relationships are governed by a norm of reciprocity. Smith and Goodnow (1999) say reciprocity is undoubtedly an important norm in most social interactions. Individuals

are often said to be motivated by self-interest and seek to maximize their “rewards” and minimize their “costs” or “punishments” in a relationship (Hammarstrom, 2005; Hamon and Whitney, 2003). The social exchange and interaction will continue as long as the relationship is profitable. This mutual exchange of social support among generations is investigated by social exchange theory in much social gerontology research (Lee, 1999). It stresses that profit and loss should be equitable between relationship partners (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998).

In the intergenerational relationships, parents provide food, shelter, care, supervision, socialization and other necessities to their offspring. Hence, children are expected, in turn, to provide emotional and material needs to their parents when parents are ill or in need (Hamon and Whitney, 2003). The exchange of help varies across stages of the life courses (Smith and Goodnow, 1999). Typically, much help is given by parents until children’s middle age and children then may keep providing support to their ageing parents (Komter and Vollebergh, 2002). However, the reciprocity in the exchange of support between generations decreases over the life courses, especially in late adulthood (Komter and Vollebergh, 2002; Smith and Goodnow, 1999). Despite the fact that older people have reduced resources, they are found to maintain some degree of reciprocity and remain independent and active at the same time (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005).

### *Critique*

Although exchange theory stresses that there should be an equitable exchange of social support among generations, some scholars argue that it is impossible for children to restore the balance and fully repay their parents (Hamon and Whitney,

2003). In addition, even if the relationship is not profitable, it is less likely to impose punishment such as exclusion of members from the family. It is because family relations are enduring and are embedded with normative expectations with respect to member's behaviour. These relations are different from other groups which are based on voluntary membership.

### **Filial piety**

Social exchange theory cannot solely in itself explain current intergenerational relationships in Chinese societies (Lee, 1999). Filial piety (Xiao Dao ; 孝道) expects young people to be respectful, caring and obedient to older persons, both within their own family or others in the society. It also states that the vital concern of children should be for the well-being of their own parents (Yang, 1988). It has been widely accepted in China and in many Asian societies (for example, in Taiwan, Korea and Singapore) although less formally in Western societies (Lee, 2004).

There are three classical treatises on filial piety. Confucius defines filial piety in terms of nine behaviour:

*Taking care, (2) not being rebellious, (3) showing love, respect, and support, (4) displaying courtesy, (5) continuing the family line, (6) withhold fraternity among siblings, (7) advising parents, (8) concealing parents' blunders, and (9) displaying sorrow for parents' illness and death (Lin, 1992).*

Mencius defines filial piety with eight features:

*(1) supporting, (2) respecting, (3) taking care, (4) minding, (5) showing courtesy, (6) pleasing, (7) abiding by righteousness, and (8) reproducing (Lin, 1992).*

Xiaojin, another Confucian classic writer, notes five characteristics of filial piety: showing respect, pleasing, worrying about parent's worries, bereavement for parents' death, and honouring (Lin, 1992). In sum, filial piety involves both the transaction of inheritance and power to the children, and expectations of absolute obedience, respect and caregiving by the adult children when their parents are old (Yue and Ng, 1999). It states the importance of childbearing to continue the family line, especially having a male offspring (Osako and Liu, 1986). It is also found that filial piety contributed to family cohesion (Cheung et al., 1994).

Two dimensions of filial piety are noted: the actual behaviour of children and the societal (and parental) expectations of children to take care of their parents (Lee, 2004). In reality, the reflection of traditional filial attitudes in actual behaviour of caring, however, is limited and more selective (Lee, 2004). For instance, many Chinese older people today have a relatively small caring network limited to a few caregivers (Lee, 2004). But this traditional concept of filial piety remains to be the dominant norm that most people still hold – giving rise to potential tensions between expectations and reality.

### **Conflict perspectives on intergenerational relationships**

There are other lines of research that emphasize isolation, caregiver stress, family problems, conflicts and abuse (Marshall et al., 1993). There has been a perception of weakened family relations and abandonment of older people in the public sphere and in portrayals of the family in contemporary fiction and theatres (Lüscher, 2002). Conflict theory claims that humans are motivated principally by self-interest (Klein and White, 1996). Conflicts are inevitable and commonly found

in social groups such as family (Klein and White, 1996). The primary concern of this perspective is how to manage conflicts (Klein and White, 1996). It states that the negotiations between family members depend on who has the greatest resources (Klein and White, 1996).

### *Critique*

The conflicts perspective has been criticized for only reflecting one side of family life. This perspective does not explain why family members cohere (Curran, 2002). There are some lesser forms of conflicts, such as tensions and contradictions, which can be referred to as part of family life, which, however, have received much less attention (Phillips, Ogg and Ray, 2003).

### **The intergenerational ambivalence perspective**

The intergeneration studies over the past 30 years have tended to be dominated by the solidarity model, which as noted emphasizes consensus between generations, and the conflict perspective, which emphasizes the negative aspects of family life. More recently, the concept of “ambivalence” has been proposed as a basis for a deeper understanding of family relationship (Kemp, 2004; Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998).

### *Concepts of ambivalence*

The word “ambivalence” is made up of two components. The Latin prefix “ambi” means “two” while “valence” refers to “value” (Pillemer and Lüscher, 2004). The Collins English Dictionary points that ambivalence is the “simultaneous

existence of two opposed and conflicting attitudes, emotions, etc” (Anonymous, 2000, p.46). The Oxford English Dictionary refers it to the “co-existence in a person of contradictory emotions and attitudes towards a person or thing” (Simpson and Weiner, 1989, p.387). In sum, ambivalence shows the dilemma of simultaneous and contradictory attitudes and inner conflicts, especially referring to emotions.

The concepts of ambivalence developed in the psychology (e.g. Bleuler, Freud, Erickson, Higgins) and psychosocial field, in the analysis of will, emotions, feelings, motivations and behaviour. Then, it has been used by sociological scholars (e.g. Coser, Merton, Weigert), sometimes termed “sociological ambivalence”, to study social roles, status, norms, and attitudes. Based on this earlier formulation of concept, Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) propose “intergenerational ambivalence” as an alternative approach to study intergenerational relationships in regards to the conflict and solidarity perspectives noted earlier (Kemp, 2004) (The definitions of ambivalence is summarized in Appendix II).

Ambivalence has been said to occur at two levels: structural and subjective levels (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). At the structural level, ambivalence can arise in the form of competing role expectations or demands (Kemp, 2004). At the subjective level, it includes the coexistence of positive and negative emotions (Kemp, 2004; Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). There are three aspects of parent-adult child relationships which are more likely to generate ambivalence: dependency/autonomy, conflicting norms and solidarity (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). Some evidence shows that a high level of ambivalence can reflect dissatisfaction with the relationships (Thompson and Holmes, 1996).

Intergenerational ambivalence means the contradictions in relationships between parents and adult offspring that cannot be reconciled (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). Connidis and McMullin (2002) share the same view. They note that intergenerational relationships are embedded in social structures, which are “sets of social relations based on class, age, gender, race and ethnicity that produce lasting inequality” so as to create contradictions and tensions when individuals negotiate their relationship with each other (p.600). Although contradictions cannot be resolved, some scholars suggest a need to investigate mechanisms used to manage them at least temporarily (Connidis and McMullin, 2002; Spitze and Gallant, 2004). The strategies which people have used to try to manage ambivalence will be tied to their structured opportunities. In sum, intergenerational ambivalence perspective views ambivalence as a source of negotiation and change and individual acts as a social actor to reconcile contradictions and tensions in the relationships with family members (Connidis and McMullin, 2002).

#### *Reasons for encountering ambivalence in later life*

Intergenerational relationships in later life may be characterized by more ambivalence in terms of permanence, power and gender (Laursen and Bukowski, 1997; Teo et al., 2003). First, bonds between parent and child involve a high degree of permanence (Laursen and Bukowski, 1997). Their relationships are enduring and cannot be broken, even though members may encounter some negative feelings, although fewer compared with relations with spouses and friends (Fingerman and Hay, 2004). The present irritations and annoyances as well as prior difficulties among family members are continually affecting their relationships (Fingerman and Hay, 2004). Second, the power structure shifts from a parent dominated to a more lateral

and equitable one (Fingerman and Hay, 2004). Older parents are more likely to have no direct power over their children's decision or daily lives (Fingerman and Hay, 2004). Ambivalent feelings may occur when older parents have unmet filial expectations towards children. Lastly, gender plays a significant role in shaping intergenerational relationships (Teo et al., 2003). The unequal power relationship between men and women affects the distribution of resources in which women are often more vulnerable, especially in traditional societies (Teo et al., 2003). As compared with men, the social structures contribute to women's experiencing greater relationship ambivalence (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). Women face countervailing pressure to perform in the work world and take on more kin work than do men (Fingerman, Hay and Birditt, 2004). Women are generally more invested in their relationships and experience more intense emotions in these ties than do men (Fingerman et al., 2004). Hence, gender may associate with sentiments toward relationships and women are more likely to encounter ambivalence in their relationships (Fingerman et al., 2004).

### **Social change and intergenerational relationships**

In reviewing the theories about intergenerational relationships, it may not be easy to conclude whether intergenerational relationships may be characterized by solidarity, conflict or both. Some postmodern theorists argue that contemporary society has undergone rapid social development. This makes contemporary family relationships become more diverse, fluid and unresolved (Lüscher and Pillemer, 2004). Evidence can be found in the various forms of intimate relations: remarriage, same-sex partnerships, and single-parent family. People often have the sense of fragmentation, discontinuity, of confusion and uncertainty on how to conduct

themselves in social relations (Lüscher and Pillemer, 2004).

Feminist theory has sometimes criticized the assumption that harmony of interests exists among all family members. It suggests conflict of interests and internal contradictions ranging from reproduction control, to household division of labour, to parenthood existing in contemporary families (Thorne, 1992). For example, caregiving is seen as part of women's roles. The fulfilling of the caregiving role is regarded as meaningful and as a means for connecting with others. However, this forces women into boring and repetitive tasks (Abel, 1990).

Both postmodern and feminist theories share a "distrust for dualistic thinking, e.g. pitting solidarity against conflict, and instead dealing explicitly with contradiction and paradox in social relations" (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998, p. 415). They suggest that a family is not likely to have either a harmonious or conflict pattern. They also address the effects of social changes on intergenerational relationships which make solidarity less often to be found. Hence, it is significant to adopt the concept of "ambivalence" to study intergenerational relationships in order to capture the whole picture of family life. In doing so, the following sections present the literature regarding all four features: childbearing and marriage, social support and living arrangements. The reviews try to present both positive and negative aspects, as well as the diverse values in each feature. The final section reviews the literature regarding strategies for managing ambivalence.

## **Beliefs and research on family formation**

### *Beliefs of family formation in Chinese societies*

Family norms regarding childbearing and marriage have changed. Traditionally, marriage has been heavily emphasized and there was a strong desire to have a male offspring.

#### *Importance of marriage*

According to the Book of Rites, the main purpose of marriage is to “continue the husband’s family line and to ally two lineages or ‘unite two surnames’” (Kung et al., 2004, p.34). Marriage is not just the issue between two individuals, but also involves two families (Kung et al., 2004). Much value is attached to marriage in the Chinese culture and its significance goes beyond the conjugal relationship (Kung et al., 2004). One of the main purposes of marriage is to fulfill the expectation of continuing the family line, especially by giving birth to sons.

#### *Son preference*

It is a conventional wisdom in demography that parents in traditional societies prefer sons to daughters (Brockmann, 2001). The desire for continuity of the lineage and the demand for social support in old age contribute to the strong son preference (Brockmann, 2001). Three main factors are found to influence the gender preference for offspring in Chinese societies: 1) patrilineality, which involves passing on the main productive assets, such as land, through the male lineages, and patrilocality of the family system, which refers to living in the man’s home so as to facilitate the

inheritance of property, especially land in agricultural society; 2) the practice of ancestor worship which is regarded as the responsibilities of sons, grandsons and great-grandsons; 3) old age support from sons who inherit their father's property and are responsible for taking care of their aged parents (Gupta, Zhenghua, Bohua, Zhenming, Chung and Bae, 2003).

### ***Research on family formation and intergenerational relationships***

Wu Chia Yu (2005) has conducted in-depth interviews to investigate the ambivalent experiences concerning the relationships between married adult children and their parents within three families in Taiwan. She found that older mothers show ambivalent feelings in the mate choice of children as they lack of control over children's marital decisions.

Another study conducted by Teo et al. (2003) focuses on the relationships between two generations of Singaporean women. They found that the two generations have divergent values about gender roles, preference for the gender of children, family maintenance, care of very young and of older people, and living arrangement. Older mothers are more likely to hold Confucian values, to regard participating in social reproductive tasks as their main role in society, to uphold a strong son preference and to have the desire for starting a family with the least delay. Grandparent generations are more likely to change their values than the parent generations. This shows that personal values are malleable to adapt in the changing social context. In addition, inter-generational ties and exchanges are dynamic and evolve according to circumstances.

### ***Research on family formation in Hong Kong***

To my knowledge, there are limited studies in Hong Kong on the expectations of older mothers regarding children's reproductive and marital behaviour. However, there is evidence which shows the changes of these family values and generational differences in the attitudes toward marriage and childbearing. The Hong Kong Family Planning Association (1999) conducted a research on 15 to 49 years old women in 1982, 1987, 1992 and 1997. It found that more women who are at prime reproductive age prefer to be childless. There has also been a decrease in the mean ideal number of children (from 2.4 in 1982 to 1.8 in 1997). This change was a response to the financial burden of raising children and the pressure to provide better education for them. It also found that women, who have secondary education, live in private housing and have been married less than two years, are more likely to prefer to be childless.

Apart from the ideal number of children, there has been a change in the preference for the gender of children. Gender preference has been one of the underlying reasons for more children. The Hong Kong Family Planning Association (1999) found that there has been a continued decrease of preference for more boys (a decrease from 25.6 % in 1977 to 12.8% in 1997). On the contrary, there was an increase of respondents who preferred girls to boys, an increase from 18.4 % in 1977 to 27.6 % in 1997.

The existing literature in Hong Kong suggests there are generational differences in attitudes towards childbearing and marriage. For example, Law (1994) notes that older parents aged 50 or above are more likely to regard continuing the

family line as an important thing (57.5%), whereas younger people aged 25 to 39 (34.7%) were “neutral” to this issue. Younger generations are more likely to adopt Western values, while older people are more likely to adopt traditional Chinese values which believe marriage and giving birth to a child are important. These generational differences may suggest conflicts of norms between generations.

## **Research on social support in later life**

### ***The nature of social support***

In the parent-adult children relationships, there is an exchange of social support between generations in the form of emotional support, instrumental activities inside and outside the home (e.g. transportation, meal preparation, shopping and housework), personal care (e.g. bathing, feeding and dressing), financial assistance, transfer of knowledge from older people to children and grandchildren and vice versa (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002; Rossi and Rossi, 1990).

### ***Significance of social support***

With regard to the psychological consequences of receiving social support, some studies show that social support brings happiness, improves life satisfaction and buffers the stressful events that help in achieving successful ageing (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002; McChesney and Bengston, 1988; Siu and Phillips, 2002).

### ***Ambivalence towards social support***

However, some studies find that social support has little effect on well-being (Umberson, 1992). Older people are found to have ambivalent feelings towards filial

support (Cohler and Grunebaum, 1981; Hamon and Blieszner, 1990; Spitze and Gallant, 2004; Willson et al., 1993). “Too much of a good thing” might generate negative psychological consequences. On one hand, older people enjoy the support provided by their children. On the other hand, they want to be independent to avoid the feeling of dependence, especially when there is a lack of reciprocity with their children (Hamon and Blieszner, 1990; Spitze and Gallant, 2004).

For example, Spitze and Gallant (2004) conducted four focus group studies involving people aged 65 and above, of different races and with chronic illness. Respondents generally resisted help from children in many ways and described how they took care of themselves, their own needs, their own health and their own housework. They had mixed feelings about the desire to be independent and the desire to have connection with their children. Hamon and Blieszner (1990) also share the same viewpoint that parents want to maintain their independence and typically do not expect much from their adult children. However, parents hope that children would be there for them when called upon to do so (Hamon and Blieszner, 1990).

Many empirical studies focus on the stress of caregivers. The provision of social support can be stressful, although caregivers may feel close to their older parents (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002; Lang, 2004). Lang (2004) found that caregivers experience more strains in the relationships with their parents when giving more than average, but receiving less support from other carers. This could have adverse effects on both parents and children. Although the quantity of intergenerational solidarity might be maintained, the quality associated with the feelings of accepting and providing assistance might be problematic in which “love declines and duty takes over” (Komter and Vollebergh, 2002; Wilson, 1993). Both parties might eventually

disengage themselves from these obligatory ties and let social services do the job instead (Komter and Vollebergh, 2002).

### ***Research on social support in Hong Kong***

As noted, Confucianism emphasizes filial responsibilities from adult children and regards them as primary caregivers (Lee, Lee, Yu, Sun and Liu, 1997). Social support can be in the form of daily care support (such as cleaning, washing, and cooking), financial support (such as giving cash, payment of daily expenses such as food, shopping and utility bills), emotional support and nursing support (Lee and Kwok, 2005). Elder sons are mainly expected to provide a sense of security and financial support to their ageing parents (Lee and Kwok, 2005). Daughters are supposed to “marry out” that belong to the husband’s family and are responsible for taking care of their parents-in-law rather than their biological parents (Lee et al., 1997). However, the situation has changed in modern Hong Kong society. The bonds between older parents and married daughters are still strong under the greater accessibility between each other. Daughters are also seen as important caregivers (Lee et al., 1997).

Some older people are found to have lower expectations of social support from their children in Hong Kong. They desire autonomy and prefer depending on the government for financial assistance, such as CSSA (Comprehensive Social Security Assistance), with the bonus of pocket money from children for the pursuit of leisure activities (Ng et al., 2002). However, older women, especially those are widowed, are more likely than elderly men to have greater expectations of emotional support, financial support, nursing support and daily care support from children (Chow, 1992;

Lee and Kwok, 2005; Lee et al., 1991; Ng et al., 2002).

However, the practice of filial piety appears to be different from the idealized form of filial piety though it still works in Hong Kong (Lee and Kwok, 2005). In Lee and Kwok's study (2005) with 390 older persons on the differences between filial expectations and practices of children, elderly women's wishes to have sufficient informal support from their children were not granted. They are more likely to receive inadequate nursing support and financial support with a lower amount (less than HK\$1000) from their primary carers. It shows that it is the willingness and ability of children as to whether or not to support their parents, rather than an obligation (Chow, 1992; Ng et al., 2002).

### **Research on living arrangements of older people**

Research on living arrangements of older people can be grouped into three broad categories: independent households (including persons living alone in the community); shared households with adult children, other relatives or non-relatives; and residential settings (Basavarajappa, 1998). Living arrangements of older people are the outcome of complex processes involving sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, psychological, economic and health-related attributes, ethnicity and cultural values (Basavarajappa, 1998). Kinshella and Phillips (2005) share the same view that living arrangements reflect the desire for and ability of many older people to live independently. The provision and adequacy of informal support under different living arrangements are different (Ng et al., 2002). Living alone was thought to indicate older people were being socially isolated or abandoned by their families (Kinshella and Phillips, 2005). It is because research often finds that older

people who live alone are more likely to enter a nursing home, live under the poverty line, have less exchange assistance, less regular contact, less emotional closeness with their children, weaker filial obligation of children and more concern about formal and informal care in case of illness or accidents (Kasper, 1988; Rossi and Rossi, 1990).

Indeed, living arrangements could be individual lifestyle choices. Recently, there has been a change in the perception of older people who live alone (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). Research in more developed countries consistently shows that multigenerational households have been declining. Older people often prefer to reside alone or with their spouse in their own homes and communities (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). It is probably because co-residential care violates the normative orientation of individualization (Lorenz-Meyer, 2004).

Sharing a common household with children might not be wholly beneficial. There are both positive and negative aspects for older people to live with their children. Positive aspects of co-residence that are identified in the literature include economic support (Kiyak and Hooyman, 2002; Siu and Phillips, 2002); supportive social interaction (e.g. division of household chores among family members (Lowenstein, 2002; Willson et al., 2003); education of grandchildren and value transmissions (Aquilino and Supple, 1991; Komter and Vollebergh, 2002; Lowenstein, 2002); emotional support (such as encouragement to older people who recover from illness, or to become active in social roles) and psychological well-being (such as happiness, self-esteem, life satisfaction) (Siu and Phillips, 2002); reinforcement of children's responsibilities (Izuhara, 2001) and connections between members by providing love and care (Wilson, 1993). These are all believed to be

beneficial for both individuals and families. However, co-residence can result in negative effects (Umberson, 1992). For example, family members may have a loss of personal space and privacy (Lowenstein, 2002). Strains and tensions can also be found, especially in co-residing children who assume caregiving responsibilities (Lowenstein, 2002).

