Gender Differences in Cross-border Work in China: Some Consequences for Family Health

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Cross-border work may have a damaging effect on the well-being of a family and the situation may be related to gender differences. This paper is based on in-depth interviews with 40 Hong Kong workers who are working in China, to study the gender differences in response to cross-border work and its consequences for the family well-being. The issue of extra-marital relationships and sexual infidelity due to cross-border work will be discussed in detail and George Simmel’s concept of social geometry will be used as a conceptual frame. This paper will concentrate on: (1) why workers choose cross-border work? (2) how ‘crossing-borders’ and ‘distance’ engender extra-marital relationships/sexual infidelity and in turn effect the health of a family? (3) how cross-border workers parent their children and (4) the gender differences in response to work, family and extra-marital relationships.

Economic development and globalisation make Mainland China the factory of the world. Globalization also provides more chances for outsiders to engage in cross-border work. In the last decade, a number of Hong Kong’s local manufacturing activities have already moved to China to meet the global demands and to better survive under keen competition. In recent years, the Hong Kong SAR Government also encouraged Hong Kong people to work in China. Although working in China is already a trend for many Hong Kong people, cross-border work may have a damaging effect on the well-being of families. According to the reports of Hong Kong newspapers, it is easy for males to engage in sexual infidelity (Sexual Infidelity, 2005; Wives in Mainland, 2005). One survey shows that, about 40% of Hong Kong cross-border drivers has a mistress (Forty Percent of Cross-border, 2005). Another report shows that at least 100,000 mainland mistresses are believed to live in the Pearl River Delta region alone, are supported by Hong Kong and Taiwan executives who routinely travel to Guangdong province on business (Liu, 2001). According to the 1998 estimation of the Hong Kong SAR Government, (News in Family Affairs, 1999), about 1,165,000 people in Mainland China consisted of out-of-wedlock children of Hong Kong people. It seems that some serious marital problems may have happened in Hong Kong and many may have been related to cross-border work in China.

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This paper is based on in-depth interviews of 40 Hong Kong workers who were working in China, to study the gender differences in response to cross-border work and its consequences for family well-being. The issue of extra-marital relationships and sexual infidelity due to cross-border work will be discussed in detail and George Simmel’s concept of social geometry will be used as a frame of discussion.

In this paper, we define a ‘healthy family’ as a family who positively contributes to the growth and adaptation of its members to the society they are a part of. A healthy family provides various supports to its members, disseminate resources and share responsibility towards the young and the aged. It also can maintain good and effective communication, has the ability to adapt to circumstantial changes. It helps every family member to lead a positive and happy life and has a strong sense of responsibility to contribute to the society. To maintain healthy relationships among family members, a family needs time together. Cross-border work often disrupts this pattern.

Current Situation in Cross-border Work between Hong Kong & China

Macro-Economy of China: Following the globalization and greater investment opportunities in China, the macro-economy of China has enjoyed a huge development. In 2001, the international imports/exports of China (excluding Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan) were worth US$ 510 billion (Asian Development Bank, 2001). The Pearl River Delta Region of China is currently emerging as one of the important global industrial and manufacturing bases.

The labor cost difference between Hong Kong and China is substantial. In Hong Kong, the average monthly income is US$1,282. In Shenzhen, a modern city right next to Hong Kong, the average monthly income is US$220 (BPF Report, 2001). This difference often lures employers to move their production lines from Hong Kong to China and they provide more and more chances for the experienced workers in Hong Kong to work there as cross-border workers. Cross-border work not only concentrates on logistics, but also covers manufacturing, wholesale, retail, import/export trades, restaurants/hotels, financing, insurance, real estate and business services (Census & Statistics Department, 2005, p. 16, Table 2d). Occupations mainly cover managers and administrators, professionals, clerks, craft and related workers (Census & Statistics Department, 2005, p. 17, Table 2e).

Number & Background of Hong Kong Workers in China

In the Special Topics Report (No.42) published by the Hong Kong SAR Government (Census & Statistics Department, 2005), there were 237,500 Hong Kong residents (7.2% of the total number of employed persons) who had worked in China. In 1992, the number was only 64,200. This number has almost quadrupled in the past ten years or so.

Of the 237,500 workers, 65.7% were aged 30-49, higher than the
corresponding proportion of 58.6\% for the total employed population at the time of enumeration. According to the report, persons aged 30 and over had a higher rate of having worked in the Mainland, probably due to their substantial work experience. There were proportionally more males (75.5\%) than females (24.5\%), with the sex ratio being 3,088 males per 1,000 females. For the total population, 54.5\% of the workforce was male and 45.5\% was female, with the sex ratio being 1,198 males per 1,000 females. Compared with the total employed population, those 237,500 persons who had worked in the Mainland generally had a higher educational attainment. Some 42\% of them had higher educational backgrounds, versus 28.9\% of the total employed population. Of the 237,500 persons, 81\% was engaged at the higher end of the occupation hierarchy while working in the Mainland, versus 33.6\% of the total employed population. The vast majority (87.3\%) worked in Guangdong Province. The median monthly employment earnings was HK$16,000 (HK$7.8=US$1), much higher than the median monthly employment earnings of the total employed population (HK10,000) in Hong Kong. This was because a larger proportion of those employed persons were engaged at the upper end of the occupation hierarchy.

