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Negotiating Family "Value": Caregiving and Conflict Among Chinese-Born Senior Migrants and Their Families in the U.S.

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Abstract Drawing on ethnographic research conducted since 2009 with Cantonese-speaking Chinese senior migrants in Boston's downtown Chinatown and its satellite community in Quincy, MA, this paper contributes to a growing scholarly literature on the problem of senior support within the changing dynamics of contemporary Chinese family life by highlighting how the paid and unpaid caregiving work performed by Chinese-born senior migrants in the U.S. provides a means for them to act strategically to secure their own support in older age. The paper describes how these senior migrants work to negotiate their value within the family through caregiving while dealing with the familial conflicts that also arise in the process.

Keywords Caregiving · Conflict · Chinese Migrants · US · Value to family

Introduction

China's aging population has attracted significant attention by scholars and policy makers, who note that both the size of China's elderly population and the rapidity of recent social and cultural transformations have created unprecedented challenges to the cultural and economic infrastructure for elderly support. Unlike countries in the West that have all developed social welfare infrastructures to support senior citizens as they grow old, China (like other East Asian countries) has generally depended significantly more on family than on institutional support for their elderly (see, for example, Davis-Friedmann 1991 and Ikels 2004). Yet China's rapid development over the past few decades has resulted in new terrains of cultural value that seem to contest "traditional" conceptions of family support for the elderly in China. As the social and cultural discourses around longstanding

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Confucian ideals of filial duty and family reciprocity in contemporary China are reconfigured, many Chinese seniors today find that they can rely on neither state nor family for support, thus rendering their future precarious (Zhang 2009). In this article, I address the question of how Chinese seniors are navigating the problem of old-age support within this changing cultural landscape by focusing on a particular group of Chinese-born seniors: those who migrate to the U.S. as retirees, at the age of 60 or older. In particular, I highlight the paid and unpaid caregiving work performed by Chinese-born senior migrants in the U.S. as a lens through which to examine how seniors' caregiving work provides a means for them to act strategically to secure their own support in older age. In so doing, I contribute to a growing scholarly literature on the problem of senior support within the changing dynamics of contemporary Chinese family life.

Migration to the U.S. to join family abroad has emerged as one strategy deployed by Chinese retirees[1] seeking to improve their personal and financial security in their older age. Since 1990, 30 % of Chinese-born migrants to the U.S. have come after the age of 60 (Terrazas and Batalova 2010), and Chinese migrants are on average older than all other foreign-born immigrants to this country: in 2010, 15.4 % were 65 or older, compared to 12.4 % of foreign-born migrants overall (McCabe 2012). Sponsored by their family members already in the U.S., senior migrants are often involved in caregiving work in the U.S., providing care for American-born grandchildren, aged parents, infirm spouses or siblings, or disabled members of the larger community. This work, which often provides the motivating rationale for seniors' later-life moves to the U.S., has significant economic value for senior migrants' Chinese-American families. The unpaid childcare performed by Chinese seniors relieves their adult children of the burden of paying for childcare in U.S., even as it also frees up income for daily necessities or savings enabling families to buy a house, move to a better school district, and so on. Moreover, seniors who work as paid caregivers outside the home make direct economic contributions to their families' lives and may support themselves independently (or at least lessen the financial burden they place on their families). At the same time, the caregiving work performed by Chinese-born seniors has immense sentimental value, as seniors grow close to American-born grandchildren, work together with adult children to promote grandchildren's future success, and relieve the distress of aged or infirm parents or siblings.