Only a limited of research projects have studied both solidarity and conflict aspects in co-residence. For example, Lowenstein (2002) conducted a qualitative study of 30 respondents from 12 three-generational immigrants families to explore solidarity and conflicts in co-residence by adopting intergenerational solidarity framework. It shows that it is beneficial to live together in terms of sharing of household chores (reflects functional and normative solidarity), having economic support and housing (reflects functional solidarity), receiving emotional support (reflects affectual solidarity) and caring and educating of children (reflects normative solidarity). However, sharing the same household is more likely to increase stress and conflicts and may cause dissatisfaction (Lowenstein, 2002). Family members often encounter conflicts and misunderstandings in the management of money, the involvement in intimate relationships of other generations and allocation of space and privacy. This suggests the importance of having a well-planned division household space, knowing how to allocate general and private space, and making decisions about who gets which room in order to enhance satisfaction and reduce the possibility of conflicts.

### ***Beliefs in living arrangements among older people in Chinese societies***

Living arrangements are culturally different. Co-residence of older parents and

their adult children previously was a predominant preference, particularly in Asian countries (such as China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Thailand and Philippines) (Asis, Domingo, Knodel and Mehtal, 1995; Kinshella and Phillips, 2005; Ng et al., 2002). However, there is an increasing number of older people who live alone and a rapidly decreasing number of them who live with adult children (Kinshella and Phillips, 2005; Lee and Kwok, 2005). For example, Teo et al. (2003) found some older people no longer uphold the traditional family and prefer independent living. Although they value emotional support which comes from living together, they desire independence and live separately from their children.

### ***Research on living arrangements of older people in Hong Kong***

Having a multigenerational household has long been the most desirable living arrangements for the Chinese (Lee et al., 1997). However, there has been a trend to have smaller households since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Chi and Chow, 1997; Lee, 2004; Wong, 1974). This is caused by numerous factors such as changing working patterns, changing filial attitudes, limited space in most modern housing designed mainly for small families and the desire of older people to have an independent and private life (Chi and Chow, 1997; Chow, 1992; Lee, 2004; Lee and Kwok, 2005; Lee et al., 1997; Ng et al., 2002).

The increase in geographical proximity may affect the practice of social support (e.g. a lack of immediate availability of family support among family members) (Ng et al., 2002). Older people who live alone are more likely to be single, divorced or widowed, and have a lower education level, poorer self-rated health status, and higher level of financial strains. They are also more likely to have smaller

social networks, receive less instrumental and emotional support, have more depressive symptoms with a lower level of quality of life, and feel insecure in daily life (Chou and Chi, 2000; Lee, 2004; Lee and Kwok, 2005; Ng et al., 2002). On the contrary, older people, who share the same household with their adult children, are believed to have better financial support (cash as well as the payment of daily expenses such as food, shopping and utility bills) from children, a sense of security, social companionship and emotional support, such as help in washing, shopping, cleaning, and cooking and help in case of emergency or sickness (Chow, 1992; Lee and Kwok, 2005; Lee et al., 1997; Ng et al., 2002).

Instead, some researchers were optimistic about situations of older people who live alone. Kwok (2001), Lee (1987) and Wong (1979) argue that family support and co-residency with family are not identical. They suggest that the Hong Kong family today can be viewed as a “modified extended family” that can cope with the demands of support. Although the family is nuclear in form, there are still close ties with extended kin who may live nearby that maintain contact and receive support from each other (Kwok, 2001; Wong, 1974). The parents’ expectations of their children’s responsibilities, such as financial support of their parents in old age, tend to come true in both the views and conduct of their children. Most adult children, especially the elder children, agree it is their duty to give money to their parents even after they are married or if they live far away (Wong, 1974).

After considering the pros and cons of sharing a common household, it is intriguing to understand the preferred living arrangements of older people in Hong Kong. Some researchers found that most older people, especially older women prefer living with their children (Chou and Chi, 2000; Chow and Chi, 1990; Lee and Kwok,

2005; Lee et al., 1997; Ng et al., 2002). They tend to live alone if they have no other family members or if their family members are not willing to live with them (Chou and Chi, 2000). However, it has been noted that some Hong Kong older people, especially those who are in older age groups (Lee and Kwok, 2005), choose to live apart but in the same district with their children as the second best choice (Lee et al., 1997). They can maintain a sense of security and closer relationships with children (Lee and Kwok, 2005; Ng et al., 2002).

Have older people in Hong Kong achieved what they prefer? Inconsistent results have been found. Lee and Kwok (2005) recognize the discrepancies between expected and actual living arrangements. They found that about half of the respondents, more female than male, preferred living with their adult children. In reality, they were less likely to be living with their adult children (22.0%), but more likely to be living alone (25.2%) or institutionalized (33.2%) and tended to live further away from their primary carers. By contrast, a study done by Chow and Chi (1990) on 7041 older persons in 1989 found that well over half of the respondents preferred living with their adult children and their wishes had come true. A similar result was obtained by Lee et al. (1997) regarding 2203 older Chinese aged 65 and over. Among the older people who wished to live with their children (n=986), a vast majority (89.4%) actually co-resided with their children.

### **Strategies of handling ambivalence**

It is crucial to manage tensions, conflicts or ambivalence though it inherently exists in intergenerational relationships. Older adults who avoid using strategies might damage the relationships or cut off possible future help (Spitze and Gallant,

2004). Studies have found that older people, especially older women, tend to tolerate the tension with adult children. Older women are less likely to respond in a “destructive” way in which they would ignore the strains and accommodate the changes in their relationships (Fingerman, 2000; Kemp, 2004; Lüscher and Lettke, 2004; Smith and Goodnow, 1999; Spitze and Gallant, 2004). For example, Kemp (2004) found that grandparents were guided by the norm of non-interference when interacting with their grandchildren. While they showed interest in the lives of their grandchildren, they generally thought that they should not interfere directly and indirectly in the younger generation’s lives. By doing so, they could avoid contradictions in their relationships.

Spitze and Gallant (2004) have done a research on dependence/autonomy, which originated from both parent’s and children’s desires for support and nurturance along with their desires for differentiation and freedom from control. They conducted several focus group discussions with 85 people aged 65 and above and of different races. This study focused on the strategies that older adults used to handle ambivalence in the relations with their adult children. It found that respondents avoided help from children, ignored or resisted children’s attempts to control them, withheld information from children to maintain clear boundaries, sought others as confidants and rationalized children’s unavailability for help. Older people were found to avoid overt conflict as it was too threatening.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Theoretical framework**

In the previous chapter, major theoretical perspectives on the study of intergenerational relationships were reviewed. It was found that there are drawbacks for the dominant intergenerational solidarity and conflicts models in understanding diverse family life. The intergenerational solidarity model fails to recognize contradictions which are inherent in family life and intergenerational relationships. For the conflicts model, it fails to explain how family members cohere together despite having conflicts of interest.

In addition, transformations in family size, reproductive behaviour and marriage patterns are found. Traditional values have been affected by Western values and seem to be less strongly held by individuals. These facts have been justified in the literature reviews. Intergenerational differences towards family norms, and tensions and contradictions might be found when generations are getting along with each other. This supports the view of postmodern and feminist theories that family life is rather diverse and fluid. Moreover, social changes make the practice of filial responsibilities more difficult. Exchange of social support and the practice of filial piety might not be feasible to meet the expectations of older mothers. Solidarity, or concordance of expectations of filial responsibilities and reality, cannot be easily achieved. However, even if concordance of reality with expectations is found, there could be problems too. Findings of empirical research support the view that the provision of social support in forms of instrumental support, emotional support and sharing the same household could have both positive and negative effects in the

intergenerational relationships.

All of the above points suggest that intergenerational ambivalence, i.e. contradictions in the relationships between older parents and adult children, may occur. The present study applies the concept of intergenerational ambivalence to identifying the contradictions and tensions in family life. The strategies older mothers use to reconcile ambivalence are also examined.

### **A brief description of intergenerational ambivalence perspective**

The intergenerational ambivalence perspective provides an alternative to intergenerational solidarity and conflicts models which focus on either solidarity or conflicts as mentioned in Chapter Two. Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) argue that intergenerational relations are inherently structured so as to create ambivalence or contradictions in the relationships between parents and adult children (Spitze and Gallant, 2004). Ambivalence occurs at two levels: the level of social structure, evidenced by contradictions among statuses, roles and norms, and the subjective level, in the psychic processes of parents and their children (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998; Spitze and Gallant, 2004). Lüscher and Pillemer suggest that ambivalence is common in parent-adult child relationships. According to Lüscher (2002), “the structuring of intergenerational relationships among adults is likely to demand dealing with ambivalence” (p.589). Family relations provide a platform for negative feelings and increased longevity provides more opportunities for such feelings to develop (Fingerman and Hay, 2004). With the increasing dependence of ageing parents on adult children, it is probable to have contradictory experiences in their ties and they have to reorganize and restructure their relationships (Lang, 2004; Willson

et al., 2003).

It should be noted that the concept of ambivalence is different from conflict. Ambivalence refers to simultaneous feelings of two opposites. People are said to have ambivalent feelings if they are attracted to both sides. By contrast, conflict refers to interpersonal disputes (Lettke and Klein, 2004). No party is ambivalent as long as they are both firmly aligned with opposite sides of the dispute (Lettke and Klein, 2004). Moreover, ambivalence is different from confusion, cognitive dissonance or ambiguity. This is because confusion, cognitive dissonance and ambiguity only refer to an unclear condition rather than being torn between two alternatives (Lettke and Klein, 2004).

### ***Dimensions of intergenerational ambivalence***

The ambivalence perspective is not mutually exclusive to the solidarity perspective. Ambivalence can be found in affection, as well as in consensual and normative solidarity. This concept has a number of dimensions:

#### *Affective ambivalence*

Lettke and Klein (2004) suggest that affective ambivalence occurs when an individual holds both positive and negative feelings simultaneously towards an object (or a person, or a relationship between people). Dressel and Clark (1990) found that caregivers, particularly children and spouse, reported mixed emotions regarding provision of care such as warmth, tenderness and delight which co-existed with frustration, disappointment and anger.

### *Consensus ambivalence*

The extent of agreement with family members is ambivalent when they both agree on some aspects and disagree on other aspects (Lettke and Klein, 2004). Tension is aroused within family members because they have no idea of where they stand with one another (Lettke and Klein, 2004).

### *Normative ambivalence*

Normative commitments become ambivalent when there are multiple competing expectations for behaviour among generations that cannot all be entirely fulfilled (Lettke and Klein, 2004). For example, Pillemer and Sutor (2002) found that older mothers reported ambivalent feelings regarding their children's achievement of normative adult statuses. They experienced fewer ambivalent feelings regarding those children who married and finished college but showed more ambivalence toward their children who still received financial support from their mothers.

### ***Sources of ambivalence***

Lüscher and Pillemer (2004) point to three major sources of intergenerational ambivalence, which cannot be easily reconciled:

1. Ambivalence between dependence and autonomy
2. Ambivalence resulting from conflicting norms regarding intergenerational relationships
3. Ambivalence resulting from solidarity.

### 1. *Dependence versus Autonomy*

Ambivalence occurs when adult children and parents have the desires for help, support and nurturance and the contrasting desire for freedom from control in the parent-child relationships (Lüscher and Pillemer, 2004).

### 2. *Conflicting norms regarding intergenerational relationships*

Norms provide guidance on how individuals in social positions are obliged to think or behave (Pillemer and Suitor, 2002). Sometimes, there is a consensus about the content of norms and obedience to these norms is required (Pillemer and Suitor, 2002). However, conflicting norms are often found between generations, particularly in contemporary societies, and thus ambivalence occurs (Curran, 2002). For example, there is a contradiction of “the norms of reciprocity” versus “the norms of solidarity” in caregiving (George, 1986) and “the norms of amity” versus and “the norm of distrust” in daily interaction between generations (Farber, 1989).

#### Research supporting intergenerational ambivalence

In George’s (1986) study of disabled older persons, he found that caregivers become distressed when previously established exchanged relationships are disrupted. However, the caregivers cannot simply give up, as this would violate the norm of solidarity. For older people, they may feel guilt and helplessness about their inability to exchange with the caregivers, despite the fact that they expect support from their children based on the norm of solidarity.

In Teo et al.’s (2003) study on 21 family groups, they found that there are

contradictory values among the grandparent and parent generations towards gender roles, preference for the gender of children, family formation, care-giving and living arrangements. Younger women are found to embrace more Western values while their older mothers uphold Confucian values.

### 3. *Ambivalence resulting from solidarity*

It was found that families that demonstrate objective aspects of solidarity (e.g. co-residence or close proximity, mutual dependence for help, frequent interaction) are more likely to have feelings that are opposite, such as dissatisfaction about the relationships and struggles for independence and conflicts (Cohler and Grunebaum, 1981; Fowler, 1999; Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998; Thompson and Holmes, 1996).

### ***Strategies of handling ambivalence***

According to Lüscher (2002), “the structuring of intergenerational relationships among adults is likely to demand dealing with ambivalences” (p.589). Imbalance in power and resources (Connidis and McMullin, 2002) and the transition of status (Lüscher, 2002) may create ambivalence. Although this means that ambivalence cannot be permanently reconciled, individuals are expected to play active roles in trying to manage it at least temporarily (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). In other words, intergenerational relations are inherently structured so as to generate ambivalence. People have to use various strategies in their attempts to reconcile ambivalence.

Strategies that people used to manage ambivalence include avoidance or

ignoring, confrontation, rationalization and acceptance (Spitze and Gallant, 2004). The choice of strategies will be tied with their structural opportunities (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). For those people who have fewer options or resources, they may choose acceptance over confrontation to prevent their relations from becoming disrupted (Connidis and McMullin, 2002).

## **Theoretical framework**

### ***The source of expectations***

Norms entail widely accepted rules and specify how individuals in social positions are obligated to think or behave. Specifically, familial norms set standards for behaviour and establish obligations and expectations of family members (Mangen and Westbrook, 1988). These values and expectations are particularly important in determining the dynamics of the relationships between older people and their relatives (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). Sometimes, adherence to these family norms is required (Rossi and Rossi, 1990). For example, as for the role of children, they are expected to obey their parents and fulfill their parents' needs.

In the present study, focus has been placed on the set of intergenerational relationships that were initially formed by expectations influenced by Confucian principles. Filial piety, as mentioned in Chapter Two, comes first amongst all Confucian virtues and has been regarded as an ancient virtue of the Chinese strengthening the family fabric in agrarian society (Young and Willmott, 1962). It provides many guidelines about how generations relate to each other and sets expectations of how adult children should behave in order to fulfill their expected roles, statuses and behaviour.

*Marriage and childbearing*

Under the concept of filial piety, family continuity is an important issue in Chinese societies (Chow, 2001). According to the Book of Rites,

*the ceremony of marriage was intended to be a bond of love between two (families of different) surnames, with a view, in its retrospective character, to secure the services in the ancestral temple, and in its prospective character, to secure the continuance of the family line (Tsui, 1991, p.64).*

In this traditional view, marriage and childbearing have been seen as important in serving the ancestors and continuing the family line by reproduction. As mentioned in ancient Chinese philosophy, “not producing a male heir is considered the gravest of offenses against filial piety” (不孝有三, 無後爲大) (Tsui, 1991). This is because sons are desirable for carrying on the family line, for performing ancestor rituals in the household and at the family gravesite, and for supporting their old parents (Gupta et al., 2003). Hence, there has been a strong expectation towards marriage and childbearing, especially having son preference. The present study focuses on the expectations of older mothers that their children would marry and give birth to a child.

*Social support and living arrangements in old age*

Apart from marriage and childbearing, provisions of support in the form of care and materials are also important for demonstrating filial piety to parents. Children are expected to perform filial care to shoulder their parents' needs by means of material, physical, emotional and behavioural support. Sharing the same household to facilitate the provisions of care is also important. In particular,

patriarchal residence, which means married couples living with or near the husband's family, was desirable in traditional societies (Haralambos, Meald and Holborn, 2000). Hence, social support and living arrangements are also two of the main features of family continuity. The expectations of older mothers that their children would provide social support and live with them in their old age are focused on the present study.

Two dimensions of filial behaviour are noted: the actual behaviour of adult children and the older mother's expectations of intergenerational relationships. The conceptual model illustrates the expectations of older mothers regarding four main features: marriage, childbearing and social support and living arrangements of their adult children as shown in Figure 3.1.

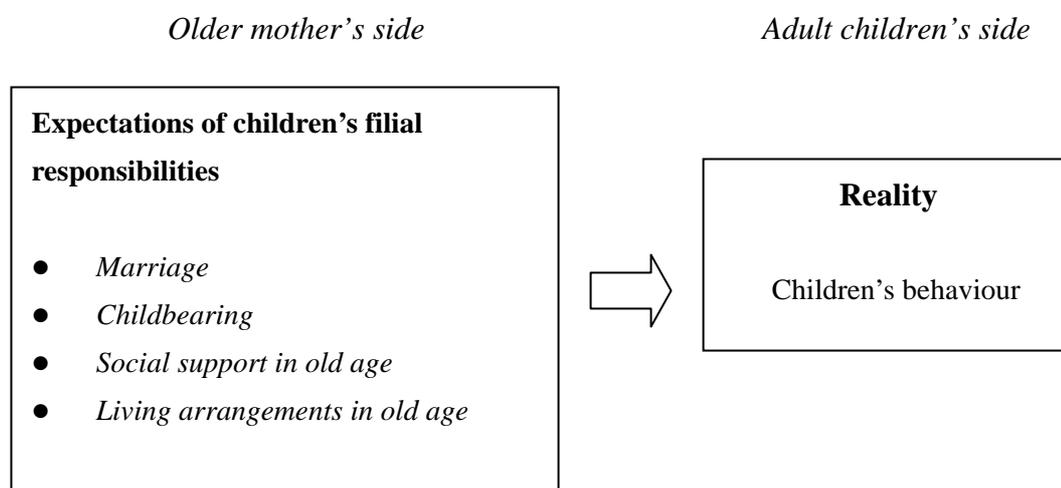


Figure 3.1 Conceptual model

### ***Mapping of expectations with reality***

According to the intergenerational ambivalence perspective, ambivalence

means the contradictions in relationships between parents and adult children that cannot be reconciled (Lüscher and Pillemer, 2002). Ambivalence is more likely to be found in three aspects, namely dependence/autonomy, conflicting norms and solidarity. The first aspect refers to the contradictions between the desire for autonomy and the desire for dependence. The second one refers to the competing norms and expectations among family members. Here, I refer to the first aspect of ambivalence concerning the contradictions between the norms of individualism and the norms of solidarity and then group it with the second aspect. Both of them refer to competing expectations and are also known as the discordance of adult children's actual behaviour with the expectations of older mothers.

In order to illustrate the above points, let us take the following example: an older mother holds strongly the norm of filial responsibilities (reference value) towards her adult children. She has a high expectation of getting social support from her children, to live with them, and for them to achieve adult status by forming a family or giving birth to a child as soon as possible. However, the perceived reality is that her children do not provide her with adequate social support, do not live with her and fail to achieve adult status. Thus, a discrepancy between reality and expectation may be perceived.

The third source of ambivalence is the buildup of contradictions and tensions which arises when families demonstrate objective aspects of solidarity (e.g. co-residence or close proximity, mutual dependence for help and frequent interaction). It is not hard to understand this scenario. According to the intergenerational ambivalence perspective, contradictions are structurally inherent in intergenerational relationships. Older mother and adult child are structurally different

in roles, status and expectations. When they live in a common household or have frequent interaction, tensions will surface. Hence, ambivalence can be found even when there are objective aspects of solidarity or a concordance of the adult children's actual behaviour with the expectations of older mothers.