**METHODOLOGY**

This paper is based on in-depth interviews with 40 Hong Kong workers who have worked in China, to study the gender differences in response to cross-border work and its consequences for family health. A snowball-purposive sampling method was used to include the views of diverse people in cross-border work. Through the connections of the authors and their research team, we asked our informants to find suitable respondents for interviews. We chose respondents who had at least one year of cross-border work experience and who belong to different levels in the occupational hierarchy. Those who occupy the manager or director levels in the organization are classified as ‘high’, those who are officers are classified as ‘middle’, whereas front-line junior workers and clerical staff are classified as ‘low’. The three levels of 40 respondents have similar proportions in the samples—13 cases (32.5\%) as ‘high’ (11 males/2 females), 14 cases (35.0\%) as ‘middle’ (9 males/5 females) and 13 cases (32.5\%) as ‘low’ (11 males/2 females).

The interviews were carried out in Chinese by the authors and trained interviewers. All interviews followed a pre-established guideline, but emergent discussions were free to deviate from these guidelines. All of the interviewers have sociological training and have received a short course for in-depth interviews conducted by the authors. The interviews were conducted between June 2004-December 2006. To ensure the confidentiality of the respondents, all names used in this paper are pseudo names and the special features of the respondents have been deleted to preserve confidentiality.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this paper is cross-border work and its problems. Following the trend of globalization, speed of mobility has made cross-border work easier. Due to the availability of work, people no longer stay in one place forever; they have more chances to cross the border to work in other countries. Transportation is one of the occupations that need cross-border workers. The U.S. and the United Kingdom also face a shortage of drivers (Samples, 2006; Logistics & Transport Focus, 2005), because there is a high turnover of drivers and the nature of cross-border work makes drivers suffer from high stress, fatigue, higher percentages of heart disease, junk food addiction and a lack of exercise (Britt, 2006). In the past, drivers were mainly recruited from the white, male and middle-aged group in the United Kingdom, but now there is a need to extend the pool of applicants to include women and ethnic minorities (Commercial Motor, 2006). Besides the transportation industry, domestic maid trade is another kind of cross-border work. Pisani & Yoskowitz (2002) use the case of the maid trade in South Texas of the US to show the importance of the push and pull factors of the two places in cross-border work. Earley and Erez (1997) argue that there is a direct relationship among culture, managerial beliefs and practices. It is a danger to assume that a standardized management practice without adjustment can fit in different cultures. Different cultural values shape different meanings of the work. Facing universal rules amid cultural diversities, to achieve success in cross-cultural management, managers should understand both their own cultures and cultures of the other countries (Neelankavil, Mathur & Zhang, 2000). Cable (1996) argues that within a global ‘capitalist’ model, the problems surrounding harmonization or mutual toleration of cultural standards and managing globalization will not be easy. Salk and Brannen (2000) think that to explain patterns of relationships in multi-enterprises, national culture remains an important factor. Race and accent might create and maintain in-group preferences in some types of interactions (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Cultural distance with the others hinders cross-border acquisition performance by increasing the costs of integration (Morosini, 1998). Cultural distance includes distance in the norms, routines and repertoires for organizational design, new product development and other aspects of management that are found in the workers and the hosts countries of origin (Kogut & Singh, 1988). In the Chinese society, seeking harmony and conformity not only tend to govern all interpersonal relations, but also enjoy social and cultural approval (Hsu, 1981). Social networks, prior experience, guanxi (interpersonal relationship) are also emphasized in Mainland China (Wong & Ellis, 2002). Guanxi means backgrounds such as common hometown, dialect, kinship or friendship, workplaces and social clubs. Due to cultural diversity and ethical climate influences organizational behavior, deviant behavior such as sexual infidelity, gam-
bling and alcoholism may appear in some organizations (Peterson, 2002). Studies have shown that deviant behavior not only has a financial impact on the organization, but also negative social and psychological effects on the workers themselves (Hollinger & Clark, 1982; Robinsonson & Greenberg, 1998).

It threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). It appears that personality variables alone are unlikely to account for a significant portion of the variance in predicting deviant workplace behavior (Robinson & Greenberg, 1998). Workplace deviant behavior may be best predicted based on individual factors, social and interpersonal factors and organizational climate (Boye & Jones, 1997; Vardi, 2001). For deviant behavior of social infidelity, a study shows that it is related to stronger sexual interests, more permissive sexual values, lower subjective satisfaction with one’s own marital union, weaker network ties to the partner and greater sexual opportunities (Treas & Giesen, 2000). Social contexts also determine opportunities for deviant behavior. Separate lives and overnight travel are more likely to lead to relations with multiple sex partners (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Wellings et al., 1994). Besides the discussion of cultural differences and their influences, Park’s concept of “marginal man” helps us to understand how the cross-border situation may impact individuals. Park suggests that marginal man is “a person in a dilemma, or state of mental conflict, by reason of his participation in two different, distinct cultural groups. He is not fully acceptable to either of the values and standards of either, nor is he fully acceptable to either of the groups with which he identifies” (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969: 243). George Simmel’s study in “social geometry” (Delaney, 2004, pp. 118-119) provides additional insight for us to analyze cross-border work. He argues that distance from the individual determines how the individual evaluates something. The role of distance in social relations is important, because “the properties of forms and the meanings of things are a function of the relative distances between individuals and other individuals or things” (Delaney, 2004, p. 118).