Writing about the cultural processes through which children shifted from economically valuable members of families in 19th century America to "emotionally priceless" but "economically worthless" by the mid-20th century, sociologist Viviana Zelizer focuses on the complex interaction between sentimental and economic value in social life (1985:3). Through her discussion about how children shifted from "objects of utility" to "objects of value" (ibid. 5), Zelizer demonstrates the importance of paying attention to the ways in which these different forms of value are intertwined, rather than "radically incompatible" (ibid. 11), as cultural values tend to demand. Moreover, through her discussion of the "monetization of sentiment" (ibid. 15) and the challenges that result when circumstances demand the assignment of monetary value to a life deemed "priceless," Zelizer draws attention to the ways in which sentimental value and economic value are not always in direct relationship with each other and are highly subjective (ibid). Below, I make use of

[1] The mandated retirement age in China is 60 for men and 50–55 for women. However, for Chinese seniors in rural areas, these ages may not matter, since many seniors need to continue to work in agricultural production to support themselves as they grow older.

Zelizer's insights to explore the complex interaction between economic and sentimental value as products of the caregiving work performed by Chinese-born senior migrants in the U.S. Whereas Zelizer documents the cultural processes that lead to changes in children's valuation, I focus instead on Chinese seniors as actors who strategically seek to use their caregiving work to increase their own valuation and therefore mitigate changing cultural values in contemporary China which have undermined seniors' traditional place of respect and authority in family life.

The exploration of how Chinese senior migrants understand and work to control how they are valued (both sentimentally and economically) by family and society adds important insight to the question of how Chinese seniors are navigating the problem of old-age support within China's contemporary cultural landscape. I argue here that the caregiving work performed by Chinese-born senior migrants in the U.S. allows seniors to renegotiate their sentimental and economic value in the eyes of their family members with the goal of fulfilling their own caregiving needs as they grow older in the U.S. Acutely aware of their precarious social status, through which they are no longer ensured family support in their older age, Chinese-born senior migrants contribute to both the economic and emotional well-being of their families in the U.S. in order to reinforce powerful cultural norms of "family love" with the hope that their adult children and grandchildren living in the U.S. will in turn draw on this Chinese cultural norm to help care for them in future decades. In making this argument, I focus on how intergenerational family relationships are affected by the cultural devaluation that scholars have documented for this generation of older adults who must find ways to compensate for this devaluation even as they also struggle to provide needed care to the various members of their families, including aged parents, aging spouses, and grandchildren. These negotiations are made more complex for senior migrants in the U.S., whose Chinese American family members are also influenced by American cultural ideals of childrearing and senior care (see, for example, Chi et al. 2001).

Throughout this discussion, I draw on ethnographic research I have conducted since 2009 with Cantonese-speaking Chinese senior migrants in Boston's downtown Chinatown and its satellite community in Quincy, MA.[2] These individuals tend to be low-income,[3] have low levels of English language facility, and are relatively unfamiliar with American cultural systems and medical practices.[4] While most research on Chinese

[2] Boston's Chinatown serves as the regional hub, followed by Quincy, which has almost 15,000 Chinese residents, forming the majority of Quincy's 24 % Asian population (City of Quincy 2013). My data collection has centered on Chinese seniors who have immigrated to the U.S. since 1990 at the age of 60 or older. All participant observation took place in Boston or Quincy Chinatown organizations and residential buildings in which Cantonese was the primary language of communication, and I conducted all research interviews primarily in Cantonese, although sometimes also in Mandarin or in Toisanese (with the help of a Toisanese-Cantonese interpreter).

[3] In Massachusetts, almost 20 % of Chinese Americans aged 55–64 are low income, and that number jumps to almost 45 % for individuals aged 65–74 and 55 % for those over 75 (Lo 2006).