The three major sources of ambivalence have been condensed into two, i.e. solidarity and conflicts. This means there are two scenarios, i.e. concordance or discordance between expectations and reality, which are more likely to generate ambivalence. The theoretical framework in the present study helps in generating different combinations of expectations and reality. The researcher investigated older mothers' expectations of adult children's filial responsibilities through the collection of data. The respondents' expectations and the actual behaviour of their adult children were mapped into different combinations of expectations and reality. This helps to analyse how ambivalent experiences would occur and how they are handled in concordance or discordance cases. This theoretical framework used the four major features: marriage, childbearing, social support from children and living arrangements to find the possible intergenerational ambivalence in parent and adult children relationships (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Mapping of expectations with reality

		Expectations of children's behaviour	
		Yes	No
Actual children behaviour	Fulfilled	Concordance	Discordance
	Not fulfilled	Discordance	Concordance

### ***Strategies for handling ambivalence***

Ambivalence is prevalence in the intergenerational relationships in later life. In the concordance case, tensions occur as the generations who are inherently different are brought together. The present study explores how older mothers deal with the tensions when getting along with children. In the discordance case, the strategies that older mothers use to deal with the “gap” between their expectations and the actual behaviour of children are explored. Ambivalence cannot be completely reconciled as it is inherently structured (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). Hence, it should be noted that “conflict and contradiction do not invariably lead to antagonism, nor the absence equate with parent-child solidarity” (Teo et al., 2004, p. 329). The family members can still cohere together by using several strategies to handle contradictions and conflicts in the parent-adult children relationships.

From the literature reviewed, the common strategies are avoidance or ignoring, confrontation, rationalization and acceptance (Spitze and Gallant, 2004). These strategies are used to resolve the contradictions and tensions among generations. Confrontation can be seen as an attempt that tries to change the side of children and to interfere with the lives of children. Rationalization and acceptance aim at having changes on the side of older mothers by adjusting their reference values in evaluating the discrepancies. For avoidance and ignoring, there seems to be no attempt to change either side but rather to stop the dynamics between generations or ignore the discrepancies.

**Research questions:**

The present study examines the changing nature of intergenerational relationship under social changes in a modern state (Hong Kong) and how ambivalence, if any, is managed. The main research questions derived from the literature are as follows:

1. How do older mothers view marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements of their adult children?
2. How do tensions and contradictions arise in the actual behaviour of children?
3. How do older mothers manage any contradictions with their adult children?

## **Chapter Four**

### **Research design**

This chapter presents how this research has approached the research problems and has sought answers to the research questions previously stated. Research design, including the choice of research method, conceptual definitions of variables, sampling, data collection process and method of analysis, is discussed. The central theme of this research is to explore the expectations of intergenerational relationships in four major features, i.e. marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements. These four features were selected because they are the important behaviour which show family continuity and are reinforced by Confucianism.

Family forms through marriage and childbearing. It is maintained by providing support to older parents or living close to them to facilitate the transfer of social support. This behaviour is known as filial responsibilities of the children. Under the traditional Chinese ideology, older mothers are often believed to depend on their children in old age. However, the traditional family norms have been weakened under various social changes. There are growing empirical evidences to show the intergenerational differences towards family norms and values as reviewed in the literature. It suggests that older mothers have expectations of intergenerational relationships that are different from the younger generation. According to the intergenerational ambivalence perspective, contradictions are inherently occurred in the intergenerational relationships in later life. Competing expectations among generations give rise to contradictions in their relationships. It may be less feasible

for adult children to perform these filial responsibilities. Discrepancies between the expectations of older mothers and the actual practice of their adult children are more likely to be found. Even when different generations get along with each other, tensions would surface and ambivalence would be found. In other words, whether there is concordance or discordance of reality with older mother's expectations, there may be ambivalence. Hence, individuals are expected to reconcile these contradictions at least temporarily. To substantiate the above points and to answer the three research questions, a research design which aims to explore older mothers' expectations of marriage, childbearing, social support from children and living arrangements, as well as map the expectations and reality into different scenarios and see how older mothers reconcile the tensions and contradiction has been designed.

### ***Conceptual definitions of variables***

#### ***Expectations***

These refer to the normative guidelines for members of the intergenerational relationships to act and behave, and to evaluate their own and other's behaviour (Kemp, 2004). In the present study, expectations refer to the views of older mothers on what roles or behaviour adult children are expected to play or how they behave in the four areas, namely marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements.

#### ***Reality***

This refers to the actual behaviour of adult children or the relationships with

adult children at the time of interview, for example, the marital status of adult children, the number and gender of children that each adult child has, the amount of social support from children and whether the older mothers and adult children are living together.

### *Strategies*

These refer to the attempts to manage the tensions and conflicts in the intergenerational relationships. Examples of strategies include accepting, ignoring, avoiding, rationalising and confronting the tensions and contradictions involved when getting along with adult children.

### *Intergenerational ambivalence*

This refers to the contradictions in the relationships between parents and adult children that cannot be reconciled (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). It includes structural and subjective levels. At the structural level, ambivalence may be found when there are competing demands or role expectations. At the subjective level, it involves the co-existence of positive and negative emotions. There are three major sources of ambivalence i.e. autonomy/dependency, competing normative expectations and solidarity (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998).

Intergenerational ambivalence in the present study is shown in two scenarios. First, it is caused by the competing normative expectations between older mothers and adult children, which refer to the discordance of actual behaviour of adult children with the expectations of older mothers (discordance of reality with

expectations). This may be caused by unfulfilled marital behaviour, reproductive behaviour, insufficient social support from children or unexpected living arrangements. Second, ambivalence results from solidarity, which refers to the concordance of reality with expectations. It may occur when having close proximity with adult children or when receiving social support from adult children (concordance of expectation and reality).

### *Solidarity*

This includes six dimensions, referring to associational (type and frequency of interactions and activities), structural (geographical distance among family members), functional (exchange of assistance and support), affectional (feeling of closeness), consensual (agreement between generations) and normative solidarity (extent of shared values between family members) (Bengston and Harootyan, 1994). In the present study, solidarity refers to frequent interaction, high level of assistance and support from children, the feeling of closeness or having shared values between older mothers and adult children.

### *Marriage*

This refers to the socially approved sexual relationship between two individuals. It includes the marital status of children.

### *Childbearing*

This refers to the decision to have children. The considerations on the number

and gender of children are explored.

### *Social support*

This refers to the emotional, instrumental and financial support provided by an adult child. Emotional support refers to the feeling of being cared for, emotional concerns and intimacy, for example, sharing of leisure time and chatting on phone calls. Instrumental support refers to the concrete, material help and assistance in daily life, such as helping in household chores etc. Financial support refers to any assistance in the form of cash, pocket money etc.

### *Living arrangements*

This refers to the composition of members living in the same household, such as persons who are living alone, living with a spouse or living with children.

### ***Research method***

In this research, in-depth, qualitative interviews were used instead of purely quantitative ones. Quantitative measures are “succinct, parsimonious and easily aggregated for analysis” and the data are systematic, standardized facts that can be easily presented in a relatively short space (Patton, 2001). They are useful for studying the causal relationships between variables, testing the hypothesis and describing the characteristics of a large population (Babbie, 2004). However, these standardized research designs can seldom deal with the context of social life and social actions (Babbie, 2004). Whilst quantitative measures can describe statistical

relationships and phenomena, they cannot always help us to understand the reasons for them.

Qualitative interviews, which differ from quantitative ones, are an interaction between the interviewer and the respondent (Babbie, 2004). They allow the researcher go more directly to the social phenomenon under study and observe it as completely as possible (Babbie, 2004). Moreover, qualitative interviews can help to illustrate a common belief that can provide a “deeper” understanding of the meanings, process or mechanisms of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data (Silverman, 2001). In the present research, family norms, expectations of older mothers and the relationships across generations are focused. The concepts of family norms and intergenerational relationships are rather abstract, complex and appear to defy simple quantification. In particular, the aim of this research is to achieve understanding and exploration of the concept of intergenerational ambivalence and the mechanisms of how older mothers manage ambivalent experiences, so this made a qualitative method of investigation appropriate.

#### *Target population*

The target population of the present study was women aged 65 and above who have at least one living child aged 18 years and above. In general, women live longer than men. In 2004, the life expectancies at birth of Hong Kong people were 84.6 for women and 78.6 for men (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). Since women tend to marry men older than themselves, they are more likely to lose their spouses and this exacerbates the proportion of elderly widows in old populations.

Women are also more economically vulnerable than men in Hong Kong as elsewhere generally. Under the gendered hierarchical social structure, the opportunity structures for men and women to access to education, enter the paid labour force, and retain rights of inheritance or property ownership are different (Lee, 2001). More women than men are therefore likely to experience financial insecurity and poverty. In 2004, the number of female Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients was in general more than that of male recipients in which females constitute 52.2% of the total recipients (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). Due to the higher longevity of women and their potential for a frail older age, greater attention should arguably be paid to the social and economic support for these older women. With the influence of Confucianism, which emphasizes filial piety in traditional Chinese societies, the major caregivers for women are their children (Ng et al., 2002). However, the traditional pattern of children supporting their aged parents is fast fading away as Hong Kong becomes more modernized (Lee and Law, 2004). It is of importance to understand the expectations of these older women regarding the behaviour of their adult children and how well their children meet their expectations.

The rationale for selecting older people aged 65 or above is that they have witnessed the great economic and social developments in Hong Kong. The current cohort of older persons (aged 65 or above) in Hong Kong who were born in 1940 or before have experienced events such as the Japanese occupation in Hong Kong from 25<sup>th</sup> December, 1941 to 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1945 (Endacott, 1973) and/or the Communist Revolution in Mainland China which happened in 1949 during their lifetime. Their experiences influence them to perceive the ideal of family life and to regard their relations with adult children differently compared with younger cohorts as their lives

have been shaped by quite different social and historical circumstances.

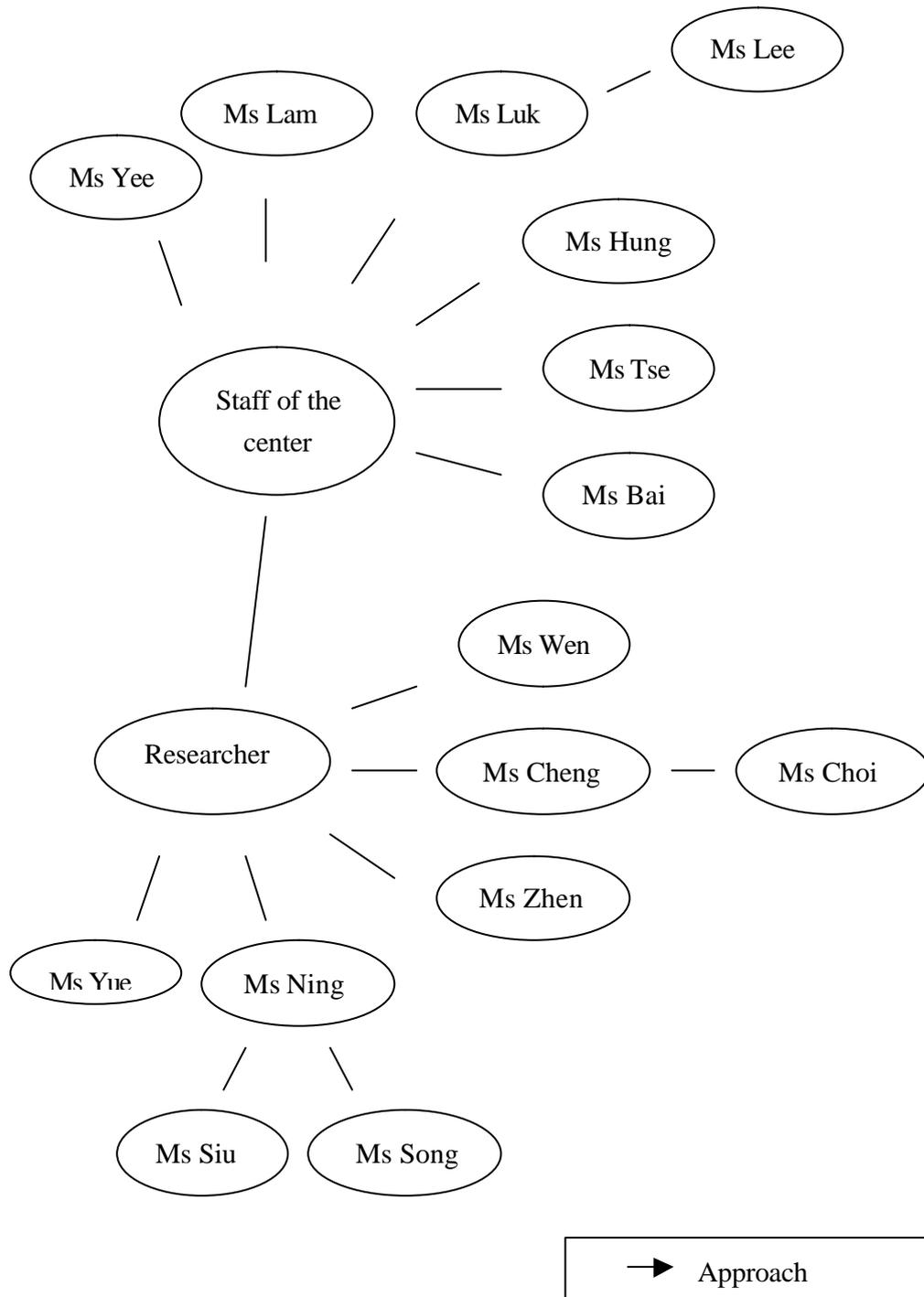
### *Sampling*

The sample was recruited from “The Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council” (NAAC), Fu Tai Center located in Tuen Mun, Hong Kong. The sampling method was purposive and a type of snowball was used. Snowball sampling, which is a kind of convenience sampling, allows the researcher to expand the base of respondents and locate respondents with certain characteristics necessary in a study (Berg, 2004). “Snowball” refers to the process of accumulation as each respondent suggests other respondents (Babbie, 2004). In the present study, some respondents were asked for the names of other women who had at least one living child. By asking some of the respondents and the staff of the center for referrals of additional older women, the sample eventually “snowballed” from a few respondents to 15 respondents. The network of respondents in the snowball sample is illustrated in Figure 4.1. Snowball sampling needs to recognize the known potential problems of friendship networks in which the subjects in the networks and subsequent sample might process similar characteristics. However, it is sometimes the best way to locate subjects in a study which is largely qualitative and exploratory in nature (Berg, 2004).

### *The fieldwork*

A preliminary study was carried out in pursuit of the most appropriate method for researching the older mothers’ experiences. A focus group interview was conducted as focus groups allow interaction between participants so that “diverse categorizations and sentiments emerge, showing how participants flesh out, alter, or

Figure 4.1 Network of participants in the in-depth interviews



reconstruct view points in response to challenges” (Haralambos et al., 2000, p.1005). Prior to the actual focus group, a procedural guide, which includes the introduction, guidelines for the interview, and short question-and-answer discussion topics, was established. Discussion topics were prepared based on the literature reviewed and the research aims. Probes were planned to be used for stimulating the discussion. A group of five older mothers was recruited from the Fu Tai Center to form a focus group discussion. The researcher acted as the facilitator and guided the discussion. The purpose of the discussion and how the information would be used were introduced. Participants were encouraged to answer the questions or express their opinions with no specific sequence. The facilitator asked for their permission to use a recorder. The focus group discussion began with general issues. First, participants were asked about their expectations of children in terms of career prospects, family formation and social support in their old age, gender differences in the expectations, and satisfaction levels with the actual children’s behaviour. Second, they were asked to discuss various social issues such as the works and programmes done by the Family Planning Association which aimed to find out their views towards childbearing. The facilitators also showed some newspaper cuttings regarding the discussion topics in order to arouse their discussions.

However, there were obstacles when conducting the focus group discussions. There were different levels of participation among the members. Some participants hesitated to express their experience freely and this is often in the case of private issues. For example, participants were asked about social support obtained from adult children. Some were reluctant to mention the exact amount of financial support obtained from their children in front of other participants. Sometimes a dominant participant was found in the discussion. When coming to some issues, for example

concerning the perceived differences in childrearing practices between the younger generation and their own experiences, they had vigorous reactions and even formed subgroups to discuss. Again, as is common in focus groups, there were only gossips among a few individuals and it was occasionally hard to manage the depth of discussion. Due to the time constraints of the discussion, an individual's family life with their adult children could hardly be explored extensively and thus limited the understanding of how they reacted to the contradictions in the intergenerational relationships. Although focus group discussions have broadened views on the research problem, this research method alone could not answer the research inquiries. After the evaluation of the most appropriate research method, in-depth interviews were adopted as they allow the researcher to probe interviewee's views and discuss confidential details. Nevertheless, the discussions from the focus group helped considerably in the development of the interview guidelines. Marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements were identified and confirmed to be the four major features of the expectations of children's behaviour. The focus group was therefore used in this research as an exploratory stage to help design the qualitative interviews.

#### *Data collection instruments*

Data collection instruments consisted of a basic demographic data sheet (Appendix III) (with English and Chinese versions) and an in-depth interview guide for the qualitative interviews (Appendix IV) (with English and Chinese versions). Items in the interview guide were developed by the researcher from the literatures reviewed, prior focus group discussion and the aims of the research. The interview guides cover four areas, namely, marriage, childbearing, social support and living

arrangements. Three key themes were addressed in each area:

- (a) Expectations of respondents
- (b) Actual behaviour of adult children
- (c) Strategies used to resolve tensions and contradictions

These themes in the interview guideline serve as a framework which helps in question design. With regards to the first theme, respondents were asked to express their expectations of and with their children. For example, they were asked whether they had expected their children would marry, give birth to a child, provide social support in their old age and live with them in their old age. The reasons underlying their considerations are also explored. For the second theme, respondents were asked the actual behaviour of and with their children at the time of interview. For example, the marital status of their adult children, the number and gender of children of each of their adult children have, the perceived adequacy of social support from adult children and the actual living arrangements whether they were living in the same household, in the same neighbourhood or far away from their children. With regard to the third theme, respondents were asked to illustrate the strategies used to manage the contradictions and tensions which arose with the actual behaviour of their children or in the interaction with their children. They were also asked to describe the rationale and the effectiveness of using any strategy mentioned.

Each theme of a particular area began with a broad, open-ended request for information and was followed with more specific, probing questions to understand the views, feelings and experience in the intergenerational relationships. No specific set of questions or a particular order are generally asked in qualitative research (Babbie, 2004, p.300). During the execution of this study, there were overlapping

areas between themes. Some issues put under different features (i.e. marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements) were found to have linkage to other themes. Hence, questions and issues were discussed back and forth during in-depth interviews. The semi-structured questions of the interview guide were preferred in allowing the flexibility for respondents to mention what they considered as important.

#### *Data collection procedures*

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 15 respondents. Some of the participants (i.e. Ms Ning, Ms Siu and Ms Song) in the focus group were also respondents in the in-depth interviews (all of the names of respondents in the present study are pseudonyms). First, the researcher spent time to warm up in order to establish an “informal” situation with the respondents. As one-to-one interviews were conducted, this ensures confidentiality that allows the interviewer to go further in-depth. All interviews took place in the senior center and were conducted in Cantonese, in a natural and unobtrusive manner. Each interview lasted between one and a half to two hours. All interviews were audio taped with the permission of respondents.

#### *Data analysis*

The recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were further translated into English for analysis. They were cross-checked against the Cantonese for consistency. The areas that the researcher was uncertain about were checked with a bilingual speaker. Examples of translation of terms from selected respondents are

illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Examples of translation of terms

English terms	Chinese terms commonly used by the respondents
Ambivalence	矛盾、為難、夾在中間、心裡有另一套
Expectation, expect, want, wish	期望、想、希望
Accept	接受
Ignore	唔理、扮唔知、當冇事
Avoid	容忍、忍讓
Confront	頂撞、話番佢

The analysis of data was begun by coding transcripts into different areas, “marriage”, “childbearing”, “social support” and “living arrangements”. Under each area, the transcripts were then coded by main themes, namely “expectations”, “reality” and “strategy”. For each main theme, the sub-themes and directional coding were inductively derived from the data. “Expectations” were categorized into simply “yes” or “no” depends on the pattern of data. “Reality” was categorized into “fulfilled” or “not fulfilled”, or “enough” or “not enough”. The themes “expectations” and “reality” were put together on two axes, which aimed to categorize the ambivalent experiences of concordance cases (ambivalence resulting from solidarity) or discordance cases (ambivalence resulting from conflicting norms). The analytical frameworks were constructed (Table 4.2 – 4.5) which were used for the analysis for each transcript.

Table 4.2 The area “marriage”

Expectations that adult children would marry

Actual marital behaviour		Yes	No
	Fulfilled		
	Not fulfilled		

Table 4.3 The area “childbearing”

Expectations that adult children would have children

Actual reproductive behaviour		Yes	No
	Fulfilled		
	Not fulfilled		

Table 4.4 The area “social support”

Expectations of adult children to provide social support in old age

Perceived adequacy of social support from children		Yes	No
	Enough		
	Not enough		

Table 4.5 The area “living arrangements”

Expectations that they would live with adult child

Actual residence		Yes	No
	Fulfilled		
	Not Fulfilled		

## Chapter Five

### Findings from the research

The data in the present study are derived from in-depth interviews with fifteen Chinese older women. The profile of the respondents is summarized in Appendix V. The fifteen respondents were born between 1916 and 1938 and ranged in age from 67 to 89 years, with a mean age of 73.4 years. Eleven of them were in the young-old group (aged 65-74) (Table 5.1). Regarding marital status, eleven respondents were widowed and the rest were married.