In the relation between work and family, people tend to work outside simply as a means of securing the well-being of their families (Beaujot, 2000). Beaujot also concludes that most people place a high priority on three goals: to live in a rewarding and continuing relationship, to have and raise children and to have secure and meaningful work. People do not want to give up the intimacy and commitment that families can provide. Bibby (1995) similarly found that over three-quarters of the adult respondents in his study of human needs wanted “family life” and “being loved”. These were higher priorities than “a comfortable life”. Although individuals like family and love, families can be areas of abuse, serious conflict and neglect or inadequate economic provision
Different family members will always view the realities of family differently (Fox, 1997). As in Longfellow’s rhyme about the little girl, for the family too, “When it is good it is very, very good, but when it is bad it is horrid” (Beaujot, 2000).

To sum up the relation between work and family, there are three major models—the separate spheres model, the spillover effects model and the interactive model (Chow & Berheide, 1988). The separate spheres model takes family and work as distinctive systems, with the family as a domestic place for women and work as a public arena for men. For societal stability, this model suggests that family and work should remain separate in order to function properly. This model implies reducing women’s contribution to society, as well as reducing men’s contribution to the well-being of the family except as a provider (Chow & Berheide, 1988). Due to social development, it is difficult to have a fixed gender division of labor; the implication of this model is not suitable for the current situation of work and family. This model is rarely used by social scientists today.

Unlike the separate spheres model, the spillover effects model recognizes that either the work place or family may have spillover effects on the other (Chow & Berheide, 1988). This model considers that the work system has a greater impact on the family system; the reverse relationship of the impact of family on work life is seldom considered. This model fails to recognize the importance of the effects of family life on workers and the workplace and also neglects the importance of organizational effects and community care.

The interactive model treats work and family as interrelated social systems and recognizes the independent as well as the joint effects of family and work on social conditions of individuals. This model is most suitable for analyzing the current situation of work and family. This model allows us to use community care, intervention by the government or family-friendly policies in the company as an intervention effort to solve the family-work balancing problems. Although not a family theorist, Kanter (1977) points out five aspects of the structure of occupations and of the organization of work life, which have dominant influences in shaping the family system. These aspects include: (1) job absorptiveness, (2) time and timing, (3) reward and resources, (4) cultural dimension of work and (5) emotional climate. On the other hand, Warren & Johnson (1995) point out that family-friendly workplace support can have a positive function on solving work-family strain. It can go through family friendly organizational culture, supportive supervisory practices and available family-oriented benefits to solve the problem to adjust to the needs of family care.
FINDINGS

We report findings in the following four aspects: (1) reasons to choose cross-border work, (2) the influence of ‘crossing-borders’ and ‘distance’ on extra-marital relationships and sexual infidelity, (3) parenting duties of cross-border workers and (4) gender differences in response to work, family and extra-marital relationships.

Reasons to Choose Cross-border Work
Since Mainland China has become the factory of the world, there are many companies that have their branches or production lines in Mainland China. Ng (27), an unmarried woman executive, told us:

*Because the company that I am working for has production lines in the Pearl River Delta region, I need to go there to supervise the local staff, to chair meetings and to contact our clients frequently. Because we have a different work culture from the local people, we cannot expect them to automatically work hard and handle the job well. I need to surprise every time.*

Yeung, (38), a male executive explained:

*Some of our clients feel that, if the companies have no production lines in Mainland China, their running cost will surely be higher, then they would not order goods from what they perceive to be the expensive companies. In this circumstance, even if we are not willing to set up production lines in Mainland China, we are forced to follow the trend. After we set up production lines there, we become cross-border workers.*

Another 25-year-old man, Kam, had just two years of working experience in China. He told the research team that he wanted to have a greater exposure when he was still young, so he chose to work in China. He explained,

*When I just graduated from the university, I wanted to experience more. Although my salary here is much lower than a job in Hong Kong, this salary is already higher than the local workers. As I am young, the opportunity cost is still low and the experience that I get from my work is greater than what I lose.*

The push factor from the working situation in Hong Kong is a critical factor. Yeung (38), told us that he chose to work in China several years ago because the original company fired him. He said,

*My original boss set very high quotas that I could not meet and I was fired afterwards. After a short unemployment period, I followed a former colleague to work in China. In fact, I like to work in Hong Kong, but to survive is the most important consideration.*
From a general profile of the Hong Kong cross-border workers in China, we find that they are mostly male, middle aged, with higher educational levels and work at higher ranks in the job hierarchy with higher pay. Our sample also reflects a similar situation where 77.5% are males and only 22.5% are females. Only two young respondents are receiving a salary of less than HK$10,000, the others are receiving more than HK$10,000. Although they earn more in China than in Hong Kong, only five out of 40 respondents wish to stay in China forever. Most said if they could find a suitable job in Hong Kong, they would go back.