[4] In Massachusetts (where in 2010 7.3 % of migrants were Chinese-born), recent Chinese senior migrants fall roughly into two groups. Migrants with longstanding family ties to the area tend to originate from rural areas in southeast China, speak a Cantonese regional dialect, have low levels of education, and live in Boston's densely populated Chinatown or in nearby urban, lower class communities (like Quincy). In contrast, seniors who have migrated through the sponsorship of adult children often originate from urban areas across China, speak Mandarin, are educated, and have held jobs in government, teaching, and other professional capacities. This latter group tends to reside in wealthy, suburban locations and is rapidly growing. These two groups are not, however, mutually exclusive, and my interviewees are drawn from both groups (see also Newendorp 2011).

migration to the U.S. has focused on California and New York, the Chinese migrant community in the greater Boston area is worthy of attention because of its long history (see, for example, Ikels 1988 and To 2008) and its current rapid growth. Overall, the Northeast region is home to more than a quarter of Asian Americans, second only to the West in geographic region of settlement (Pew Report 2012). Massachusetts in particular is an attractive destination for Chinese-born senior migrants not only because of longstanding family connections and networks but also because of the many institutions of higher education and significant social welfare resources available to low-income senior citizens. Although much of my discussion below is also applicable to Chinese senior migrants in general, my focus on Cantonese-speaking seniors has been a deliberate methodological choice to trace the migration trajectories unique to this regional group, with its longstanding engagement in transnational ties with the U.S.[5]

Caregiving and Chinese "Family Love" in the Immigrant Context

Chinese seniors' caregiving work in the U.S. takes place within the challenges presented by the immigrant family context, as seniors adjust both to the new social environment they encounter in the U.S. and also to the expectations of the Chinese American family members—siblings, adult children, sometimes parents—who sponsored their migration. Senior migrants and their Chinese American family members must find ways to live or work together while negotiating the changing dynamic of Chinese "family values" that influences the lives of Chinese in America as well as in China. Chinese-born seniors and their family members remain strongly influenced by "traditional" Chinese cultural discourses emphasizing support for the elderly and the overwhelming importance of "family" as a deeply seated cultural value of all Chinese. At the same time, both groups are aware of different sets of ideas in the U.S. about personal independence, family life, and education that further complicate the relationships families develop around caregiving needs. This complex context makes the transition to caring for grandchildren in the U.S. difficult—even more so when seniors in the U.S. have had to leave other grandchildren they previously cared for behind.

Like many Chinese grandparents who routinely care for grandchildren in China (Zhang 2009), many recent senior migrants provided care for Chinese-born grandchildren in China before migrating to the U.S. One woman in her 60s, who had been in the U.S. for less than a year when we met in Boston in 2009, explained her continuing sense of attachment to the grandchild she left behind in China:

> Since I retired I have taken care of my grandchildren. [My husband is also retired, and in China] life was very relaxing; we would wake up and do tai chi and other things. Then I would go buy groceries and make dinner…. I miss [my son and his family in China] a lot. My grandchild always calls and asks me when I'm going

[5] Some Cantonese speaking seniors also speak Mandarin, but many do not. Toisanese refers to the Cantonese regional dialect spoken by individuals from the Toisan (Taishan) area of Guangdong Province. This area was the primary sending region for Chinese who migrated to the U.S. beginning in the mid-1800s and continues to be an important sending area for Cantonese migrants to the U.S. today. (See Hsu 2000 for more details on the transnational connections between Toisan and the U.S.).

> back and [tells me] that he misses me. And I tell him I miss him and that I will visit when I have a chance.

Explaining how her small pension[6] in China now pays for someone to look after her grandson in her absence, this grandmother continued:

> [My grandson in China] is six. He's starting school this year in September. At home we hired someone to make lunch because my daughter-in-law works from 8 AM to 7 PM and doesn't come home in between. My grandchild eats [lunch] at home because China is not like here where you eat at school. After lunch he has to go back to school, and we have to take him there. Then at 5 PM we have to pick him up, [so] we hired someone to make lunch and take care of our grandchild. This way I'm very relieved. I want my retirement fund to be used to hire someone [so I don't have to worry about my grandchild].