Table 5.1 Age and marital status of respondents

	Respondents (n)
Age	
65-69	3
70-74	8
75-79	2
≥ 80	2
Marital status	
Widowed	11
Married	4

Source: Author's survey

In terms of educational level, the sample was generally a lower educated one, and ten of the respondents had not received any schooling (Table 5.2). With regard to the main sources of income, ten of them mainly depended on the financial support from their children, while two respondents relied mainly on their savings. The remaining three respondents regarded the social assistance from the government, i.e. the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and the Old Age Allowance, as their

main source of income.

Table 5.2 Socio-economic status of respondents

	Respondents (n)
Highest educational attainment	
No schooling	10
Primary	3
Upper secondary	2
Tertiary	0
Main source of income cited	
CSSA / OAA	3
Children	10
Own Savings	2

Source: Author' s survey

In terms of living arrangements, six respondents lived without children while nine lived with their children, as shown in Table 5.3. Of the nine respondents who lived with their children at the time of interview, six lived with their sons, two lived with their daughters while one lived with a son and a daughter (Table 5.4).

Table 5.3 Living arrangements of respondents

Living arrangements	Respondents (n)
Living without child(ren)	
Living alone	4
Living with spouse only	2
Living with child(ren)	
And living with spouse	2
Living without spouse	7

Source: Author' s survey

Table 5.4 Living arrangements of respondents who lived with children

	Respondents (n)
Living with child(ren)	9
Living with son	6
Living with daughter	2
Living with son and daughter	1

Source: Author's survey

As noted in Chapter Three, the findings were used to help answer three research questions. They are specifically:

1. How do older mothers view marriage, childbearing and living arrangements of their adult children?
2. How do tension and contradictions arise with the actual behaviour of children?
3. How do older mothers manage any contradictions with their adult children?

This chapter discusses the expectations of respondents to the behaviour of their adult children and the strategies they used to manage the tensions and contradictions in their relationships. Four major features, namely marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements, are presented. The expectations of children's behaviour are first discussed in each feature. They are then mapped with the actual behaviour of adult children. In each case, strategies used to reconcile the contradictions in the relationships between respondents and their adult children are presented.

## **1. Respondents' expectations of marital behaviour of adult children and their strategies of handling ambivalence**

In this section, the feature focuses on marriage. It discusses the expected and actual marital behaviour of respondents' adult children and examines the strategies used for managing the tensions and contradictions with the actual behaviour of their children.

### **Respondents' expectations that adult children would marry**

All respondents expected their children would marry. There are two main reasons underlying their expectations and they are discussed below.

#### ***Marriage as a natural and expected event***

Most respondents found it was hard to answer why they expected their children would marry. They regarded getting married and then having children to be a "natural thing" in the life cycle with no questioning. As mentioned by Ms Bai,

All parents expect their children to behave well, to have a stable job, to have their own family when grown up and to have kids later on. It's just so normal.

Some assumed being a wife or a husband to achieve the normal adult status. "It's normal to consider marriage at certain point of the lifetime", as said by Ms Lee.

***Marriage brings emotional support***

Most respondents mentioned that people could get emotional attachment from marriage. The couples could share life with the one they love. For example, Ms Hung referred to the mutual support between the couples:

You will have a companion after getting married. It's good that you can help each other when in need and share the joy and sadness together. You can marry later as soon as you find the one you like the most.

Ms Wen shared the same view that the married couples could have companionship. She accepted a later marriage:

It's not necessary to get married too early. You can have it later. But if you do not marry, you will be very lonely when you are older.

Ms Zhen, who had an arranged marriage, hoped that her children could find one they loved and share the rest of their life together.

It's important for them to find the one they love. It's not that important comparatively whether they would be poor after getting married.

Respondents regarded marriage as an expected and natural event, which brings emotional support to their adult children. It is intriguing to examine whether their adult children had actualized their wishes. The following section maps the respondents' expectations with the actual behaviour of their children.

### Mapping of expectations and reality

All respondents were asked directly if they had expected their children to marry and their actual number of adult children who had married. The answers to these two questions characterized two clusters of women within the sample (Table 5.5). The first group of women (n=11) said they had expected their children would marry and all of their children were married. Another group of women (n=4) had expected their children to get married but with one or more adult children had not married at the time of interview. The strategies used to manage the contradictions between their expectations and their adult children's actual behaviour are discussed in the next section.

Table 5.5 Mapping of respondents' expectations and actual adult children's marital behaviour

		Expectations that adult children would marry (n)	
		Yes	No
Actual marital behaviour	Yes	Bai, Hung, Lee, Luk, Ning, Siu, Tse, Wen, Yee, Yue, Zhen (11)	(0)
	No	Cheng, Choi, Lam, Song (4)	(0)

### Strategies for handling ambivalence

Of those respondents whose all children were married, they showed the least tensions and contradictions in their relationships. Generally, they were satisfied with the marital behaviour of their children as they had fulfilled the expected status.

More ambivalent feelings towards marital behaviour of adult children were found in the four respondents who had at least one adult child who remained single at the time of the interview. So, how did these older women deal with the ambivalent feelings?

**“I try not to interfere with them”**

Generally, respondents found it was hard to impose their own expectations on their children. They said they had no power to control their children’s decisions. All of them had to accept the marital decision of their children eventually, although they had an unmet expectation. For example, Ms Song had a son who was forty-year-old and was an instructor of a university. She admitted that she expected her son would marry. However, she avoided intervening in the life of her son:

You can’t worry too much. Right? He has already grown up. He is 40 something now. I want him to get married. But I can’t say too much. I have urged him twice already. I will not say it again for the third time.

Similar to the case of Ms Song, Ms Lam also did not attempt to interfere in her children’s lives. Ms Lam had one daughter and one son who were forty-two-year-old and thirty-six-year-old respectively and remained single. Despite the discrepancies with what she expected, she tried not to impose her wish on her children and avoided triggering any upset or anger.

At the time when the respondents got married, marriage was considered an important issue since there had been strong cultural expectations to get married at their early ages. Many respondents, regardless of their educational levels and places of birth, replied that it was normal to marry at around the age of 20. Most of them

were married in their early adulthood, with a mean age of 20.2 years. People would intervene if they noticed abnormal marital behaviour. Singlehood would be stigmatized in the past. Women were afraid of being labelled as “old virgins”. It was not surprising for them to face relentless social pressure to get married (Bullough and Ruan, 1994). Ms. Wen, a 74-year-old respondent who was married at 28 years of age, described the pressure exerted by her relatives on her mother and her at the marriageable age:

Many of them [her relatives] asked my mum why she didn't let me get married. They called me “Old girl. Old girl” and hooked me up with some men. I understood their concern. But I was afraid my future husband and his family would give me a hard time. I wanted to choose carefully.

By contrast, the social and parental control on the marital decision of children is of less significance nowadays. Under social changes, there has been a shift of power relations between parents and children. The power structure has changed from a parent dominated one to a more lateral and equitable one (Fingerman and Hay, 2004). This imbalance in the power relationship between parents and children is believed to be inherent in the social structure and cannot be permanently reconciled (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). Older people are more likely to have no direct control over their children's decisions. Both Ms Song and Ms Lam adhered to the norm of non-interference that did not attempt to interfere with their children. It is intriguing to know what would happen if older mothers tried to intervene with their children's decisions.

There is a respondent who tried to exert her power on her daughter. Ms Cheng, expected her unmarried 40-year-old daughter would get married at a certain age. She

had intervened by introducing a man to her daughter. However, it was unsuccessful and she provided the following comments:

I have urged her to get married for ten years now. One time I asked her elder brother to introduce a man to her. They went to a Chinese restaurant. She couldn't wait to leave! Actually she does not want to get married. If she would like to get married, I'm sure she can find a husband. She has her own network in which she's possible to find one.

Due to the failure to exercise parental control, Ms Cheng eventually gave up and accepted the choice of her child. She cast herself into the passive role that could not interfere with the lives of the younger generation and said,

We, as older people, can't bother too much about the young people. It seems good to arrange her a marriage. What if it turns out to be bad? It causes a lot of trouble and she will even blame me.

As suggested by Kemp (2004) that there is a wide cultural emphasis on personal freedom and independence, older generations will be unable to alter the opinions and attitudes of their children. Although the marital behaviour of their children contradicted with the respondents' expectations, respondents felt obligated to respect the choices of their children. Hence, they just had to ignore the discrepancies between their own desires and the actual behaviour of their children. It was out of their abilities to control their children.

### **“Marriage does not necessarily bring happiness”**

Another strategy that respondents used to manage the discrepancies between

their expectations and the actual behaviour of their children was rationalization. Respondents, in the discordance case, tried to rationalize to themselves that marriage might not be the best choice for their children. For instance, Ms Cheng, whose daughter remained single at the time of the interview, said:

My daughter says it's easy to find people who get married, but it then results in divorce after a certain period of time. She says people cannot make ends meet even after they are married. Yes, I agree with her. I haven't urged her to get married now.

Ms Cheng demonstrated rationalization by focusing on how worse marital life could be. By doing so, she could convince herself that the contradictions in the expectations of her daughter and herself were understandable. In a similar vein, Ms Choi, who had an unmarried daughter, tried to convince herself that remaining single was an alternative for her daughter. She replied that her marriage life did not provide her a sense of financial security:

You can say my marriage is a pity. It was better when I was still a girl as I didn't need to worry whether we had enough to eat.

Lee (1995) notes that there is a widely shared sense of skepticism about marital happiness. Older mothers who had unmet expectations tried to rationalise themselves that "it is better to have no marriage than a bad marriage".

### **"They have abilities to support themselves"**

For the women in the past, marriage was an important means for survival. For example, Ms Yee commented that she obtained economic security from her marriage:

I was in the village. My parents passed away when I was young. It was better for me to get married young. My grandpa couldn't support me for the rest of my life. It was better for me to have my own family... I met him [her husband] and after five days we got married... I liked him because he would go to Hong Kong... he could make much money.

Nowadays, women have more opportunities for higher education and careers. They can have alternatives such as worker roles, even if they do not adopt the role of wives. According to the theory of individualization (Beck, 2002; Giddens, 1994; Kemp, 2004), the traditional family relationships and value systems that once defined individuals' lives have lost much of their traditional meanings and determinism. The traditional meanings of marriage as a mean for survival have eroded. People nowadays can be economically successful even if they remain single. Respondents were found to accept singlehood and the worker role as an alternative to the role of wife or husband. For instance, Ms Choi had to accept the fact that her daughter had the autonomy to choose the role she desired. Traditional roles for women as caregivers are no longer important. It was out of Ms Choi's control because her daughter had the ability to have an independent life:

She is neither too young nor too old. She is 30-year-old. I can do nothing about it. She is educated and can earn a living. It's not possible for me to force her. She can choose what she wants to do. I can just take it easy.

Not only limited to those respondents who had unmet expectations, other respondents also had to accept the changes of women's roles brought from social changes. As Ms Yue said, 'Now, women can do what they want. The trend has been changed. It's not a must for them to get married'. Ms Zhen, an 89-year-old respondent who had an arranged marriage, said:

I take it easy. If they want to [remain single], I cannot control them. It's important that they can earn a living. It's not necessary to depend on others... I have no comment on whether they should get married.

With the increase of educational and career opportunities for individuals, life opportunities other than marriage are available. The social stigma of singlehood has weakened and the economic significance of marriage has diminished. With limited abilities to change the fact, respondents who had unmet expectations had to accept the new norms and values of marriage, and the discrepancies between their wishes and reality.

## **2. Respondents' expectations of reproductive behaviour of adult children and their strategies of handling ambivalence**

Given that the younger generation has more autonomy over fertility decisions, it is intriguing to explore the expectations of older mothers on their adult children's reproductive behaviour. This section focuses on the expectations of respondents that their adult children would give birth to children and the strategies used to reconcile the tensions and contradictions in the relations of their children.

### **Expectations that adult children would give birth to children**

Of the older mothers in this sample, eleven had their first child within two years of marriage. This suggests that childbearing was the foremost consideration after their marriage. When they were asked whether they had expected their children would give birth to children, all of them agreed that they had such expectations.

#### ***Children bring happiness***

Many respondents found it was fun to have children and regarded parenting as a source of achievement. They showed the joy and happiness of having grandchildren. For example,

My son said it's hard to educate the baby girl. She often cries (laugh). I told him children were like that. (Ms Choi)

My grandchildren called me every week and said, "Mama, shall we go to the Chinese restaurant tomorrow?" She is so lovely. (Ms Yue)

I have a new-born granddaughter. I showed her photo to the friends in the senior center. All of them said she was beautiful, haha. (Ms Siu)

### *Children as companions in old age*

Some respondents regarded children as companions in old age particularly important in the past days. Ms Siu said:

It is not good to have no child. Having one or two children would be better. It was different in the village that people expected to have many kids... People were afraid nobody would take care of them when they were old, haha. Now we have many senior centers There was no such thing in the village.

Until now, some respondents replied it was important to have children so as to prevent parents from feeling lonely in old age.

It's worth it to have children. People will get old one day. If you do not have any child, you will have nobody else [to accompany you in older age]. (Ms Song)

Once you get married, it would be better if you could have one or two children. If not, what would you be in your older age? You will be alone! (Ms Luk)

Ms Tse, who adopted two children after being married for seven years, had the following comments on having children:

Even if you are rich, it would be better to have one or two child(ren). Sons might not want to live with the old parents once they had their families. But it's better to have children as you still have people on your side.

In order to know more details about their expectations on reproductive behaviour, they were asked about the ideal number of children and their preference for the gender of children.

### *Ideal number of children*

None of them preferred childlessness nor expressed a desire to having more than four children, while most respondents (n=11) preferred two children regardless of educational level (Table 5.6). The norm of having “two children per family” was widely accepted by the respondents while having one child only tended to be avoided. Similar to the studies of the Hong Kong Family Planning Association from 1982 to 1997, there has been a trend of women, aged 15-49, who stated the ideal parity was two. When compared with the respondents’ own reproductive experience, few of them had less than two children. Except for one respondent who failed to conceive and had adopted two children, the remaining fourteen respondents had produced 66 children, or an average of just over 4.7 children per woman.

Table 5.6 Ideal number of children

Educational level	Ideal number of children					
	0	1	2	3	4	No preference
Educated	0	0	3	1	1	1
Not educated	0	0	8	0	1	0
Total	0	0	11	1	2	1

Source: Author’s survey

### *Gender preference for children*

Most respondents discussed their preference for the gender composition of their

adult children fairly without referencing to ‘traditional values’ (sons’ preference), while some preferred a mix of boys and girls (Table 5.7).

Table 5.7 Preferred combinations of children

Educational level	Preferred combinations of children				
	Equal number of son(s) and daughter(s)		More son(s)	More daughter(s)	No preference
	One son and one daughter	Two sons and two daughters			
Educated	1	1	0	0	3
Not educated	4	1	0	0	5
Total	5	2	0	0	8

Source: Author’s survey

However, some respondents assumed there was a special relationship with a son in older age during the in-depth interviews. As Ms Zhen said,

My daughter-in-law gave birth to a daughter. I asked them to try to have one more. If it’s a girl, then that’s okay. Daughters will marry out. You can have a family if you have a son in old age.

Some respondents mentioned that sons were assigned special responsibilities that could not be substituted by daughters, for example, older people’s own funeral matters.

In my old mind, it would be ideal to have two sons and two daughters... They can have companionship... Once the old person passed away, the brothers could discuss the funeral ceremony together. If there is only one son, he has nobody to take over it. Women have no say in it. In the village, once the daughters get married, they belong to the husband’s family side rather than the family of the origin. (Ms Siu)

### Mapping of expectations and reality

Unmarried children were excluded in this theme as it would be less likely to actualize the older mothers' expectations on children's reproductive behaviour. All of them were asked whether they had expected their children would give birth to a child. This generated two clusters of respondents (Table 5.8). All adult children of the respondents in the first group (n=11) had children, while the other group (n=4) had married adult children that remained childless. While mapping the ideal combinations of children of each adult child with the actual combinations, strictly speaking, only three cases, Ms Tse, Ms Yee and Ms Yue who had few children themselves, had a "perfect" match. With the discrepancies between what they expected and the actual reproductive behaviour of adult children, what would the older mothers do? Had they asked their children to have one more child?

Table 5.8 Mapping of respondents' expectations and actual adult children's reproductive behaviour

		Expectations that adult children would have children	
		Yes	No
Actual reproductive behaviour	Fulfilled	Bai, Hung, Ning, Lee, Luk, Song, Siu, Tse, Yee, Yue, Zhen (11)	(0)
	Not fulfilled	Cheng, Choi, Lam, Wen (4)	(0)

## **Strategies of handling ambivalence**

### **“I try not to interfere with them”**

For childbearing, most respondents showed limited parental influence on the fertility choices of their adult children. Respondents had to adopt the modern family norms. As Ms Lam illustrated,

People in the past were different. My daughter got married and does not want any child. I can do nothing. That's fine. You decide it. You make the decision and I can't interfere too much. (Ms Lam)

Respondents are found to reconstruct the traditional value and accept the decision of their children, as they could not interfere with the decision of their children. Ms Siu regarded herself as having “traditional thought” and could not impose her wish on her children:

The old folks say it's good to have two boys and two girls... I have changed my mind. Even having two girls is still desirable. Those younger people earn money and they raised their children by themselves. I don't care anymore. (Ms Siu)

Some respondents had actively persuaded their adult children to have children. However, many of them fail to impose their traditional mind their on children. Ms Wen's married daughter, aged 34, remained childless. But Ms Wen failed in interfering with the fertility decision of her daughter. She replied:

Sure I hope they would have a child. I did urge her about it. But she says she is busy... every Chinese New Year, I wish them Kung Hei Fat Choi and have children soon... my eldest son said it would be better to wish them healthy. (Ms Wen)

Older mothers were found to avoid possible tensions and contradictions with their children over the decisions of children. Although respondents hold different expectations of childbearing, they tried not to interfere too much in order to avoid placing their interpersonal relationships under strain. Some even reconciled their own desires and accepted the decision of their children. For example, Ms Cheng distracted herself by developing other interests without bothering the fertility decision of her children and minimized the ambivalent feelings:

It's okay even if people do not have any children. I heard from my youngest son that he doesn't want to have any child. I have no opinion on it. It's their decision, I just don't bother... I go to the senior center to find my happy time there and enjoy my happy later life. I'm already seventy years old. Why do I still need to care about so many things?

### **“The economic cost to raise children is high”**

The economic cost of parenting was the highest concern of the respondents. Ms Song related her experience and how she has changed her expectations towards childbearing:

One child is okay for me now. The world is not good now. I believe your parents have suffered a lot to raise you up. If you have too many children, you need to suffer a lot too. You just can't provide the best to your children at the same time.  
(Ms Song)

Traditionally, Chinese women were assumed to take the inferior role of taking care of the family (Nan zhu wai nu zhu wai, 男主外女主内) and to teach their children (Xiang fu jiao zi, 相夫教子) with limited assistance from other family

members. Most respondents went to work outside the family until their children had grown up. It was not surprising for them to regard parenthood as demanding. As Ms Bai recalled her parenting experience:

It was harsh to raise the kids. Much time was spent on breastfeeding and taking care of children. And I also needed to work on factory stuff at home. It was a tough task. (Ms Bai)

Both Ms Chen and Ms Tse said daughters-in-law were more fortunate in present days:

All housework was done by myself. It's different from the daughters-in-law nowadays. I had to supervise the kids and couldn't cook at the same time. In the old days, we had to cook and wash the clothes manually. Do you think we have kerosene as today? We needed to burn wood to get the power supply. We, the older cohort, experienced it. It's exhausting and I was used to it. I would be fine the following day after sleeping and would do the same things again. (Ms Chen)

We [she and her husband] had to work. I had to cook after work... we had no assistant to help. We were not so fortunate compared with women nowadays. Those daughters-in-law even do not cook now. The world has changed. (Ms Tse)

According to Umberson and Gove (1989), there were psychological costs of parenthood including "economic strain, time and energy demands, role overload and conflict and limitations of personal and social choices and opportunities for parents". Some respondents referred to the restricted freedom and increasing financial burden of raising children in present days:

In the past, you had nothing to worry about concerning the children... but it's different now. Children are becoming more important. They can eat what they want. There was no such thing in the past. (Ms Lam)

It's not good to have too many children. If you have fewer children, the burden would be less and you could have more freedom... It's up to your financial status and the economic condition of the society... My grandson had a daughter in 1998 during the economic downturn. In 2001, he asked me whether it would be good to have one more child. I let them decide it. Under the poor economic environment, I don't want them to argue over the financial issue of childrearing. (Ms Lee)

It is different from the past. It's hard for people to have so many children. They would lose their freedom and it's costly to get the nappies and milk powder. It would be better if the baby is healthy. Otherwise, there will be an imbalance of income and expenditures in the family. (Ms Choi)

Respondents rationalized themselves that it was reasonable for their children not to have too many children because of the high economic cost of raising children.