The Influence of “crossing-borders” and “distance” on Extra-marital Relationships & Sexual Infidelity

Although cross-border work has many positive aspects, there are also many problems. Distance is commonly correlated with extra-marital relationships and sexual infidelity. Distance: ‘Distance’ is an important factor which influences behavior; it leads individuals to compare and calculate situations and creates changes in their expectations and behavior. The distance from the place of origin also discourages people to relocate, unless it provides enough attraction to overcome this negative factor. Chan (42) came to China to work, because he had been promoted to a manager from officer with a 70% salary increase. He told the research team: “If the salary is the same as my job in Hong Kong, why should I come here? The prospect and the salary are the two factors that I consider”.

Wong (45) had also a similar situation. His company not only gave him HK$40,000 monthly, but he also had a 1,500 ft² apartment. Also, his company provided him with a private car and a servant for his own use. Wong said: “This is really a life of the upper class. If I kept working in Hong Kong, I don’t think the company would have provided such fringe benefits to me”.

We find that with longer distances, there are fewer chances to understand the situations and people well and greater chances to contrast cultural differences. Ng (38, female), said: “Local people have their own values and manners. We are really experiencing cultural differences with them. If I have a choice, I don’t want to make friends with them”.

If the location of the workplace is far from the household, individuals are forced to live near the workplace. If their family members do not move with them, both cross-border workers and their separated family members must live independently. Distance also discourages workers from communicating, contacting and looking after their families in traditional ways and members of the family also lose control over the workers. The moral standards over the cross-border workers become diluted. They can follow the other cross-border workers’ norms and may behave in a way that is contrary to the socially expected manners. Cheung (42) who is a logistics company general manager said:

It is very common that our colleagues have mistresses
there. Although we need to behave ourselves, many cross-border workers enjoy this uncontrolled life-style to have a mistress or a one-night stand. If you are in the same situation, I think you may behave in a similar way. To have self-control facing great temptation is really difficult, especially with no supervision from our wives.

Crossing-borders: ‘Crossing-borders’ is another important factor which affects individuals’ expectations and behavior. For the case of Hong Kong people working in China, the border is a significant boundary to formally distinguish the two regions. After crossing, the individuals develop a comparative sense of advantage or disadvantage for themselves, and act accordingly. If they find no advantage in the other region, it is very difficult to convince them to find a cross-border job. Kwok (47, male) told the research team:

*Every time when I cross the border, I have a very strong awareness that I am a Hong Kong person. I like to maintain a style that says I have a difference from the locals. I never dress like them, because I don’t want to assimilate with them. Psychologically it helps me to maintain my superiority.*

Due to the long distances, heavy workloads, crossing-borders and long travel times, workers have to deal with tiredness and stress. Ko (56), a male CEO explains:

*Why we need to do cross-border work? Because there are many projects which need us to handle them. Our selling point is because we have a distinguished ability. Whether we can handle the jobs as expected is what we are concerned about. More salary means more workload and responsibility. It is easy for us to suffer from stress.*

Tiredness and stress also push cross-border workers to search ways to release the tension. Going to the sauna, bar or other entertainment places are common ways. Interaction with the local people strengthens their own status awareness and differentiation. For the case of Hong Kong cross-border workers, cross-border work makes them feel they have upward mobility and have an advantage when compared with the local people. Their subjective awareness seems consistent with the objective reality, because their earnings are much higher and the living standard in Mainland China is lower than Hong Kong. These two factors together mean that they can afford a luxurious style of life. Chen (43, male) said: “We can afford to spend several hundred or thousand a night. This high consumption ability strengthens our sense of superiority”.

Cross-border work & interaction with local people: Loneliness, work stress and the work culture in Mainland China are the three factors that motivate cross-border workers to search for relief. Whether they engage in
deviant sexual behavior or not depends on their interest on sex, the temptation of their leisure activities and their struggle with self-control. Why do many cross-border workers engage in extra-marital relationships and sexual infidelity? Even for people work in Hong Kong, there are possibilities for engaging in sexual infidelity. These possibilities are more frequent for cross-border workers since many women in Mainland China are willing to accommodate their sexual needs. Many cross-border workers treat extra-marital relationships as ‘normal’ social activity. The working climate of cross-border workers also encourages them to do so. Moreover, some sex partners or mistresses of the cross-border workers try to use their sexual relationship to advance their own gains. Many respondents told the research team that to have a relationship with Hong Kong businessmen means to have a chance for upward mobility. Local people and their families will consequently have a better life, migrate to Hong Kong or buy a new house. It was found that if the local people are originally from poor districts such as the rural districts or Western provinces, the desire is very strong. Pong (50), a cross-border driver, told the research team:

I have three mistresses in three places in Guangdong province, all are from rural areas. They accepted me not because I am handsome. They think that to link up with a Hong Kong person means to have an entrance permit to have a stable life and finally go to Hong Kong.

Ng (29), an unmarried female cross-border worker explained:

Some said that local females have very low moral standards, they don’t think to have a sexual relationship with a stranger is a serious matter. Some of them treat it as a means to move upward. They don’t mind becoming a mistress, but they do mind how many benefits they can get from this sexual exchange.