Writing about the increasing engagement of working-aged women in global caregiving networks, scholars have documented the emotional strain resulting from familial separation on migrant mothers as well as on the children left behind when parents migrate seeking work opportunities abroad (see, for example, Parrenas 2001, 2005a, b; Constable 1999, 2007). The situations of Chinese grandparent caregivers who migrate to the U.S. are not qualitatively different from situations in which a child's mother leaves home for work abroad, because grandparents may often be the primary caregivers for children over many years—making meals, accompanying children to school and back, even sleeping in the same room with grandchildren when they are young—freeing their adult children for full participation in the workforce and easing the stress associated with balancing career and family life. As a result, grandparents are deeply embedded in family life and demonstrate how roles played by individuals within families are complex and multifaceted (see also Rodriguez-Galan 2013).

As grandparents perform the everyday work of caring for grandchildren, they develop intimate ties and strong interrelationships that overlap with parents' love and devotion to children; moreover, grandparents may spend many more hours of the day with grandchildren and be particularly aware of how their absence creates emotional and other difficulties not just for grandchildren but also for working adult children. The strong emotions bound up with caring for grandchildren (along with other family members) complicate the migration experiences of Chinese-born seniors who move to the U.S. following their retirement in China. However, similar bonds develop while caring for American-born grandchildren which serve to ground many seniors' adjustment to the U.S., providing a sense of purpose and meaning to their later-life migration trajectories. Moreover, the fact that the caregiving work performed by Chinese migrant grandparents is embedded within the contract of intergenerational reciprocity in China means that senior migrants are able to rationalize many of the hardships that they face

[6] Many of my interviewees, particularly those from urban areas, had small pensions that they received in China from the work unit (*danwei*) to which they belonged as working adults. Pensions for seniors in China vary considerably depending on the size of the danwei and position held (see Davis-Friedmann 1991). My interviewees who did have pensions explained that their pensions were very small, generally not more than enough money to take friends to lunch on return visits to China or contribute to family caregiving expenses for grandchildren or elderly parents in China.

through their transition to the U.S. by making reference to the important ways in which commitment to family supersedes other interests for them. In shorthand, my interviewees refer to this sense of commitment to family as "family love."

"Family love" was implicit in how seniors talked about which set of grandparents would migrate to care for American-born grandchildren and, as part of that process, make sacrifices, including leaving behind other family members in China, dealing with the challenges of living in a new and unfamiliar social, cultural, and linguistic setting, and adjusting to living far away from established networks of friends and colleagues. Often, only one set of grandparents was healthy or available to migrate. When both sets of grandparents were available, and when families had sufficient economic resources to pay for the cost of bringing grandparents to the U.S., both sets of grandparents would come to visit and "try out" living in Boston for several months. Adult children would ultimately rely on the set of grandparents who seemed best adapted to living in the U.S.—either because that set managed the cultural differences well, or because they already had other family members and networks here with whom they wanted to reunite.

Even when only one set of grandparents was available to help with caregiving needs, adult children might still have them visit in preparation for their eventual migration. During the summer of 2012, at a senior community center in Quincy, I met a woman and her husband who were about to return to China following a three-month trial visit living with their adult daughter and son-in-law, who hoped to have a child the following year. The older woman explained that she and her husband had considerable difficulty adjusting to living in suburban Quincy, because they missed their work, colleagues, and friends back home. Unlike China, where life was busy and interesting, in the U.S., this woman and her husband were alone most days while their daughter and son-in-law were at work. When I asked if, following this trial period, she and her husband might decide not to return to the U.S. in the future, this woman assured me that they (or she, if her husband was not yet retired) would definitely return once the grandchild was born. Although the visit had not taught her to enjoy living in the U.S., it had allowed her and her husband to see how hard their daughter worked and how tired she was at night. Drawing on the cultural trope of "family love," this woman felt she would have to help ease her daughter's load when her grandchild was born despite the difficulty (and unhappiness) she anticipated in adjusting to living in the U.S. For this immigrant (would-be) grandmother, the justification for migration because of "family love" worked to reinforce traditionally held Chinese cultural ideals of the intergenerational contract, even as it also demonstrated seniors' vulnerability in China today. By taking on a difficult (although rewarding) task for the sake of the family, senior migrants conform to expectations of a Chinese cultural model of family life, foregrounding the sentimental attachment that binds generations together. This model assumes that seniors will sacrifice for the good of the family, despite the fact that their own future security is no longer certain. Nevertheless, the trope of "family love" also allows seniors to articulate their motivation to migrate as a choice, as they decide which adult children to help, voice likes and dislikes about the possibility of living abroad, and articulate sacrifices they expect their children to recognize and value.