### **“Girls are also good”**

During the reproductive stage of respondents' life courses, bearing sons to continue the family line was an important consideration and had strongly influenced their reproductive choices. However, the older mothers seemed to have selectively reconstructed the tradition (Teo et al., 2003) and regarded girls as important as boys. When respondents were asked about their gender preference on children, most of them showed no gender preference of their grandchildren. Some respondents regarded daughters as still being “filial” and concerned about their mothers even after getting married. Ms Ning and Ms Choi explained,

There is no difference between boy and girl as they both can earn money. Mothers can get from them. It's not necessary to have a boy. Sons may not support you in your older age. Daughters may support you. (Ms Choi)

Girls are good as they have their parents in their hearts, especially when parents are ill. For sons, they might only provide financial support. That's it. Daughters do more than that. (Ms Ning)

This showed daughters become “better” when they fulfilled the functions previously expected from sons. By contrast, sons became less “filial” as they were more likely on the side of their wives. When Ms Zhen and Ms Siu were asked if they preferred boys or girls, they replied:

I like both boy and girl. Girls are also good. Even after getting married, they still treat their mothers well. I do not need to care whether my son-in-law is good. It's more important that he treats my daughter well. A son has his mum and his own wife. It's hard to decide who he will feel closer to... Sure he will be on the side of his wife. How would he obey his mother? (Ms Zhen)

Girls are good. My daughter is better than my daughter-in-law. My daughter-in-law may not care about me. My son is good but his wife may not be good. Girls have their mother's interest at heart. They would call me once every one to two days. My daughter-in-law doesn't do this, ha-ha. Boys are good but their wives are not. So girls are also good. (Ms Siu)

It is interesting that girls were regarded as the “losing money commodity” (蝕本貨). Some respondents viewed daughters as being “owned” by their husbands' family after getting married, in contrast to sons who remained part of their birth family. After getting married, daughters were regarded as a loss rather than a gain to the family. Commenting on the gender preference of children, Ms Tse offered the following:

Chinese favour boys. You can't say this is about tradition. Girls tend to forget their parents after being married out. It's up to them whether their husbands will satisfy them with the visiting of their family-in-origin. Sons-in-law and daughters-in-law

are outsiders... having sons are better.

Ms Tse preferred to have one boy and one girl to achieve a balance. She continued:

It's better to have a boy as the first child... have one more child, the combination of one boy and one girl is the best. You can have "in" and "out". You gain another's son and you lose your own daughter. There's no loss.

However, most respondents no longer seemed to uphold this gender preference over children. This is because their expectations on their sons have been fulfilled by their daughters and this made them change their mind.

### **3. Respondents' expectations of social support from adult children and their strategies of handling ambivalence**

As noted earlier, few respondents hold the views that children could bring security in older age. Along this theme, the research aims to examine whether respondents had ever expected their children to look after them when they grew old and how well their children fulfilled their expectation. The strategies they used to manage the discrepancies are also examined.

#### **Expectations of social support from adult children**

Respondents shared the expectations of “giving back” from children. They viewed giving back as one of their children’s responsibilities. Most of them referred to their own children as the main source of income to support their daily lives.

#### **“I’ve suffered a lot to raise them up”**

Generally, respondents mentioned the hardship of their parenthood. Respondents had contributed love, care and nurture when raising their children. Some agreed it was the responsibility of children to support their older parents no matter whether the children liked it or not. When Ms Tse was asked whether she had expected her children would take care of her in old age, she answered:

I am sure everyone thinks about it too. Otherwise, why would I have to adopt the children? We [she and her husband] both worked and earned money. Even though we didn’t have much money, we still raised them. We hope somebody would take care of us so that we have the sense of security in older age.

Similarly, Ms Yee recalled her parenthood and said:

When he [her son] was sick, I took him to see the doctor which was far away. I had gone through a lot of hardship to raise him up. No matter how tired I was after working on the farm, I managed to take care of him. Certainly he ought to take care of me too.

### **“I have no income”**

Respondents were asked about their primary source of income. A majority of them (n=10) received financial support primarily from their children, as shown in Table 5.9. They tended to depend on their children for financial support.

Table 5.9 Respondents' main source of income

Main source of income	n
Children	10
CSSA	2
OAA	1
Own savings	2
Total	15

Source: Author' s survey

Most respondents agreed they lacked of ability to support their daily lives without the assistance from children. For example, Ms Siu and Ms Wen described how they could not live without the support from their children:

I have no income. I have to depend on my son to make sure I have enough food and a place to live. (Ms Siu)

I partly agree with this [sense of security from children in older age]. I really have no ability to earn a living if my children don't provide me any support... you can say the

government can help you. You can have the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance or something like that. Frankly speaking, I do not really want to get this.  
(Ms Wen)

Since respondents generally did not have any plans for retirement, especially those who grew up in the villages, many of them reported stronger expectations of old age support from children. As Ms Yee and Ms Hung said,

I was born in the village. I have no money. My husband worked and only got RMB\$500 per month... I hope I can seek support from him [her son] at an older age. (Ms Yee)

In the village, we must have children. If we don't, who will support you when you are old? I had to depend on my children. (Ms Hung)

According to the traditional Chinese custom, it is common for parents to depend on their children to meet economic needs in later life (Chou, Chi and Chow, 2004). These respondents, who are the current cohort of older people in Hong Kong, mainly come from an agrarian social and economic background and are the first generation to grow old in Hong Kong (Chou et al., 2004). It is not surprising to find most respondents were unprepared for their later life because most of them came from villages.

### **Mapping of expectations with reality**

Respondents were asked directly whether they had expected their children would support them in their old age and the perceived adequacy of the support. The

answer to these two questions generated two clusters of respondents (Table 5.10). The first group (n=9) had concordance of reality with expectations and another group (n=6) had unmet expectations.

Table 5.10 Mapping of respondents' expectations and perceived adequacy of social support from children

Expectations of adult children to provide social support in old age (n)

		Yes	No
Perceived adequacy of social support from children	Enough	Bai, Cheng, Lee, Luk, Ning, Siu, Song, Wen, Zhen, (9)	(0)
	Not enough	Choi, Hung, Lam, Tse, Yue, Yee (6)	(0)

The social support from adult children mentioned can be categorized as emotional support, financial support and instrumental support. Ten of them had financial support from their children. In terms of instrumental support, they mentioned helping in house chores such as “installing an emergency alarm for them”, “taking out the garbage” and “collecting the clothes”. In terms of emotional support, the frequently mentioned items were “chatting on phone”, gatherings such as “going to the Chinese restaurant” and encouragement to have more social interaction.

## **Strategies of handling ambivalence**

Both groups of respondents showed ambivalent feelings towards the social support provided by their adult children. So, how did older mothers in the present study deal with the ambivalent feelings?

### *Concordance case*

#### **“I don’t need much help”**

According to the intergenerational ambivalence perspective, ambivalence is found when there is objective aspect of solidarity. In these concordance cases, respondents who received adequate social support from children tried to minimize the help from their children. Especially for those had higher education level, they tended to set a low level of expectations on their children:

We, as parents, do not expect much from children, not to mention some kind of financial support. I’m satisfied if my husband and I have enough food, clothes and can go to elderly center to have fun. (Ms Ning)

Having children for security in old age is lacking. There’s no such thing [obligations] anymore. We do need to be independent. It’s enough if children remember to contact their parents even they are busy. (Ms Song)

Older people want their children to be good, have a job with a good career prospect. I would be satisfied if they have a happy life. I don’t expect much from them. It’s not fair to say they give nothing to me, but it’s hard to say they give too much... I’m satisfied if I have two meals per day and have a shelter. (Ms Bai)

Be natural. It’s like the “water droplets drip down from the canopy of the

building” [being a role model, 簷前滴水]. If you treat old people well, your children will follow and do the same too... I have some expectations from children. Sometimes I think I give them so much which will be reciprocal. I do not expect too much, but just do the best for them. (Ms Cheng)

It's impossible for them to pay back all the things we gave them. How can we strike a balance? If they can't provide me enough care and support, I just can't blame them. (Ms Lee)

Most respondents upheld the belief that older people have to be independent. By trying not to demand much support from their children, this could keep a small gap between the reality and expectations. For instance, Ms Song who lived in a privately owned flat with her husband was satisfied with what her children provided her and she made some suggestions to make older parents happy without depending on adult children. In the following quote, she suggested that older people had to actively seek other sources to fulfill the social support originally expected from their children:

Now, many young people migrate to other countries or live apart. Older people need to be independent and take care of themselves. First, you need to protect yourself from any injuries; second, be careful of your eating habits; third, it's important to make yourself happy. There are a lot of entertainments. Some are free of charge. You can run in the park, enjoy a free movie. You can have a lot of chances to make yourself happy and forget the worry about your children.

### **“I reject too much help from them”**

Even if there is concordance of reality with expectations, mixed feelings were found. Some respondents felt the “love stress” of their children and tried to keep a distance from their children. For example, both Ms Zhen and Ms Siu tried to avoid

too much social support from their children, although they received sufficient social support from their children:

The son who lives with me gives me \$1000 each month. It's okay. My youngest son gave me \$200 per month. And then I have \$700 Old Age Allowance per month. My sons are good as they often call me and check if I get enough food and if I'm in good health.

However, she felt uncomfortable about her dependence and sometimes rejected the unsolicited help from her children:

My daughter gave me money during Chinese festivals but I rejected her offer. She has her own family and has to spend a lot... I have nothing to do but to depend on children... I am too old. I'm 89 years old. Sometimes I wonder why I'm still here.  
(Ms Zhen)

Ms Siu also expressed a mixed feeling about her children's "overprotection" which made her felt like a frail old person. Although she appreciated the concern and attention from her children and showed pride with the filial behaviour of her children, she felt uncomfortable with the interference from them:

The weather was cold before. My son who lives in Leung King asked me to wear more clothes and so on... My daughter also called me and said it would be getting cold the next day. She asked me to bring more clothes when I went out... I don't need them to teach me such a thing. I don't have dementia. Rather, I am quite smart!

Apart from rejecting the social support from her doting children, Ms Siu tried to lie to them in order to prevent losing the support from her children:

I said it's okay and ignored them. I wanted them to know they were quite annoying. But I didn't. I was afraid they wouldn't call me again. It's really no need for them to

teach me when to wear more clothes. (Ms Siu)

In these concordance cases, respondents enjoyed the social support from their children. However, at the same time, they tried to maintain as independent as possible in order to prevent the guilt feelings and over-dependence on their children.

### *Discordance case*

#### **“They had economic hardships”**

Most respondents accepted the discrepancies between the expected and actual filial behaviour of their children in this modern society, especially when the economic environment was not desirable. They illustrated the economic difficulties that their children faced:

Everybody wants having children to give you a sense of security in old age. But it is not evident in this society. They even can barely survive in the society. I am satisfied if they are concerned about me. That's enough. (Ms Zhen)

My son is a construction worker. He does not make much money. I will be happy to accept his money. I don't expect too much. (Ms Lam).

My daughter lives in Tai Wo. We are far apart. She seldom comes here [Tuen Mun]. Sometimes we chat on phone... She has to prepare the meals for her family... she has to take care of her family... how will she be free to come here? (Ms Tse)

My daughter's company has cut her job recently... she is unemployed and hasn't found a new job... I don't expect much help from her... I can't expect too much. (Ms Choi)

They rationalized their children's neglect of responsibilities by focusing on how

busy their children were and how difficult it was for their children to achieve the filial responsibilities under the unfavourable economic environment. The respondents generally did not complain about their children nor ask for more help. In addition, some respondents thought that it was not the responsibility of their children to support them. They regarded the fact that the younger generations had many more responsibilities to take care of, including their own children, than take care of themselves. Ms Yue and Ms Luk thought “raising children to provide against old age” was:

... [only] emphasized in the ancient Chinese which valued "Li, Yi, Lian, Chi" [propriety, righteousness, honesty, and a sense of shame; 禮義廉恥]. Son raises his son, and then the son will raise his son. You need to consider the current [economic] environment. If the environment is good, you can be filial. If you had no money, how can you be filial? It depends on their ability (Ms Yue)

... outdated. We raised them up and did not expect much from them. One generation raises up the next one. If you expect they will take care of you one day, you will easily get upset. I did not expect much from my children but just raised them up. What would my future be? I would “wait for the next chapter” [look forward to the result]. (Ms Luk)

Once again, rationalization was used. Respondents reconstructed this tradition ideal of “raising children to provide against old age” and realized it was no longer the goal that they could achieve. They seemed to understand and recognize that the gap between what they desired and the actual support from children was reasonable. They even readjusted the reference value of their expectations.

**‘I’d find other for help’**

Some respondents depended on formal networks for fulfilling their expectations of social support. The hierarchical compensatory theory describes an hierarchal ascending or descending order in the importance of presence in the choice of support element with the value system of the current cohort of older people (Brenman and Cantor, 2000). It states that older people first seek assistance from informal networks such as their spouse, kin, friends and then neighbours (Novak, 1997). Only when informal networks are not available, formal networks will substitute in the role. In the present study, older mothers sought the support from other sources such as the government and avoided asking from their children. For example, Ms Hung received Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) from the government, which substituted in the role of her children. She depended on other sources of help to “fill in” the gap between her expectations and reality without demanding more assistance from her children. At the same time, she tried to maintain a peaceful relationship with their children.

Having children is important in villages. Otherwise who will support you when you’re old? It’s different in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong SAR Government is so good. You can get some assistance to live... I’m satisfied with the present situation as I can get around \$2000 Comprehensive Social Security Assistance each month... Sometimes I go out with my son when he’s off and have a family day. (Ms Hung)

A similar view was expressed by Ms Tse, who placed high expectations on old age support from her children. She was disappointed by her son and turned to the government. She even treated her son as:

A friend. I treat him like a friend. I don’t regard him as a son expecting more.

A friend, ranks lower than children in the hierarchical compensatory theory, and assumes fewer obligations to provide support. By treating family members as friends, people could lower the expectations on filial support from their children. Moreover, bonding between friends has a lower degree of permanence than between parent and child (Laursen and Bukowski, 1997). The ties between friends can be broken in case of any negative feelings. This is also another adaptive behaviour to avoid ambivalence existing in enduring relationships.

### *Discordance case*

#### **“I ask more from him”**

What would happen if older mothers try to narrow the gap between their expectations and the reality by requesting more support from children? Limited evidences of confrontation were found. There was only one respondent had tried to intervene with their adult children. Ms Yee, who had an overt conflict with her children, perceived a wide discrepancy between her expectations and reality. She shared a household with her son and her son's family but reported no financial support from her son. She had an overt conflict with her son but their relationships became worse after the confrontation.

He didn't give me any money even on Mother's Day... I treat him not as my blood related son! I asked him if he didn't want to support me anymore, he could sign the agreement and then we could have an end. I could live alone and I don't need to suffer.

#### 4. Respondents' expectations of living arrangements and their strategies of handling ambivalence

This section focuses on the preferred and actual living arrangements of the older mothers. Living with children under the same roof has been the normative ideal shared by the Chinese for several centuries (Lee et al., 1997). With increasing longevity and medical advancement, older people have more shared time with their children. It raises questions whether the older mothers in this sample expected to live with their adult children and whether they had achieved their wishes.

##### Expectations on living arrangements

When respondents were asked about their preferred living arrangements on reaching old age, they had diverse views. Some respondents (n=5) preferred to stay with their spouse or on their own, while some respondents (n=10) preferred to stay with their children (Table 5.11).

Table 5.11 Preferred living arrangements on reaching older age

	Respondents (n)
Prefer to stay with spouse/ on own	Luk, Ning, Song, Yee, Yue, (5)
Prefer to stay with children	Bai, Cheng, Choi, Lam, Lee, Siu, Tse, Zhen, Hung, Wen (10)

Source: Author's survey

Respondents with higher socio-economical status (Ms Ning, Ms Song and Ms Yue) preferred living without their children in old age. In terms of the perceived

health status, since the majority of the respondents were young-old (aged 65-74), they generally perceived better health status. It did not show a pattern of preferred living arrangements with the perceived health status. In general, respondents agreed that staying with their children could give them better emotional support. However, they found co-residence could result in strains and contradictions. Some respondents considered independent living a better choice for them. Two main themes were mentioned when they considered the preferred living arrangements. They are discussed below.

**“I want better emotional support and care...”**

Sharing the same household is one of the means to facilitate emotional support and care (Lowenstein, 2002). Most respondents found the advantage of living with children offered more companionship and a sense of security. Ms Zhen, who is aged 89 and lives with her son, replied:

If you ask me to live alone, it's very lonesome. I will be lonely with nobody. I prefer living with my children even if I might have problems when getting along with them.

Ms Siu, who lives with her son and his family, shared the same view and expected to live with children:

The older folks say it's good to live with children. Living alone is so poor.

Besides being lonely, how difficult it is when old people live alone? Ms Siu took her friend as an example to illustrate how co-resident children provided her better support in case of emergency:

My friend lived alone. One day, she felt pain in her feet. She couldn't cook or go out to eat. Living alone is so poor. Her son lived in Tin Shui Wai. She had to meet her son somewhere to get a meal. I replied to her, "Really? He's far away. Why didn't you ring me and ask me for help?"... Nobody accompanied her to see the doctor... Once, it was midnight. She felt sick. She was afraid to wake me up. I told her, "I wouldn't mind. You should call me." I bought her breakfast the following day... Don't you agree living alone is poor?...though living together has good and bad sides...

Living together can provide a sense of being protected and can enhance intimacy among family members. Older people can have immediate support from co-resident adult children when needed. However, there are negative sides when living together.

**“I don't want to have conflicts with children...”**

Yet, “not all old people want to live with the young”, as said by Ms Ning. Some respondents preferred living with their spouse or on their own. They were concerned about the possible conflicts and tensions when living with children. For example, Ms Ning, who lived with her husband, agreed that friction and arguments were inevitable when living together. She offered the following comment:

When you wash the dishes, there will be collision. When living with children, no matter how highly educated you are, you have your own personality, they have their own personality, you two might not be compatible with each other. Some people say “ten fingers. All of different lengths”. If you want to find another person that is the same to you, you have to find two of you [to clone]. That's the fact.

The contradictions, in terms of hobbies and values, between parents and children surfaced when they shared the same household. Ms Song, who previously lived with her son, illustrated that the different interests of herself and her son hardly

found any common interest:

I don't want to live together. We do have distance between us. Our hobbies and eating habits are different. Take watching TV programs as an example. We are simple and just watch for fun. He is different and considers more. He likes watching English programs. I don't know what the characters said. I just know they are speaking and moving. I was not interested in the program and went to bed.

Ms Hung pointed to her deteriorating health as a source of daily hassles:

Once I'm getting old, those young people do not want to live with me anymore. I have nothing to do. I talk too much. (Laughter) My hearing is not good. I often replied "What? What? What?" when they talked to me. My son didn't like that. Then I moved out.

Hong Kong is a patriarchal society so that living with a son to obtain care from him in old age has been the cultural ideal (Lee et al., 1997). In order to prevent the contradictions and conflicts which would disrupt the relationships with their children, respondents no longer upheld the traditional ideal of a multigenerational household. Some respondents preferred keeping a distance with their children by not sharing the same household with them. Teo et al. (2003) point out that the grandparent generation manifests countervailing norms about living arrangements. On one hand, older mothers desired independence. On the other hand, they still value the emotive support that comes from living together. In the present study, respondents also showed the struggles between the norm of non-interference (the desire to be independent) and the norm of solidarity (the desire to have social support from children).

Similarly, Ms Luk had considered these two competing norms. She lived with

her husband and her son's family at the time of the interview. However, she preferred living with her spouse only. Ms Luk was asked whether she was concerned about the possibility of losing the sense of emotional closeness when living without children. She evaluated the proximity with children and the quality of relationships in terms of "long term" and "short term" gains:

I don't feel like that. I have a long term view. If people only focus on the gains of the short term, they would have lots of trouble. My husband does not have a long term view. If he does, both of us, the old people, would be happier. He focuses on the immediate result and enjoys interfering with other [his daughter-in-law]. It's annoying.