How do cross-border workers feel about their deviant behavior? They say that it is very common for cross-border workers to engage in sexual infidelity. One reason is because of the high work stress and the other is the environmental factor. Also, the other workers treat it as common. Kwok (43, male), explained:

Many cross-border workers at first do it to release stress. They like to use sexual excitement as a means to achieve this goal. They don’t treat this sexual relationship seriously, but only think that they can use money to find satisfaction. In the Pearl River Delta Region, if you use HK$3,000 to find sexual release, there are many choices. Very few cross-border workers want to use this means to find a wife. They are only concerned about their immediate sexual satisfaction.

Common practices of cross-border workers also forces them to venture into sexual infidelity. They consider having sexual infidelity
with local people as a common entertainment with no guilt and they are not afraid of any sexual diseases such as AIDS being transmitted to them through sexual intercourse. They do not worry about getting infected with sexually transmitted diseases, infecting their wives, or breaking up their families. Although they engage in intimate relationships with local people, this is not a signal that they are assimilated into the local world. Many of them retain a strong sense of a distinguished identity. Leung, (55), a male general manager of a cross-border transportation company, said,

There are many transportation workers who engage in sexual infidelity. In fact, most cross-border workers treat this sexual infidelity as a norm. From my company, we have no regulation to forbid or control their sexual life, because this is their own private life.

Hong Kong people make no long-term plans with their mistresses, because immediate sexual exchange is fundamentally different from long-term marriage. It is only an instrumental sex-money exchange and need not be based on true love. Wong (53) said:

I don’t know how long my relationship with my mistress will last. I have no long-term plans and no expectations of true love. Maybe, if I can find another partner better than this one, I can change it. It is not suitable to take it seriously.

Parenting duties of cross-border workers: Hong Kong cross-border workers find it difficult to parent their children. Most of them have a heavy workload and need to stay in China for a long time. Especially for middle and senior management workers, they face the dilemma to balance the work duty and maintain a socially desirable family life. For the interest of work, they feel the need to spend more time to supervise local workers and to find ways to extend their networks with clients. For the interest of family, they need to maintain a socially desirable family life with their spouse and children. In reality, cross-border workers give priority to their work than to their families. They give up some parenting duties to adjust to their work demands. Due to the special nature of cross-border work, geographical separation from family members and irregular times of home- visits, there is time crunch for parenting. Chu (48) said that since he needed to stay in China for three to four nights a week, it was difficult to handle his family affairs:

Several years ago, I only needed to go to China one night a week, but now due to the heavy workload and keen competition, I need to go for three to four nights a week. Every time when I come back from China it was always so very late that my family members were asleep, it is very difficult for me to carry the family duty of parenting children.

Small family size also affects parenting duties. Due to the decrease in family size as the trend in Hong Kong, in normal situations, a family
has only three to four members. If one of the family members is working in China, the major family duties shift to the spouse or employed domestic worker. The family may start functioning like a single-parent family. A single parent plays the dual roles as father and mother at the same time. Family members behave independently. The two-parent family becomes a concept rather than a reality. The cross-border workers’ family responsibilities become ambiguous and the functions played by the cross-border workers become marginalized. This shift in duties to a certain extent can relieve the domestic workload of the cross-border workers, but does not replace their role in emotional support. The tie between family members becomes weak and the importance of parents on children’s lives also becomes weak. To strengthen the family unity, economic support becomes the primary means. Family relationships are linked in a utilitarian manner. Yeung (49) said,

*When I am in China, my family members in Hong Kong handle family affairs themselves. It is not practical to wait for me to deal with everything, or ask my view by telephone, because long-distance telephone calls in China are very expensive. My family members lead an independent family life. My most important function in the family is giving money to them.*

How to balance cross-border work with the parenting duties depends on the flexibility of the working duties and the subjective willingness of the cross-border workers to balance the needs of work with family needs. In a patriarchal society, there are strong gender role differences in parenting of children. Male cross-border workers emphasize the importance of work than family duties. In contrast, female cross-border workers emphasize family than work. This is also the norm in Chinese tradition. One female respondent (Chow, 38), said:

*At first, I did not resist being sent to the Mainland for a long time. After I got married several years ago, I needed more time to spend with the family. I found it difficult to balance my work in China with my family life at home. After my daughter was born, I had no choice and asked for a permanent post in Hong Kong.*

A male respondent (Chan, 41), said:

*After my children were born, I became aware of the importance of family time with my children. I have tried to ask for more time at home, but it seems not so easy. Sometimes when I am back, my wife and children have already gone to sleep and communication chances are decreased.*

Leung (48, male) said:

*My work requires that I entertain outside with clients for about four days a week and I always stay long in China.*
My home in Hong Kong seems to have become a hotel for me. For men, I think to emphasize work more than family is correct. Family members always understand and are willing to accept, even if we cannot play the family roles.