For Ms Luk, the "short term" gain referred to the feeling of security and proximity when living with children and the norm of solidarity as well. For the "long term" gain, it refers to the long lasting relationship gained by adhering to the norm of non-interference. So, how did older mothers in this sample choose between the "short term" and "long term" gains? Were their wishes granted? The mapping of the preferred and actual living arrangements would offer more analysis.

### **Mapping of expectations with reality**

As noted earlier, most respondents (n=7) lived with their children without their spouses at the time of the interview. After mapping the preferred living arrangements with actual living arrangements, four clusters of responses were generated as shown in Table 5.12.

Table 5.12 Mapping of respondents' expectations and actual residence

		Expectations that they would live with their adult child	
		Yes	No
Actual residence	Fulfilled	Bai, Cheng, Choi, Lam, Lee, Siu, Zhen, (7)	Luk, Yee (2)
	Not Fulfilled	Wen, Tse, Hung (Living in the same district) (3)	Ling, Song, Yue (Living far apart) (3)

### Strategies of handling ambivalence

#### *Concordance case*

#### **“I don't want to live with them and I live far away from them”**

For those who lived without children, they tended to choose the norm of non-interference over the norm of solidarity. All these three respondents who lived without children had higher socio-economical status. They did not expect much social support from their children and this enabled them to make a choice to have an independent life. Although they did not achieve the solidarity of sharing the same household with their children, they were satisfied with the social support provided by their children. For example, Ms Ning said her children contacted her constantly to show concern:

Now, I live with my husband. Two children live in Guangzhou and one is in the USA. We do not see each other. But my son, who is in the States, phones me every

Monday...the other son, who is in Mainland China, phones me once in two weeks... it's important that they have us in their hearts.

In a similar vein, Ms Song enjoyed the distance away from her son that enabled her to have an independent life and long-lasting relationships with her children:

It's hard for us to avoid interfering with other's lives when we live together... To prevent us from disliking each other, it's good to live apart. If you want to be filial, you don't have to take care of me by treating me like a child. No matter how busy you are, you need to remember to contact me and it's okay.

Guided by the norm of non-interference, they generally did not place many demands for help from their children. They were free from the strains and contradictions that result from close proximity with their children. As Ms Yue who lived apart from her son replied:

I come and go to the Chinese restaurant every Sunday... Sometimes they bring grandchildren here to visit me. I feel good and that's enough.

### *Discordance case*

**“ I can' t live with them but I want more social support from them”**

For the respondents (Ms Tse, Ms Wen and Ms Hung) who desired both independence and proximity, they showed many ambivalent feelings about living arrangements. They desired the social support from their children, however, they could not live with them at the same time. Ms Hung accepted the fact that she could not live with her son because of the small living space and her limited control over

the decisions of her son. But she enjoyed having a sense of security by living near her son so that he would be ready to help her. She cast herself an independent role to avoid intervening with the young:

Now, it's not your turn to decide. Is he wants it or not... My health is good and I can take care of myself... Now we are happy to have our own life... We don't have to feel the difficulties of living together...Once I need help, he can come and help me...

Although Ms Tse's son moved out after getting married, she would like to maintain the least distance from him. Ms Tse regarded it to be the best living arrangement to live near her son in order to maintain better relationships with him. On one hand, she maintained an independent life without interfering with her son:

He moved out once he got married... I need to take care of myself. People have to be independent... now I don't disturb them and they don't disturb me... we go to the Chinese restaurant and chat occasionally.

On the other hand, she could have a sense of security with children who lived nearby:

Though I have some worries when living alone, I find it's good to live here. He lives on one end and I live on the other end [of Fui Tai Estate]. In case of emergency, once I shout [call for help], he can come if he would like to do so. It was different when I lived in Shek Lei Pui. He had to transfer buses and it took an hour to reach me.

Respondents agreed that not interfering with their children was one of the best ways to have better quality of relationships with children. Compared with Ms Tse and Ms Hung, Ms Wen had more autonomy and resources to choose her desired

living arrangements. She received the savings from her husband who passed away several years ago. Ms Wen worried about the possible conflicts that could occur when co-residing with her son. Guided by the norm of non-interference, she refused to live with her son. She accepted the discrepancy between her expected and actual living arrangements:

My elder son asked me to live together. He was afraid I would be lonely. He suggested that I share a room with my grandson. I thought this idea was not good. It's fine for me to live alone. He does not need to worry too much. You know, no matter how filial he is, we might have problems when we get along with each other. We might have mocha [friction] even in a short conversation... Now, I can take care of myself in my daily life. We don't need to depend on other.

At the same time, she upheld the norm of solidarity and desired to live in the same neighbourhood with her son:

Previously I lived in Lam Tei. My son lives in Parkland Villas. I moved here to live near him. He lives opposite to me. I am near to him. It's good for us. [Why don't you live near other children?] The other children live so far away. The younger son lives in Sheung Shui. I don't know how to travel there.

Respondents in these cases struggled between the norm of solidarity and the norm of non-interference with their children. In general, they were satisfied with their current living arrangements, which achieved “intimacy at a distance”.

***Concordance case:***

**“I want more social support from them and I live with them”**

In another concordance case, respondents had gotten their wishes granted to live

with their children. Although they enjoyed the emotional support from children, tensions and contradictions among them surfaced when living together. Two common problems were mentioned by those respondents who currently lived with their children, i.e. limited space and the problems when getting along with their daughters-in-law.

“We have limited space...”

Co-residence of different generations demands better allocation of living space (Lowenstein, 2002). As the public housing in Hong Kong is designed for a smaller family, multigenerational co-residence might be challenged once the grandchildren have grown up and want more privacy. Ms Siu described the strains with her family members over the decisions about who got which room:

My husband passed away several years ago. I originally occupied the medium size bedroom. My daughter-in-law and son occupied the bedroom with en-suite bathroom. My three grandchildren occupied the smallest one. One day, my daughter-in-law decided to ask me to move to the smaller bedroom. My son loved me and rejected. He worried I wouldn't sleep well in a smaller room. I didn't know this incident. The following day, I recognized the couple was not happy. I asked my granddaughter what's going on. She said they fought about me. I replied, “Me?”

When having the request of the reallocation of private and general areas, Ms Siu accepted her daughter-in-law's proposal to change rooms with her grandchildren:

I'm open-minded. I volunteered to exchange rooms and moved all the things to the smaller room the next day. They said I was so efficient [laughter]. I let the three kids live in a larger room. It's important for them to give money to me. I can go to the Chinese restaurant. I can have clothes to wear. No problem! We had no arguments and I felt happy.

Although respondents achieved the norm of solidarity, they tried to be independent without intervening in each other's private lives. Space and privacy are significant in creating the conditions for respondents to avoid interfering in each other's lives. However, the demand for better allocation of general and private space seemed not necessarily feasible in Hong Kong. Sometimes it was out of the respondents' control to manage the contradictions. When Ms Bai, who lived with her son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren, was asked whether she expected to live with her children in old age, she replied,

Sure. I expected that. But it's hard to achieve. There's not enough space to live! In Hong Kong, space is so limited and expensive. The grandchildren have already grown up. But the household is not spacious enough. It's inconvenient for us. I might need to live in the old age home.

“I have problems with my daughter-in-law”

Without specifying which child, respondents were asked whether they expected to live with their children. It was common for them to point to their sons regardless of their educational levels. In terms of their actual living arrangements, the married adult children whom the respondents had ever lived with or currently were living with at the time of the interview were their sons. As mentioned earlier in the theme concerning the expectations of childbearing, some respondents assumed special responsibilities and relationships with their sons in later life. Since the traditional Chinese family is patrilineal, it is not surprising to find that older parents expected to live with their sons and their family in order to get better social support from them (Lee et al., 1997).

However, living in a big family might have more tensions. Ms Ning observed that her friends in the senior center encountered problems with their daughters-in-law:

I recognized that many older people who lived with their in-laws in this center... have a lot of conflicts! I knew one of them has to buy take-away food to eat at home. This shows she has poor relationship with her daughter-in-law.

Ms Ning's observation echoed with the view of the respondents who were currently living with married sons. All of them mentioned the problems when getting along with their daughters-in-law. It is common to find the main source of conflicts with their daughters-in-law was their attempt to impose their own expectations on their daughters-in-law. This violates the norms of non-interference. Most of the respondents blamed their daughters-in-law for not performing their daughters-in-law roles well. Some of them said their daughters-in-law spent too much money, were lazy in doing the housework, and that their cooking was unsatisfactory. When Ms Siu was asked to illustrate the example of conflicts with daughters-in-law, she took her sister's case:

My sister often interferes with the life of her daughter-in-law! When her daughter-in-law bought cosmetics, my sister blamed her for having make-up. She also blames her in-law for buying so many expensive things and giving more money to her mother than to herself.

Even though daughters-in-law were part of their family, respondents found it was hard to develop a norm of solidarity with them. By contrast, most respondents did not mention the conflict with their children. It seemed they were more tolerant with their own children than with their daughters-in-law. This can be shown in Ms

Ning's view. Ms Ning said the relationship with her daughter was different from the one with her daughter-in-law. She offered the following comparison:

It is inevitable to have mocha [frictions] with my daughter-in-law. There are fewer frictions in the relations with daughters. It is the truth. If your daughter has done something wrong, you can scold her. She might not accept my advice, but she would not be angry with me. The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is different. She is your daughter-in-law. Not only might she not accept my complaint, she might even strike back. So I often scold my daughter. But I would not do this with my daughter-in-law. I don't care how she raises the grandchildren. I won't blame her. I maintain the *friendship*. We can have more long-lasting relationship. We would have fewer contradictions.

Once again, the respondent was found to regard a family member as a friend in order to maintain a better relationship. Besides, some respondents regarded daughters-in-law as outsiders. For example, Ms Tse had expected to live with children, pointing out that her daughter-in-law did not understand her:

It is good to live together... It's hard to say... He moved out once he got married. Children knew the personality of parents. A daughter-in-law is the *outsider*, how would she understand the personality of parents-in-law?

Ms Yue also found problems with her in-law:

It's not easy to get along with children. [why?] Conflicts between in-laws! It's hard to say... She's the *outsider*. She doesn't know how to serve old people well... My son is on the side of his wife...I chose to remain on my own.

Conflicts and contradictions occurred when sharing the common household. So, what would older mothers in the sample do to manage the possible tensions and conflicts? The common effective strategies they used were trying not to interfere

with their family members, to accept and ignore contradictions and conflicts. This showed that they had the norm of non-interference. For example, Ms Bai reconciled the tensions by avoiding quarrels with her daughter-in-law:

My daughter-in-law is not either good or bad... It's not good to blame her... As an old person, I must be tolerant. Once you speak up, it is problematic, it's hard for my son.

When Ms Zhen was asked how she dealt with the tensions, she said she would ignore them without affecting the intimacy with her daughter-in-law:

When I found problems with what they did and what they mentioned, I didn't interfere with them. I just roll up my eyes. If you bother them, you will have mocha [friction]. It's hard to live together. Being older people, we need to be considerate. When you find it's unhappy to get along with each other, I would go out for a walk. Whatever they cook, you have to stop complaining. It's good for you to accept. Even if they prepared chicken wings every meal, I had no complaint. Once you speak up, there would have more mocha [friction].

Being tolerant and considerate with family members is better for relationships. The role of the older person is to not interfere too much. Ms Siu also took up the norm of non-interference and found fewer problems when living with her daughter-in-law. She did not blame her daughter-in-law:

If you act like a strict mother-in-law, those young people must dislike you. I think, it's no problem for me whom to live with. Why? I don't interfere with the young. I pretend to be blind and deaf. I don't control them.

If she cooks well, I will eat more. If she cooks badly, I will eat less. Don't try to complain that this or that is not delicious, those young people dislike others to control them. Being a mother-in-law, you have not to bother too much. It's fine. I treat her like a *friend*.

But she admitted to have her own thought in mind:

Certainly. But I would ignore them. My sister blames her daughter-in-law for giving more money to her mother. It's reasonable that you serve your own mother well. Your own daughter also gives money to you! She needs to analyse like this [laughter]. ... Why do you have to interfere with the daughter-in-law? Your own daughter is another's daughter-in-law. You had another's daughter to be your daughter-in-law. It's fine if you don't interfere too much.

### *Discordance case*

#### **“I don't want to live with them but I live with them”**

Of the two respondents who were unwilling to live with their children, a higher level of tensions and conflicts between generations occurred. Ms Luk, who lived with her spouse and youngest son's family, did not prefer staying with children. But her husband preferred living with his son and often interfered with the lives of his daughter-in-law. Ms Luk became the “sandwich” between her husband and daughter-in-law and felt torn in the relationships:

My husband would like to live with children... I don't want to. I am afraid the frequent mocha [frictions] is not good [for their relationship]. Once we have encounters, we would be unhappy. This family life is poor. Sometimes my husband fought with my daughter-in-law. I asked them not to argue any more. My daughter-in-law sometimes understood me. But my husband did not... sometimes the daughter-in-law went out and we did not have dinner together. I didn't know where she went. My husband asked me to ask her why she went out. I refused and his face became angry.

She chose to ignore the tensions and contradictions to avoid possible conflicts.

In contrast, her husband often interfered with his daughter-in-law. She found that overt conflicts with her daughter-in-law were exhausting and damaged their relationship:

I would rather take it easy with the mocha [friction] with my in-law. I asked my husband not to bother her. You might find something uncomfortable when you get along with each other. Mocha is common. Living together must have mocha. Why do you need to bother the daughter-in-law? ... It's not a minor thing if you interfere with her life... Now, they often look angry when seeing each other.

From the quotation above, it illustrates that interference in the lives of the younger generations might increase possible conflicts. Overt conflicts are too threatening. Ms Luk tried to maintain “harmony” in her family by stopping the conflicts between her husband and her daughter-in-law. According to Fingerman (2001), older mothers, in general, use less “destructive” strategies in order to prevent the disruption of the relationships. However, there was an extreme case. Ms Tse had overt conflicts with family members and this was harmful to her relationships. She had imposed her expectations on her daughter-in-law and compared how her daughter-in-law played the role of daughter-in-law with her own experience:

His wife [Ms Yee's daughter-in-law] didn't sweep the floor, even if the floor was very dirty... The daughter-in-law does not prepare breakfast and lunch for me, I have to cook for myself... The oven...and the cupboards... were dirty but she did not clean them up... I did everything for my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law had problems with her teeth. I bought the meat without bones for my mother-in-law to eat. I had never treated my mother-in-law badly...

The attempt to impose her own desires and influence her daughter-in-law's life violates the norm of non-interference. This is not surprising that this deviant act

might create strains and negativity in their relationships (Kemp, 2004). Ms Yee had confrontations with her daughter-in-law:

One Chinese New Year, I took the head of a roasted pig home after gathering with relatives...I put it in the fridge for days as I was not feeling well to cook... my daughter-in-law scolded me for occupying too much space and threw the pig's head at me! We fought and I called the police...

This is one of the incidents she reported. It should perhaps be defined as a case of elder abuse. Ms Yee would like to live apart but she did not have the resources to move away. Even with the intervention of a social worker, her son still refused to sign the agreement to claim he would not support her any more. She had to remain staying with her son's family and maintained "solidarity". This, in itself, is a brave discussion by the respondent and illustrates the importance of the qualitative interventions.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Discussions and conclusion**

This thesis explores the expectations of older mothers as to marital and reproductive behaviour, social support and living arrangements of their adult children and how older mothers react when tensions and contradictions occurred. The concept of intergenerational ambivalence was adopted. This is a response to the criticism that the studies of intergenerational relationships have been dominated by the intergenerational solidarity or intergenerational conflicts models which have depicted family life either as overly positive or as negative for over 30 years. The intergenerational ambivalence perspective shows solidarity and conflicts can coexist in family life. The tensions and contradictions are probably inherent in the parent-adult child relationships. Although the sample size of the present study is rather small and only females are focused on, the present study helps to understand how older mothers, who are often the less advantaged group in traditional Chinese societies, resolve these contradictions. This concluding chapter will first summarize the findings and answer the research questions which are set out in Chapter Three. Finally, the implications for further study and the limitations of the present study will be presented.

#### **Recapitulation**

Respondents were asked about their expectations in four themes, i.e. marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements in old age. With regard to marriage, respondents had expected their children would marry as they felt marriage

was an expected life event and it was good to have a companion to share your life with. However, the traditional meanings of marriage had eroded. The economic significances and marital happiness were becoming less significant. Younger generations had new roles other than being wives or husbands. Respondents often found it impossible to exercise parental control over their children's decisions. They had to reconcile themselves to the ways their adult children thought even though they did not accept them. They handled the discrepancies by accepting the fact, rationalising the cultural ideal and avoiding interference in the lives of their children.

The next feature is childbearing. At the time the respondents were reproducing, childbearing was an important issue and gender preference over children was prevalent. With the effects of social changes, they found that they had very limited parental control over their children. Although respondents upheld their ideal number of children and preferred combination of children, they had to readjust their reference value of the expectations of having so many children and forego the gender preference for children. Many of them accepted the fact by rationalising the economic significance of having children to avoid possible arguments or conflicts with their children.

Throughout the theme of social support, respondents were found to expect social support from their children because of their actual need and the cultural ideal of giving back the support in parents' old age. No matter if there was concordance or discordance of reality with expectations, nearly all respondents were found to have adaptive strategies of trying not to interfere with their children. Some respondents, like Ms Siu and Ms Zhen, encountered "love stress" as their children provided them unsolicited help and assistance. They both tried to create discrepancies and avoided

or rejected the support from their children. For those respondents who had inadequate social support from their children, they tended to rationalize that the discrepancies between their expectations and the actual filial support from their children were understandable as their children had economic hardship. Some of them tried to find an alternative, such as Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, to fill the gaps. Most respondents attempted to avoid interfering with their children. Ms Yee, who violated the norm of non-interference, and requested more social support from her children, was found to have a poor relationship with her son.

The last feature focused on living arrangements. Respondents, on one hand, desired independence and, on the other hand, desired emotive support that came from close proximity. For those respondents who had more resources, they tended to prefer independent living. They did not expect much social support from their children. More ambivalent experiences were found in those respondents who wanted more emotive support from children but could not live with them. They tried to maintain “intimacy at a distance”. For respondents who shared the same household with their children, contradictions and tensions surfaced in their relationships. Due to limited space, they found it was hard to adhere to the norm of non-interference. Although some respondents lived with their daughters-in-law, many of them encountered difficulties when trying to build close relationships with their daughters-in-law. Guided by the norm of non-interference, respondents generally avoided the risk of damaging relationships with their family members. They would accept and ignore the contradictions and avoid overt conflict which might disrupt the family relations.

## **Discussions**

Three research questions were addressed in the present study. These were the exploration of the expectations of older mothers on marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements of and with their adult children. Secondly, the research attempted to understand how tensions and contradictions arose with the actual behaviour of children. Third, it aimed to understand how older mothers dealt with these tensions and contradictions. An exploratory focus group discussion and fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted in an attempt to answer these research questions.

### ***1. Respondents' expectations of marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements of and with adult children***

All respondents expected their adult children would marry and give birth to children. They did not hold son preference over the gender of children. They expected their children would provide support to them in their old age. But not all respondents would like to live with their children. Some of the respondents who had higher socio-economic background preferred independent living.

### ***2. Tensions and contradictions arise in the actual behaviour of children***

As noted earlier, ambivalence may be defined as the contradictions in relationships between parents and adult offspring that cannot be reconciled (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998). Ambivalence can arise when there are competing role expectations. Referring to the present study, ambivalence occurs when there are

discrepancies between an older mother's expectations and the actual behaviour of children. In other words, tensions and contradictions in the intergenerational relationships could be found in the discordance of the expectations of older mothers with reality. Older mothers expected their children would get married and would give birth to children. However, some of them had unmarried children or children who remained childless. Although all respondents expected social support from children, some of their children did not fulfill their expectations. With regard to the living arrangements, some respondents who lived with their children in the same neighborhood also exhibited ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, they desired independence without interfering in the lives of children. On the other hand, they desired solidarity with their children, creating a contradiction or ambivalence.