Gender Differences in Cross-border Work

According to the situations of our respondents, the gender differences with cross-border work can be summarized as in Table I. It includes the following:

Table I. Gender Differences in Integration to Cross-border Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Accept equal gender status or males being superior to females.</td>
<td>1. Accept equal gender status or males being superior to females.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Perceive Hong Kong cross-border workers as having a higher status in China and find it easy to find the opposite sex as sexual or marital partners.</td>
<td>2. Perceive Hong Kong cross-border workers as having a higher status in China and find it difficult to find the opposite sex as sexual or marital partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perceive great pressure from work than family.</td>
<td>3. Perceive great pressure from family than work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Concentrate more on work.</td>
<td>4. Concentrate more on family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Like to release their emotions in China.</td>
<td>5. Like to control their emotions in China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Not willing to move their family to China.</td>
<td>6. Not willing to move their family to China.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Values on gender status & the cross-border workers’ status in China: There is no gender difference for accepting equal gender status or accepting the male superiority. Both male and female cross-border workers perceive that they have a higher status than local workers in China. It is not surprising that they perceived it in an ethnocentric way. One important indicator is their salary is much higher than the local workers and many of them occupy important positions in the companies, which also leads them to feel that they have a high status in China. A male respondent (Cheung, 44), said:

In a normal situation, the salaries of Hong Kong cross-border workers are much higher than the local workers. We have at least HK$ 12,000 (US$ 1,538) per month and many even higher. For the local workers, the normal salaries are HK$2,000 (US$ 256). If they can earn HK$5,000 (US$ 641), they are already treated as high salary workers. In terms of position, the senior posts are always occupied by cross-border workers, because local workers lack international working experience and they still need a long time to learn.

Male cross-border workers treat their high status as an advantage in finding sexual or marital partners. Lee (51) explained:
In China, the living standard is much lower than in Hong Kong. If you have HK$ 5,000 to spend, you can have a very good living standard in China. It is not difficult for Hong Kong people to find a beautiful girl willing to make friends or even make love with you. Local people think to have a Hong Kong link is the path to a better life and as a path for moving up, so we have the advantage for making friends.

But female cross-border workers are more discriminating against Mainland Chinese. They find it a barrier to do the same as male cross-border workers. For male cross-border workers, because they have an advantage in material conditions, they can easily interact with local people if they want. For female cross-border workers, although they perceive males as having a higher status than females, they perceive Hong Kong people as having a higher status than local people. Thus, their ethnocentric views make them believe that they are superior to local men. To a certain extent, the reality of their earning capability and position also supports this view. As a result, they reject local Chinese men as sexual or marital partners. They also avoid the problem of sexual infidelity. One female respondent (Chan, 35) said:

*Frankly speaking, I hate to interact frequently with local people, they are not so polite. If we take part in a social gathering with local people, they force you to drink. Also, many people try to have an intimate relationship with the opposite sex. That is why I avoid taking part in those kinds of activities.*

A male respondent (Wong, 44) said:

*I am sure Hong Kong people feel that they have an advantage when compared with local people. As a Hong Kong person, I don’t mind interacting with local girls, especially the beautiful ones. To have a one night stand or mistress is very common for Hong Kong and Taiwan cross-border workers.*

Response to pressure from work & family: In general, male cross-border workers perceive great pressure from work than from their families. In contrast, female workers perceive great pressure from family than from work. Male workers are willing to stay in China for work, because working in China provides opportunities and prospects for their careers. Female workers prefer to respond to the needs of the family rather than to fight for the opportunities and prospects for their careers. Some of them only want to stay in China for a short time. Wong (29), who just got married to a man working in Hong Kong, said she was now applying for a transfer to stay in Hong Kong. She explained: “It is different for females to stay working in China when we have a family. I need to be with my husband. If I always stay in China, I am afraid my husband will have another woman.”
Emotional relief: Each individual has his/her moral standards to govern his/her own behavior. Some have higher standards, but some do not. However, besides moral standards, the environmental factors and level of self-control together determine workers’ actions. Social control and self-control may be stronger in their own society due to social ties, but weaker in foreign places that have weakened social ties. On the other hand, social approval versus social sanctions for behavior may have gendered differences. In the case of sexual infidelity, Chinese culture has serious objections to females’ sexual indiscretions, but show more tolerance for males’ sexual behavior. This difference also leads to gendered differences in response to sexual temptation. Male cross-border workers like to release their emotions in China, but females contain their emotions. In general, male cross-border workers feel relatively weak in terms of social control and self-control. Their loneliness and need for entertainment make them look for social outlets, and they know that the social sanctioning of male indiscretions will be weak. Because of their relative advantage in finances, some local people do not mind making friends or having intimate relations with them. In turn, sexual infidelity becomes ‘normalized’. Cheung (48) said:

It is so stressful and lonely to stay in China. We need activities to lessen our stress. To have one-night stands is common for males. I don’t think many of us have very good self-control.

As for male cross-border workers, if they want to integrate into the local community, it is a socially expected view for them to make friends with local people. Some of them eventually get married with local people and some have mistresses. If they already have a family in Hong Kong, sexual infidelity may cause problems. Wife abuse and/or divorce are two possible outcomes.