Ambivalence also occurs even when there is solidarity. As mentioned in the literature review, solidarity occurs when there is frequent interaction between generations, geographical proximity, exchange of assistance, emotional support, agreement between generations or shared values between family members (Bengtson and Harootyan, 1994). Evidence of this kind of ambivalence can be found in the themes of social support and living arrangements in the present study. Respondents enjoyed the social support provided by adult children. However, some respondents, Ms Siu and Ms Zhen, were found to have a feeling of guilt or overprotection when interacting with children frequently or receiving excess social support from children. Silverstein et al. (1996) suggest that excessive support from family members might increase distress by inducing dependence and eroding the autonomy of the older recipients. With regard to living arrangements, sharing the same household is also a kind of solidarity. Tensions and contradictions occurred when family members shared the same household. It was common for respondents to have daily hassles

with family members and especially with their daughters-in-law (George, 1986). It is not hard to understand as people who are structurally different were put together in limited space. Tensions and contradictions would then surface.

There is a scarcity of Western studies on the relations between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, although there is widespread anecdotal evidence that the relationships between in-laws involve both closeness and animosity (Walker, 2000). It is common for daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law to share the childrearing responsibilities. Daughters-in-law may feel their independence and self-worth are compromised when they are being challenged by mothers-in-law (Elder, Rudkin, Conger, Myles and Morgan, 1995). Similar evidence is found in the present study which supports this point of view. Older mothers themselves or their spouses encountered more conflicts when they tried to interfere with the lives of daughters-in-law or impose their expectations on how daughters-in-law should perform their roles. On the contrary, literature in the East has tried to link these phenomena to the social boundary. It is predominant to make an insider-outsider distinction by using the blood relationships (Wu, 2005). Daughters-in-law are often counted as outsiders in certain circumstances (Graham et al., 1999). However, daughters-in-law are often expected to fulfill their duties as filial daughters and wives (Wu, 2005). Older mothers are more likely to have ambivalent feelings in building close relationships with daughters-in-law (Wu, 2005). Tensions are more likely to occur when mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law try to reconstruct their boundaries and develop bonding with each other (Graham et al., 1999).

### **3. Strategies used to manage ambivalence**

Generally, older mothers in the present study were guided by the norm of non-interference. They tried to avoid overt conflicts with their adult children. They used various strategies such as accepting, ignoring and avoiding when managing the tensions and contradictions in the relationships with their adult children. Evidence of constructive coping was found in which respondents dealt with the ambivalent experiences by efforts that are judged to be relatively healthful (Weiten and Lloyd, 2003). Respondents who were disappointed with the actual behaviour of their children tended to accept their children remaining unmarried, being childless, providing inadequate social support or not living with them. Some respondents demonstrated appraisal-focused constructive coping by engaging in positive reinterpretation to search for something good in a bad experience (Weiten and Lloyd, 2003). For example, some of them rationalized that the unmet expectations were understandable to the extent that traditional values were not feasible in this changing social context. These coping strategies can help to improve mood and self-esteem (Weiten and Lloyd, 2003). Some respondents depended on the assistance from the government to fulfill their needs. In the discordance cases, respondents demonstrated their attempts to minimize the discrepancies without changing the “reality” which is known as the actual behaviour of their children. They were found to reconcile their values and expectations to the way that their children thought. When sharing the same household with their children, older mothers tried to ignore the contradictions and avoid possible conflicts in their relationships. They regulated their own emotions by distracting themselves and managed hospitality (Weiten and Lloyd, 2003). These strategies are known as emotional-focused constructive coping.

When feeling overprotection from their children, some respondents rejected the help from the children. They tend to preserve boundaries with the children in order to maintain independence (Spitze and Gallant, 2004). This is consistent with the findings of Fingerman (2001), Teo et al. (2003) and Spitze and Gallant (2004). The least evidence of confrontation was found when managing ambivalence. Older mothers are more likely to use less destructive strategies to prevent the relationships from disruption. By contrast, one respondent, Ms Yee, in the present study, had overt conflict with her son and daughter-in-law and this damaged their relationship.

In fact, some older mothers in this sample had tried to interfere in the lives of their children. However, they found it was unsuccessful to impose their wishes on their children. Fingerman and Kay (2004) point out that the power structure has shifted from being parent-dominated to a more lateral and equitable one. Older parents are more likely to have no direct control over their children's decisions. Ambivalence thus occurred since respondents could not control the way of their children behaved. Similar to the study of Teo et al. (2003), the shift of the relationships between older mothers and children make older mothers become more tolerate and accepting to the actual behaviour of their children (Teo et al., 2003). Older mothers had to adhere to the norm of non-interference with their children in order to maintain better relationships.

### **Implications of the findings**

#### *Theoretical significance*

The main proposition of the present study is that tensions and contradictions occur when there is a concordance or discordance of the expected and actual

behaviour of adult children, in which solidarity and conflicts co-exist together. Overall, the concept of ambivalence was applied in four themes – marriage, childbearing, social support and living arrangements. The themes of marriage, childbearing and social support can illustrate the competing expectations between children and older mothers. The themes of social support and living arrangements are better at showing the ambivalence that arose in solidarity. This thesis argues that the intergenerational ambivalence perspective is useful in understanding the diverse nature of family life. It helps to understand that contradictions and tensions occur in intergenerational relationships. Under social changes, norms, which provide guidelines for people to perform their roles, are continuously changing. Modern family norms as well as traditional norms co-exist in a situation where members in the generations may have competing expectations for themselves and others. It is common to find that members in the family may not have shared norms and values with regard to marriage, fertility and filial responsibilities. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily mean that family members must have conflicts with each other. Adaptation to new values was apparent in the interviews. This perspective provides insights to help understand how people adapt to the new roles and negotiate in the intergenerational relationships.

#### *Adaptation to the changes in the intergenerational relationships*

The intergenerational ambivalence perspective views ambivalence, the tensions and contradictions embedded within the family, as a source of changes and individuals are expected to adapt to these changes. This echoes with the concepts of successful ageing and active ageing which provide insights for the implications of the present study. The concept of successful ageing addresses the importance of

coping and adaptation in later life. Older people encounter numerous life events, role loss and societal changes throughout their lives (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2002). Evidences of changing social contexts are found in the present study which show the weakening family functions that are to provide care. The meanings of filial piety have been changed. With the increasing emphasis of individualization, traditional family relationships and values systems that once defined individuals' lives have lost much of their traditional meaning (Kemp, 2004). This coincides with Ng et al.'s (2002) study that the social support provided by children is the personal choice of children themselves as to whether or not to support their elderly parents. Young people are free to explore new lifestyle options such as remaining single throughout their lifetimes or remaining childless. This changing social and economic context may affect the psychosocial development of individuals, i.e. the older people's feelings of self-esteem, value, and place in family and society (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). Adaptation is thus essential to cope with the changes and to achieve successful ageing.

The literature has given the impression that older women are vulnerable, passive and dependent on their younger generation. They are depicted as powerless and have little control to influence the way their children behave. Despite these images, older mothers in the present study have been found to adapt to the social changes. They used several strategies to try to ignore, accept or rationalize contradictions which helped in maintaining harmony in the family. They were reconciled to the values of younger generations even though they have limited coping strategies to resolve the tensions and contradictions in their family lives. Many of them adopted open attitudes to the changes in the intergenerational relationships and reconstructed the tradition, for example no longer upholding preference for the gender of children.

This shows that they act as active progenitors of their identities in changing contexts (Teo et al., 2003). They demonstrated active roles in managing the contradictions and negotiating in the intergenerational relationships. The dynamic and fluid nature of intergenerational relationships has been discovered in the interviews. This in itself is an important finding with both academic and policy implications.

However, the strategies older people used depend greatly on their structural opportunities (Coser, 1966). Individuals who had fewer options or resources may choose acceptance over confrontation (Coser, 1966). In the case of Ms Yee, for example, she encountered severe conflicts with her son and her daughter-in-law. Her son refused to provide her financial support and she suffered from elder abuse. Unfortunately, she did not have resources to live apart and had to retain the “solidarity” with her son. In other cases, some older people had to depend on other sources of support, especially from the government and the community to substitute for family support. Some of the respondents in the present study chose to receive social assistance such as old age allowance as a supplement or the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance to support their daily life. Some of them joined senior centers and established their own social networks in the neighborhoods. This seems to suggest that the formal sector plays an important role in providing choices for older people to substitute the support that cannot be obtained from their children. It also shows that there are interrelations between the formal and informal sectors. The concept of active ageing encourages older people to be active in physical and economical status and have a continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and civic affairs (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). It states that the government has a role to promote a supportive environment and foster healthy life choices (Kinsella and Phillips, 2005). Next, the question is raised as to what the Hong Kong

government has done to promote the supportive environments for older people.

Since as early as the 1970s, “care in the community” has been emphasized in Hong Kong, which aims at “enabling the elderly to remain as long as possible as members of the community at large, either living by themselves or with members of their family, rather than aiming at providing the elderly with care in residential institutions outside the community to which they are accustomed” (Hong Kong Government, 1973, p.15). Later in the 1990s, “ageing in place” was proposed which suggested “appropriate support should be provided for older persons and their families to allow old people to grow old in their home environment with minimal disruption” (Health and Welfare Bureau, 1994, p.48). No matter whether the concept is “care in community” or “ageing in place”, these approaches assume the family will shoulder most of the burden in taking care of older people. Yet, adult children have the responsibility to take care of their parents. However, questions arise such as whether the community or family is the supportive one? From the findings of the present study, the expectations of the older mothers are found to have discrepancies with reality. This is for various reasons such as changing working patterns, economic hardship of children and the changing meanings of filial piety. As care in the community would be successful when the community is comprehensive, rather than solely dependent on family itself, collaboration between the formal and informal sectors to provide supportive community network is essential for the sake of older people. Government intervention to provide assistance to older people in coping with their needs is thus expected.

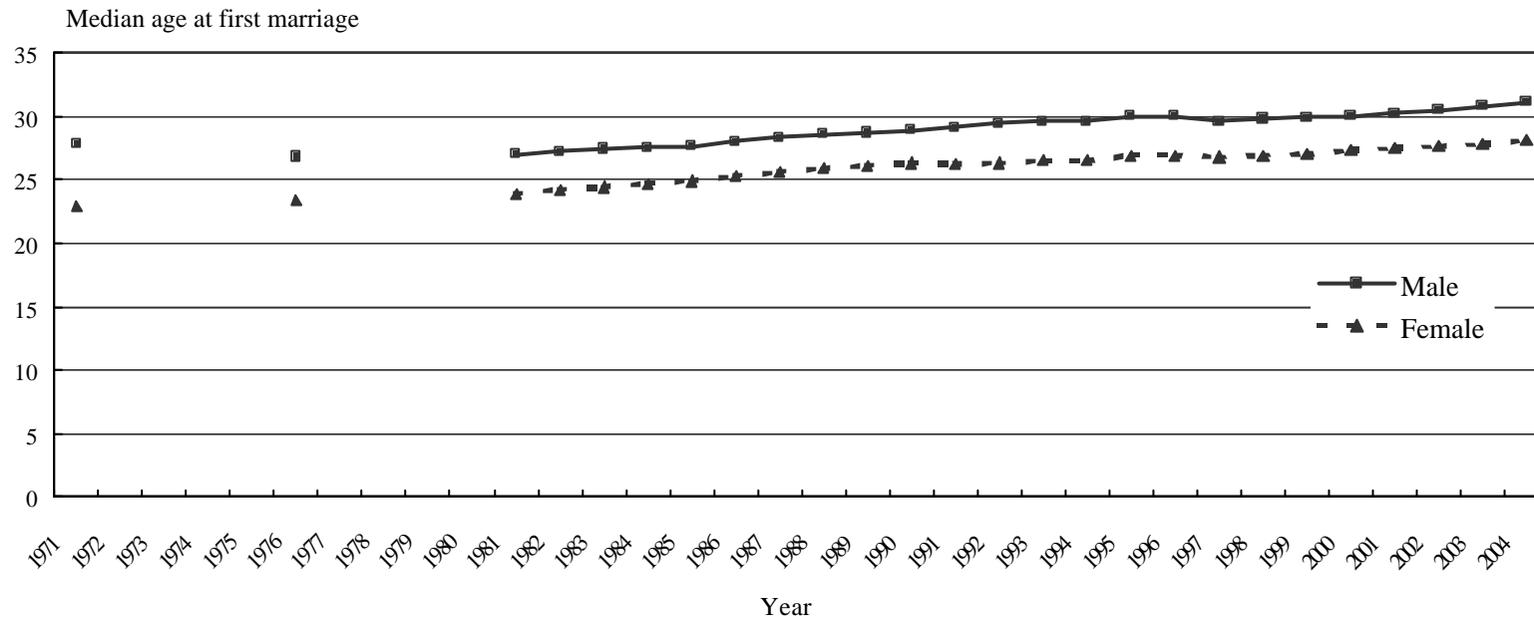
### **Limitations and recommendations for further study**

Applying intergenerational ambivalence in the study of the intergenerational relationships in Hong Kong is a new starting point. It has provided a number of new insights into ageing and the intergenerational relations. Throughout the period of study, from the literature review to the in-depth interviews, I increasingly realize the intergenerational ambivalent experiences within family are a very broad and complicated issue. Due to the restrictions of knowledge, time and resources, it is not within my ability to provide an in-depth analysis. There are a number of limitations. First, only the older generation of females has been studied in the present research. Previous research findings suggest that the two generations might evaluate their relationships in different ways in which older people tend to be optimistic with their relationships (Wu, 2005). Hence, future research can focus on both generations as the unit of analysis to present a full picture of family lives.

The second limitation of the present study lies in the sample of the in-depth interviews. It is believed that this research can shed light on discovering the complex meaning of intergenerational ambivalence. However, this study is limited in its generalizability and qualitative nature to representing or capturing the diversity and complexity of intergenerational relationships.

Last but not the least, the present study focuses only on older mothers. Under the gendered opportunity structure, males are often regarded as having differential treatment in their life courses. The strategies they use to manage ambivalence in their life experiences may be different from females. Future research could focus more on the gender differences in ambivalence experiences and their adaptation to the intergenerational ties.

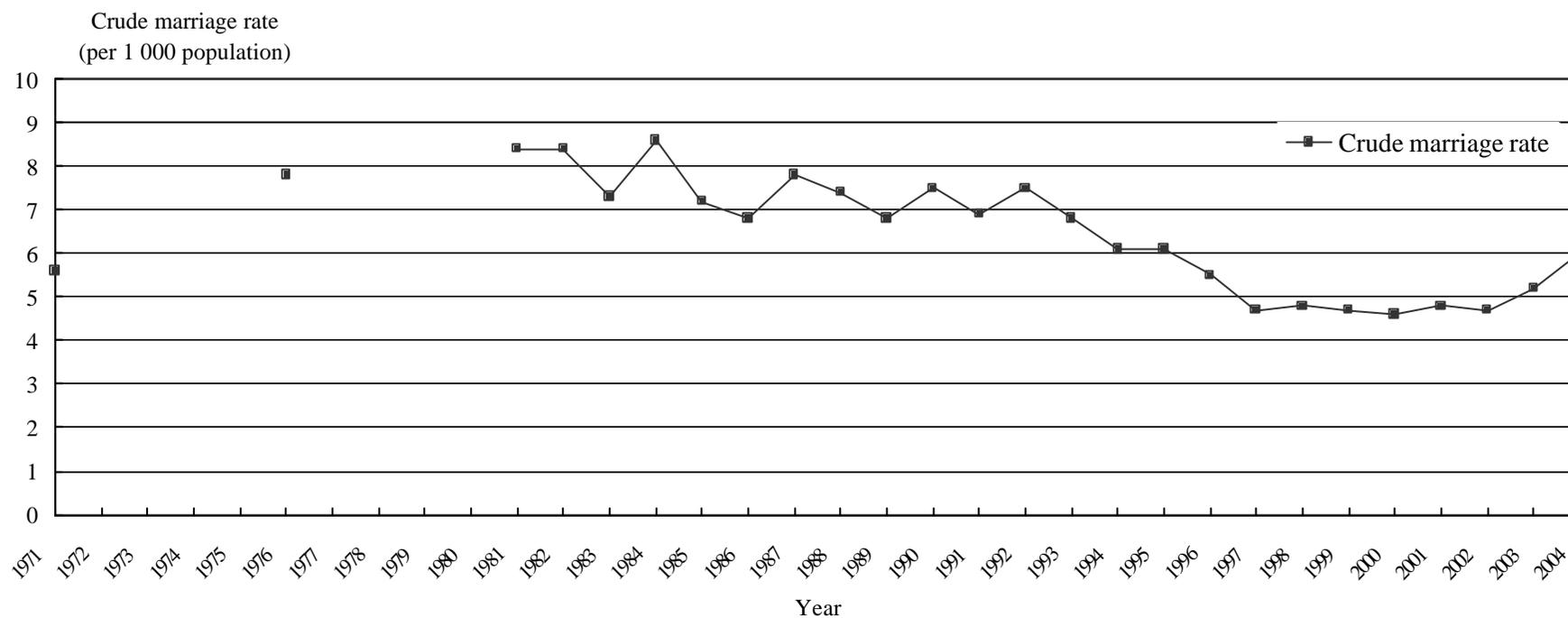
Figure 1.1 Median age at first marriage



Year	1971	1976	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
M	27.8	26.8	27.0	27.2	27.4	27.5	27.6	28.0	28.3	28.6	28.7	28.9	29.1	29.4	29.6	29.6	30.0	30.0	29.6	29.8	29.9	30.0	30.2	30.5	30.8	31.1
F	22.9	23.4	23.9	24.2	24.4	24.7	24.9	25.3	25.6	25.8	26.1	26.3	26.2	26.3	26.5	26.5	26.9	26.9	26.8	26.9	27.0	27.3	27.5	27.6	27.8	28.1

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2005).

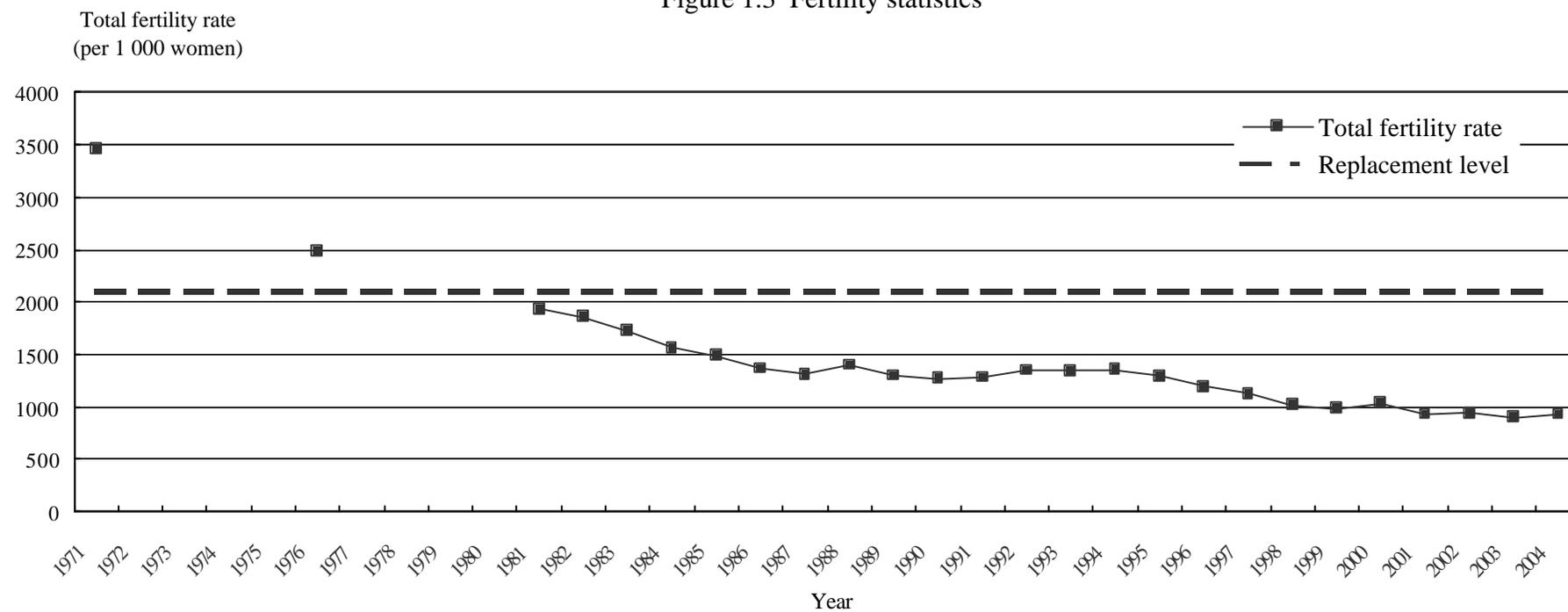
Figure 1.2 Marriage statistics



Year	1971	1976	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
CMR	5.6	7.8	8.4	8.4	7.3	8.6	7.2	6.8	7.8	7.4	6.8	7.5	6.9	7.5	6.8	6.1	6.1	5.5	4.7	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.7	5.2	6.0

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2005).