For female cross-border workers, they are more aware of the status of Hong Kong people than the gender difference. Sexual temptation does not seem to have an effect on them. Hence, there are no sexual infidelity problems in female cross-border workers. Mrs. Leung said:

Since Hong Kong females don’t want to be treated as low status people, they are aware of the extent of integration to the local community. Local people cannot attract them to have sexual relationships; there are few or no sexual infidelity problems in female cross-border workers. For me, of course I will behave in the same manner as other Hong Kong females.

Refusing to move their family to China: It is a common phenomenon that both male and female Hong Kong cross-border workers refused to move their family to China. From our respondents, only five out of 40 cases considered moving the whole family to China. They wanted their spouse and children to stay in Hong Kong. The most important reasons they gave were: (1) They do not want to lose the chance of their spouse
earning more in Hong Kong, (2) They are not sure how long they will stay in China; in case they lose their job, their spouse will still have work in Hong Kong and let the family have a more stable financial situation, (3) There is better educational opportunities for their children in Hong Kong. One respondent, Au Yeung (30), explained:

> My wife is a school teacher in Hong Kong. If our family moves to China, she will lose her job. Also, having no good school training for our children means no good prospects for them. We need to stay in Hong Kong for their future.

Wong (32) explained,

> We need to consider the whole family. For males to work in China is acceptable. But if the whole family moves to China, it will mean having great loss of income and we cannot enjoy the good education in Hong Kong. We do not want earning less money and at the same time, decreasing the educational prospects of my children.

## DISCUSSION

### Barriers for Integration

Globalization and economic development in Mainland China have created a need for cross-border work. Economic interests make Hong Kong people increase contact with Mainland people and also lead them to enjoy better prospects and greater economic development. However, it also has negative effects. How cross-border workers interact with local people is in fact a problem. From Simmel’s view of social geometry, distance and crossing-borders increase individuals’ motivation to engage in social comparison processes. People ask themselves who they are which brings in problems of identity and integration. Since cross-border workers are basically motivated by relative advantage, it seems not easy for them to give up this sense of privilege. On the contrary, they need to find ways to show off their status advantage. Therefore, social comparisons create barriers for integration for both males and females. Male cross-border workers’ advantages and luxurious life style allow intimate links with local females. But this does not mean integration. On the contrary, interaction with local people increases their sense of ‘distinction’ and ‘superiority’. Female cross-border workers, on the other hand, refuse most contact with local people and limit their social network to Hong Kong people. This tendency prevents them from engaging in sexual infidelity.

The nature of cross-border work creates divided loyalties. Cross-border workers, on the one hand are expected to integrate with local people, but on the other hand, demonstrate their difference from them. Although they refuse to be assimilated, when the differences of Hong Kong people with local Chinese people narrows, Hong Kong workers’ relative advantage will be decreased. Eventually, they may be marginalized, or just become a group in the local community. Although it is not
an immediate problem, more Hong Kong people are aware of the long-
term possibility of being marginalized. Recently, there was a thoughtful
discussion in the media (Wake Up Hong Kong, 2007) about this issue. It
is inevitable that their relative advantage cannot last forever. After they
lose their advantage, they will also find it difficult to be accepted by the
Hong Kong community. This situation is similar to the situation of
Park’s “marginal man” (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969, 243). Cross-
border workers have identity problems generating from split loyalties:
whether to identity with Hong Kong or China.

**High Work Stress & Heavy Workloads**

The high work stress and heavy workloads are part of the com-
mon working phenomena in cross-border work. In keen competition
with others, these pressures seem inevitable in contemporary societies.
Due to the long travel times, workers feel tired. To reduce tiredness and
in order to handle more jobs in China, cross-border workers are forced
to stay in China for longer durations. As mentioned above (Blumstein &
Schwartz, 1983; Wellings et al., 1994), separate lives and overnight travel
provide opportunities for sexual infidelity and also weaken family ties.
From the interactive model (Chow & Berheide, 1988), we know that
work affects family life and family relationships. People involved have
their own family strategies to adjust to the arrangement in order to
avoid problems, but family-friendly policies from the employers are nec-
essary for maintaining a family health. When family relations are good,
family members are likely to adjust their roles and time to meet the new
requirements. On the other hand, if family relationships break down,
family strategies cannot function. To strengthen family ties, it is impor-
tant that the companies set up an upper limit in travel times, to allow
workers to go home to fulfill their family duties.

**Adapting to the Work Culture in China**

How to adapt to the work culture in China is another issue.
Although Hong Kong and Mainland China are both Chinese societies,
there still exists a substantial difference between the work culture and
the meaning of work. Cable (1996) argues that mutual toleration of stan-
dards will not be easy. If workers need to survive in China, it is natural
and reasonable for them to adapt to the local work culture.
Unfortunately, the work culture in Mainland China emphasizes enter-
taining in nightclubs or high-class restaurants. These informal means are
functional because they allow traders to discuss their affairs in a free
and relaxed atmosphere and to compensate for stress. In China, social
gatherings with the company of nightclub dancers or sex-workers are
full of temptation. Work culture, work stress and lowered social con-
trols, all together make sexual infidelity common among cross-border
workers.
Studies have shown that deviant behavior costs the organization and its members dearly (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). From the perspective of outsiders, to engage in extra-marital affairs and sexual infidelity may be viewed as immoral. Workplaces want to be neutral, they feel that they have no right to intervene in the workers’ private lives. From the view of the cross-border workers, some of them use this kind of activity to satisfy their emotional and sexual needs. They may not consider thoroughly that their sexual actions may break up their own families, or feel guilt for their sexual infidelity. Women who are willing to be their sexual partners can get financial gains through this sexual exchange. Through becoming mistresses of cross-border workers, they may achieve upward mobility. They are not likely to feel guilt or shame as a mistress: instead, they are likely to think sex as a fair exchange. It seems that there is not an easy answer to the problem of sexual infidelity. The Chinese government is aware of the importance of maintaining a harmonious family. Currently people are not allowed to legally patronize sex-workers in China. Although it is still common, cross-border workers who patronize sex-workers face the risk of being arrested by the police.

Geographical Separation & Its Impact on Families

Long physical distance and geographical separation from family members also decrease the frequency of face-to-face contact with family members. Cross-border workers find it difficult to play the roles as parents and spouses, have difficulty to have a ‘normal’ family life and have less time for communication with family members. Their personal importance in family matters weakens. Family relationships thus become utilitarian and lack sentimental depth. Family becomes only a concept rather than a reality.

On the other hand, while geographical separation decreases the bond with the family; it gives cross-border workers more freedom. It weakens family ties, weakens their sense of family loyalty and family responsibility and weakens the perception of social control. If their self-control cannot overcome the sexual temptation and the situation is permissive, sexual infidelity will happen. To avoid the negative consequences, either cross-border workers should stay in Hong Kong, or move their families to China. In these two ways, they can maintain a socially desirable family life. When asked about how to solve the issue of geographical separation, cross-border workers seem to give priority to their family’s benefits rather than themselves. Most of them prefer family members to stay in Hong Kong for work and schooling while they stay in China to work. This strategy tries to protect the financial interests of the family as well as the educational prospect of the children, but there is no guarantee to maintain steady and good family relationships under the conditions.
CONCLUSION

Economic developments in China and globalization have made China the factory of the world. Cross-border work has become widespread. Although society welcomes the positive economic functions of cross-border work, it needs to pay more attention to its negative effects. From the lessons we have learnt, problems in cross-border work include cultural identity issues, deviant behavior and balancing work and family. The source of the problems comes from the geographical separation from families and from the stresses of work. In Georg Simmel’s social geometry analysis (Turner et al., 2002), ‘distance’ is the structural factor that affects the individual’s thinking and human relationships. Many problems related to cross-border workers are not accidental. The geographical separation weakens the family bonds and provides sexual temptations. It also increases social isolation.

Though some Hong Kong people hold ethnocentric views towards others, or abuse their relative advantage to search for sexual satisfaction, their relative advantage is a merit for them to survive in China. But this advantage also creates problems. When workers feel lonely and search for transient sexual exchange, the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, family breakups and wife abuse may be the result.

This study may be informative to people who have to move to other countries to work or to live. As to the issue of cultural diversity, all societies have their own work culture and the culture is related to their special features, beliefs and interests. No matter how we evaluate the other culture, or whether we think that our culture is much better, it seems neither suitable nor necessary to impose our own views on them, or try to change their culture. From the practical viewpoint, it is necessary to follow the work culture to a certain extent in order to gain acceptance and cooperation. Hong Kong workers know this work culture and it can be treated as the price that cross-border workers pay. If a worker does not accept this work culture, to go to work in Mainland China becomes a dilemma. Although cross-border work poses problems for male workers, the issues are different for female workers. Due to gender stereotypes, their salaries, position and education creates status incongruities for them. Thus, most female Hong Kong cross-border workers have no plan to stay in China for a very long time.

Physical distance from the family in cross-border work is also an important problem. Geographical separation weakens family ties and damages ‘normal’ family life. This is also a problem others may encounter if they join cross-border work elsewhere. For example, before 1997, many Hong Kong people migrated with their families to Canada or Australia, but the breadwinners came back to work in Hong Kong or China. This reversed migration has its own challenges for family life.

Basically, problems related to geographical separation can be solved if workers move the whole family to China. If Hong Kong families, due
to financial or schooling reasons do not want to move their families to China, at least their employers need to set up family-friendly policies to allow workers to have more time to live with their families in Hong Kong.

Cross-border workers’ relative advantage exists elsewhere. Hong Kong workers’ relative advantages are their wealth, skills and working experiences. The relative advantages of Hong Kong workers also contribute to the development of Chinese businesses. These relative advantages are not negative factors for work. It may indeed be a positive factor that allows Hong Kong people to survive in China. Facing keen competition, Hong Kong people feel a need to maintain their relative advantage rather than to forfeit it.

To conclude, we would like to argue that facing the speed of globalization, it seems common for people to engage in cross-border work. Cross-border work provides opportunities for development, but it has an impact on family life. Cross-border work provides prospects for career advancement and can provide more money and resources to the family members. On the other hand, cross-border workers may find it difficult to play their spousal or parenting roles. These are barriers to maintaining healthy relationships. Many people still give higher priorities to maintaining intimate relationships and feeling being loved than to earn more money. In this view, they need to balance the various needs of work and family and strengthen their self-control.
REFERENCES