Figure 1.3 Fertility statistics

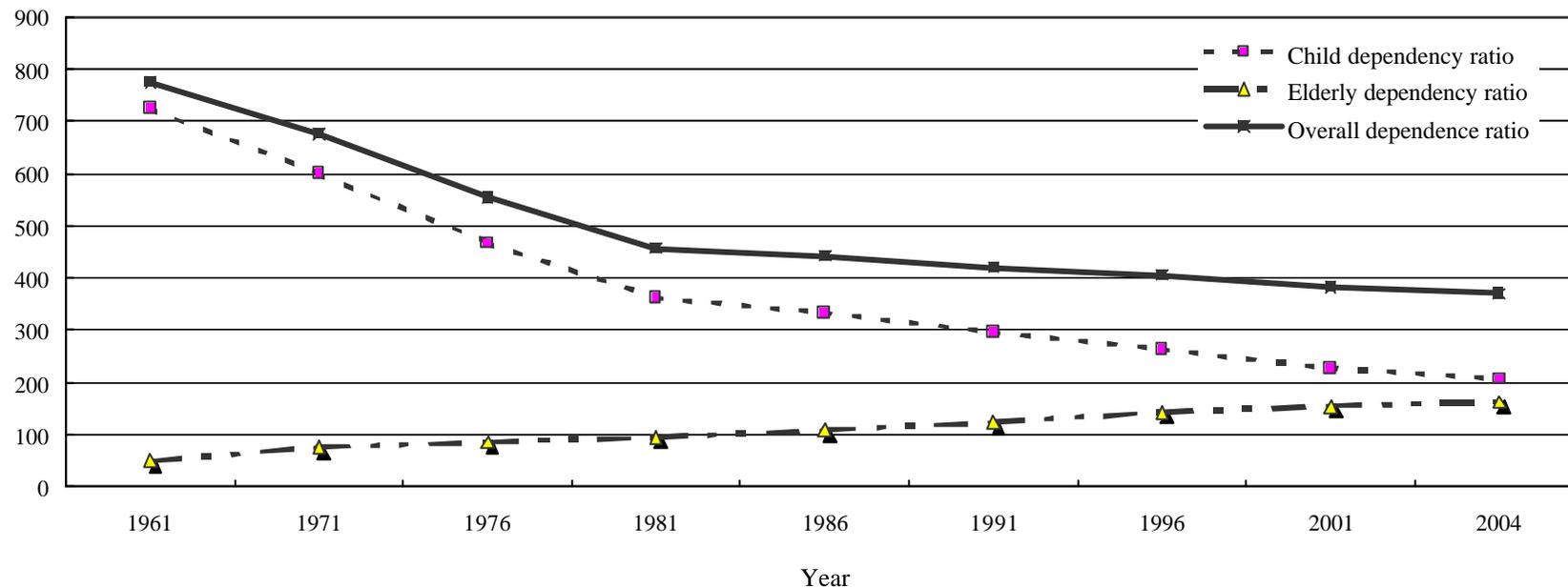


Year	1971	1976	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
TFR	3459	2480	1933	1860	1722	1559	1491	1367	1311	1400	1296	1272	1281	1347	1342	1355	1295	1191	1127	1017	982	1035	932	939	901	927

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2005).

Dependency ratio  
(per 1 000 persons aged 15 and  
64)

Figure 1.4 Dependency Ratios, 1961 to 2001



Year	1961	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2004
Child dependency ratio	724	599	467	362	333	296	263	227	207
Elderly dependency ratio	50	76	86	95	109	124	143	135	163
Overall dependence ratio	774	675	553	457	442	420	406	382	370

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2005).

**Summary of definitions of ambivalence**

<b>Authors/ sources</b>	<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Collins English Dictionary (Anonymous, 2000)	Psychological ambivalence Emotional	“Simultaneous existence of two opposed and conflicting attitudes, emotions, etc” (p.46).
Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson and Weiner, 1989)	Psychological ambivalence Emotion and attitude	“Co-existence in a person of contradictory emotions and attitudes towards a person or thing” (Anonymous, 1989, p.387).
Merton and Barber (1963)	Social ambivalence Normative expectation	“Incompatible normative expectations of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours...the core-case of sociological ambivalence puts demands upon the occupants of a status in a particular relation...opposing normative tendencies in the social definition of a role” (p.94-96).
Coser (1966)	Social ambivalence Normative expectation	“Sociological ambivalence is built into the structure of status and roles...within social life reflecting contradictory (and inevitable irreconcilable) expectations among two or more role partners”(p.179).

**Appendix II Summary of definitions of ambivalence**

<p>Hajda (1968, p.63, as cited in Lüscher, 1998)</p>	<p>Emotion, Roles and status, Normative expectation</p>	<p>Biological, psychological, structural ambivalence and cultural ambivalence</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) “Biological ambivalence refers to the simultaneous presence of opposing drives or instincts in the human organism” (p.8).</li> <li>2) “Psychological ambivalence can be conceived of as an experience of unstable duality of feelings, simultaneous calling forth of counter-emotions, inability to overcome counter-feelings or contradictory evaluation of the same object of attachment” (p.8).</li> <li>3) “Social or structural ambivalence is, first, an expression of man’s duality as an individual and a social being. Secondly, it is a manifestation of the simultaneous independence and interdependence of social relations, roles and status, and the multiple loyalties, conflicts, and cross-pressures thereby created” (p.8).</li> </ol> <p>“Cultural ambivalence represents an inherent tension between the inner experience of attachment to values and an outward expression of this experience in a socially and normatively patterned way...” (p.8).</p>
<p>Handel (1979)</p>	<p>Normative expectation</p>	<p>“One that simultaneously values contrary courses of action for a single actor in a give situation” (p.227).</p>
<p>Raulin (1984)</p>	<p>Emotions</p>	<p>“The existence of simultaneous or rapidly interchangeable positive and negative feelings toward the same object or activity” (p.64).</p>

**Appendix II Summary of definitions of ambivalence**

Weigert (1991)	Emotions and motivations	“A mixture of positive and negative feelings towards the same object” (p.119) and “simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from pursuing a particular line of action” (p.416).
Lüscher and Pillemer (1998)	Emotions, Roles and status	<p>Sociological/structure ambivalence and personal/psychological ambivalence.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Contradictions at the level of social structure, evidenced in institutional resources and requirements, such as status, roles and norms (p.416)</li> <li>2) Contradictions at the subjective level, in terms of cognitions, emotional and motivations (p.416).</li> </ol> <p>“Ambivalence contains three key elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Ambivalences presuppose contradictions and conflicts. But this is not sufficient. They must be viewed as polarized and irresolvable;</li> <li>2) This irresolvability must be diagnosed by agents and their interpretations;</li> <li>3) Agents of interpretations can be the acting persons themselves, third parties such as therapists, or the bearers of scientific analysis” (p.9).</li> </ol>
Connidis and McMullin (2002)	Roles	Intergenerational relationships are embedded in social structures, which are “sets of social relations based on class, age, gender, race and ethnicity that produce lasting inequality”. These created contradictions and tensions that individual encounter as they negotiate their relationship (p.600).

**Appendix II Summary of definitions of ambivalence**

Lorenz-Meyer (2004)	Emotions, Normative	<p>Personal, structural and multiple ambivalence</p> <p>1) “Personal ambivalences refer to the simultaneity of opposing feelings and orientations such as closeness and distance that came to the force when participants imagined co-residential living arrangements with their parents...personal ambivalences are accessed not on the basis of (perceived) parental behaviour, feelings, or judgments in themselves, but in comparison to what respondents saw as socially appropriate for intergenerational relationship.” (p. 247)</p> <p>2) “Structural ambivalences refer to the simultaneity of opposing offerings, directives, or guidelines for action inherent in institutional structures, such as state agencies or social policies...assessed in comparison to what respondents desired and saw as appropriate in specific situations, thereby emphasizing the relevance of affective investments and personal identity for the interpretation of structural ambivalence.” (p.247)</p> <p>3) “Multiple ambivalences refer to overlapping personal and structural ambivalences that constitute multiple sources of, rather than a single cause for, decisional ambivalence.” (p.247)</p>
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Sources: Anonymous, 2000; Connidis and McMullin, 2002; Coser, 1966; Handel, 1979; Lorenz-Meyer, 2004; Lüscher, 1998; Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998; Merton and Barber, 1963; Raulin, 1984; Simpson and Weiner, 1989; Weigert, 1991.

**Respondent's personal information**

Interview date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Place : \_\_\_\_\_

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Year of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Place of born: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Marital status:    married            widowed            divorced

5. Education level: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Self-rated Health status:

          very good        good            fair        poor        very poor

7. Main source(s) of income

income from work: HKD \_\_\_\_\_            pension: HKD \_\_\_\_\_

spouse: HKD \_\_\_\_\_            children: HKD \_\_\_\_\_

savings: HKD \_\_\_\_\_            CSSA: HKD \_\_\_\_\_

OAA: HKD \_\_\_\_\_            other: HKD \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix III Respondent's personal information**

8. Type of housing: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Living arrangements:

spouse

son(s): \_\_\_\_\_

daughter(s): \_\_\_\_\_

daughter(s)-in-law: \_\_\_\_\_

son(s)-in-law: \_\_\_\_\_

grandchild(ren): \_\_\_\_\_

others: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Number of child(ren):

Child(ren): Total \_\_\_\_\_

Son(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Daughter(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Grandchild(ren): Total \_\_\_\_\_

Grandson(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Granddaughter(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**被訪者基本資料**

訪問日期：\_\_\_\_\_ 時間：\_\_\_\_\_ 地點：\_\_\_\_\_

1. 姓名：\_\_\_\_\_

2. 出生年份：\_\_\_\_\_ 年齡：\_\_\_\_\_

3. 出生地點：\_\_\_\_\_

4. 婚姻狀況： 已婚            喪偶            離婚

5. 教育程度：\_\_\_\_\_

6. 自評目前健康狀況：

          非常好            好            一般            差            非常差

7. 目前主要經濟來源和金額：

現在工作所得：港幣 \$ \_\_\_\_\_            退休金 / 長俸：港幣 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

配偶：港幣 \$ \_\_\_\_\_            子女供養：港幣 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

個人積蓄：港幣 \$ \_\_\_\_\_            綜合援助：港幣 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

生果金：港幣 \$ \_\_\_\_\_            其他：港幣 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix III Respondent's personal information

8. 住屋類型： \_\_\_\_\_

9. 居住狀況：

配偶 \_\_\_\_\_ 兒子 \_\_\_\_\_人 媳婦 \_\_\_\_\_人  
女兒 \_\_\_\_\_人 女婿 \_\_\_\_\_人 (外)孫兒/女 \_\_\_\_\_人  
其他 \_\_\_\_\_人

10. 兒女數目：

兒女：共 \_\_\_\_\_人 兒子： \_\_\_\_\_人 女兒： \_\_\_\_\_人  
(外)孫兒/女：共 \_\_\_\_\_人 孫兒： \_\_\_\_\_人 孫女： \_\_\_\_\_人

## Interview guidelines

### A. To construct a family tree

1. Interviewee's marital status
2. Interviewee's child(ren): number, age, marital status
3. Interviewee's grandchild(ren): number, age, marital status
4. Current living arrangements

### B. Expectations of intergenerational relationships and actual behaviour of adult children

#### Marriage

1. Have you expected your children would marry? (Expected/ not expected)  
Reason(s).
2. Reaction(s) to children's actual marital behaviour. (Accept/ignore/avoid/oppose/ others). Example(s).
3. Effectiveness of the reaction(s) (in terms of marital behaviour of adult children, quality of the relationships with children, etc)

#### Childbearing

1. Have you expected your children would give birth to a child? (Expected/ not expected). Reason(s).
2. Views towards "not producing male heir is the greatest grave to the family".  
Reason(s).
3. Ideal number of children. Reason(s).
4. Gender preference on children (More boys / More girls/ Equal number of boy and girl). Reason(s).
5. How do you feel or view toward the reproductive behaviour of your children? (In terms of number and gender of children). Reason(s). Did you have any mixed or ambivalent feelings with the fertility decision of your children?
6. Reaction(s) to the reproductive behaviour of children. (Accept/ignore/

avoid/oppose/others). Did you try to interfere with their reproductive decisions?

Example(s).

7. Effectiveness of the reaction(s) (in terms of reproductive behaviour of adult children, quality of the relationships with children, etc)

### **Social support**

1. Have you expected your adult children would provide social support in your old age? (Expected/ not expected) Reason(s).
2. Views towards “raising children as security in old age”. Reason(s).
3. Did your adult children provide social support to you? In which aspect(s)? (Financial; emotional; instrumental support (e.g. help in household chores)
4. Self-evaluation of adequacy of social support from adult children.
5. Did you have any mixed or ambivalent experiences towards social support provided by your children? Example(s)
6. How did you deal with these ambivalent experiences? (Accept/ ignore/ avoid/oppose/ others). Example(s).
7. Effectiveness of the reaction(s) (in terms of social support provided by adult children, quality of the relationships with children, etc)

### **Living arrangements**

1. Have you expected to live with your children in old age? (Expected/ not expected) Reason(s).
2. Did you have any mixed or ambivalent feeling over the decision of living arrangements? Example(s)
3. Are you satisfied with the current living arrangements? Reason(s) (in which aspects).
4. Under the current living arrangements, how is the interaction with your children? Do you find any aspects you which bother you? Example(s)
5. How did you deal with these ambivalent experiences? (Accept/ ignore/ avoid/oppose/ others) Example(s).
6. Effectiveness of the reaction(s) (in terms of the quality of the relationships with children, etc)

**C. Observation from interviewer**

Ending time of interview:

Whether the interview is successful:

Performance of respondent:

Reliability of respondent:

Characters of respondent:

Note: \_\_\_\_\_

## 訪談大綱

### A. 製作家庭圖

1. 被訪者的婚姻狀況
2. 被訪者的兒女：數目、年齡、婚姻狀況
3. 被訪者的(外)孫兒／女：數目、年齡、婚姻狀況
4. 目前居住狀況

### B. 兩代關係的期望與成年兒女的實際行為

#### 婚姻

1. 你曾否期望你的兒女結婚？(期望／不期望)。原因。
2. 對兒女婚姻決定的反應。(接受/忽略/避免/反抗/其他)。 例子。
3. 反應的成效 (例如就兒女的婚姻狀況及兩代關係的質素而言)。

#### 生育

1. 你曾否期望你的兒女生育？(期望／不期望)。原因。
2. 對“不孝有三，無後為大”的看法。
3. 理想的兒女數目。為什麼。
4. 對兒女性別的喜好 (多男孩/ 多女孩/ 相等數目的男孩及女孩)
5. 你對兒女生育有什麼看法或體會？(就兒女數目及性別)。 原因。在兒女生育決定方面，有沒有特別令你覺得為難、矛盾之處？
6. 你對兒女生育行為的反應是什麼？(接受/忽略/避免/反抗/其他)。 例子。曾否影響兒女生育的決定？
7. 反應的成效 (例如就兒女的生育行為及兩代關係的質素而言)。

### 社會支援

1. 你曾否期望在年老時得到兒女的供養？（期望 / 不期望）。原因。
2. 你對“養兒防老”的看法。原因。
3. 你的兒女有沒有向你提出支援？什麼方面？(金錢；情感；工具性支援，如協助家務)
4. 自評兒女所提供的支援的足夠程度。
5. 就兒女提供的支援，有沒有特別令你覺得為難、矛盾之處？例子。
6. 你怎樣處理這些矛盾的經驗？（接受/忽略/避免/反抗/其他）。 例子。
7. 反應的成效（例如就兒女的供養行為及兩代關係的質素而言）。

### 居住情況

1. 你曾否期望年老時與子女同住？（期望 / 不期望）。原因。
2. 就居住安排的選擇方面，有沒有特別令你覺得為難、矛盾之處？例子。
3. 你是否滿意目前居住安排？原因(那方面)。
4. 就目前的居住狀況，在與兒女的相處經驗中，有什麼體會？有沒有令你覺得為難的地方？ 例子。
5. 你怎樣處理這些矛盾的經驗。（接受/忽略/避免/反抗/其他）。 例子。
6. 反應的成效（例如就兩代關係的質素而言）。

### C. 訪問員的觀察

結束時間

訪問是否成功

被訪者的表現

被訪者的可信程度

被訪者的性格

備註： \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix V Profile of respondents**

**Profile of respondents**

Name	Age	Marital status	Place of Birth	Education	No of children	Children's details		Main source(s) of income	Living arrangements	Perceived health status
						Age	No. of Son/ Daughter			
Ms Tse	67	Widowed	Hong Kong	Nil	1 son (adopted)	42	1/1	CSSA	Alone	Good
					1 daughter (adopted)	41	1/1			
Ms Lee	68	Married	Hong Kong	Nil	2 sons	47	2/1	Children	With spouse, youngest son & his family	Good
						44	1/1			
					2 daughters	45	2/0			
						42	1/1			
Ms Song	68	Married	Hong Kong	Primary 5	2 sons	42	Unmarried	Children	With spouse	Good
						41	1/0			
					1 daughter	39	0/1			
Ms Choi	70	Widowed	Mainland China (fishermen)	Nil	3 sons	47	2/1	Children	With 2 unmarried daughters	Good
						44	1/1			
						25	1/0			
					7 daughters	42	Unmarried			
						40	1/0			
						37	1/1			
						34	2/0			
						32	1/1			
						29	1/1			
26	Unmarried									

The names of respondents are pseudonyms

**Appendix V Profile of respondents**

Name	Age	Marital status	Place of Birth	Education level	No of children	Children's details		Main source(s) of income	Living arrangements	Perceived health status
						Age	No. of son/daughter			
Ms Cheng	70	Widowed	Mainland China (village)	Primary 2	4 sons	46	1/1	Children	With an unmarried daughter	Good
						43	1/1			
						37	1/1			
						34	0/0			
					1 daughter	40	Unmarried			
Ms Ning	70	Married	Vietnam	Secondary 5	2 sons	48	0/1	Own savings	With spouse	Poor
						43	1/0			
					1 daughter	50	1/0			
Ms Lam	71	Widowed	Mainland China (city)	Nil	7 sons	49	2/0	Children	With an unmarried son & an unmarried daughter	Good
						47	1/1			
						45	2/0			
						45	1/0			
						40	1/1			
						39	1/0			
						34	Unmarried			
					2 daughters	42	0/0			
					36	Unmarried				
Ms Yee	71	Widowed	Mainland China (village)	Nil	1 son	46	2/0	OAA	With son and his family	Good

The names of respondents are pseudonyms

**Appendix V Profile of respondents**

Case	Age	Marital status	Place of Birth	Education level	No of children	Children's details		Main source(s) of income	Living arrangements	Perceived health status
						Age	No of son/daughters			
Ms Luk	71	Married	Hong Kong	Nil	3 sons	48	1/1	Children	With spouse, youngest son & his family	Poor
						45	2/0			
						41	0/1			
					2 daughters	46	0/1			
						43	1/0			
Ms Hung	74	Widowed	Mainland China (village)	Nil	3 sons	53	2/0	CSSA	Alone	Good
						51	0/1			
						48	1/1			
					2 daughters	55	2/0			
						47	1/1			
Ms Wen	74	Widowed	Mainland China (city)	Primary 4	2 sons	40	1/1	Children	Alone	Fair
						36	0/1			
					3 daughters	45	1/1			
						43	0/1			
						34	0/0			
Ms Siu	75	Widowed	Hong Kong	Nil	2 sons	50	2/1	Children	With youngest son & his family	Good
						47	2/1			
					2 daughters	52	2/1			
						49	1/1			

**Appendix V Profile of respondents**

Case	Age	Marital status	Place of Birth	Education level	No of children	Children's details		Main source(s) of income	Living arrangements	Perceived health status
						Age	No. of son /daughter			
Ms Yue	79	Widowed	Mainland China (city)	Secondary 5	1 son	57	1/2	Own savings	Alone	Poor
					1 daughter	55	1/0			
Ms Bai	84	Widowed	Mainland China (city)	Nil	4 sons	63	2/1	Children	With son & his family	Good
						55	1/2			
						53	1/1			
						50	1/0			
					1 daughter	52	2/0			
Ms Zhen	89	Widowed	Mainland China (village)	Nil	3 sons	58	2/1	Children	With youngest son & his family	Poor
						56	2/0			
						54	0/2			
					2 daughters	61	4/1			
						59	2/1			

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