Trial periods were also important because they allowed seniors and adult children to test out whether they would be able to get along living together in the U.S. Seniors talked pragmatically about the difficulties of multiple generations living together under

one roof. In doing so, they challenged traditionally held beliefs idealizing that form of living arrangement, even as they continued to reinforce traditional ideas of the importance of family values as a defining feature of Chinese culture that influenced their decisions to live near (but not always with) their adult children in the U.S. while also taking care of their American-born grandchildren.

Although idealized goals of family harmony (ideals that continued to animate seniors' discussions around "family love") may have helped seniors to rationalize the challenges they would take on in moving to the U.S. as older individuals, seniors also made frequent reference to their relative powerlessness and social precariousness within the changing conditions of contemporary Chinese social norms. In this way, they acknowledged the real difficulties that occur when members of different generations live together and rely on each other for help. Despite Confucian cultural legacies that continue to perpetuate a Chinese cultural ideal in which elders are powerful and deeply respected within the family, seniors' social and familial status today in China has shifted, with younger adults now more in control than the senior generation (see, for example, Yan 2003; Ikels 2004; Zhang 2009). While the seeds for this shift were sown during the Maoist era through the state-engineered attacks on the family, the economic and social changes ushered in during the reform era have had the most significant effects in weakening elders' social and familial status. As adult children have gained opportunities to earn significant incomes, the senior generation has lost the control of collective family property along with the ability to command respect that went along with that control; as adult children have had access to greater physical mobility, they have moved away from rural locations where family networks traditionally helped care and provide for elders too weak to work in the fields or provide for themselves (ibid.). Taken together with the relative lack of social welfare for many seniors in China today (particularly for those living in rural areas, but also for urban residents with only small pensions), many seniors today must rely on the mercy of adult children for support (ibid). Thus, as one of my interviewees explained, when seniors and their adult children live together under one roof, it's not necessarily the physical living situation itself that is problematic. Rather, problems result when the two generations do not treat each other with mutual respect:

> [P]eople who are older… are dependent on their children. In this relationship, if you have respectful children, then they will understand your situation. They won't want too much from you and don't expect you to do what they say. But if you have children who have a different viewpoint, then there are conflicts between the young ones and the older generation…. It's not about the living situation. It's about the relationship between the family members and whether it's equal. Will they listen to you and will you listen to them? … It used to be that the children listen to the parents, but now the parents listen to the children. Some people are not able to take that, because they're too proud.

My senior migrant interviewees drew heavily on both of these concerns—Chinese cultural values of family love and support and the relative powerlessness of seniors in China today—to explain their post-migration interactions with their adult children and grandchildren in Boston. During one group interview, several senior migrants talked

about the disjuncture between idealized views of "family love" and the realities of everyday conflict within family life:

> M3: Now, we're here and we can still help out and make ourselves useful so that we still have value; that's why we don't really have any problems with our children.
>
> M2: That's right…. There are some cases with [family relationships], where the principle is I help you, you help me, that's ok. But there are cases where it is purely family love….
>
> M4: For Chinese people, family love is very important.
>
> M3: Family love is very important. But seeing each other is good, while living together is difficult. It's true! To see each other, to talk with each other, that's really good. But if you live together, that's… very difficult.

As seniors debated the pros and cons of living with or near family, and how those living arrangements did or did not comply with powerful social and cultural discourses of Chinese "family love," they also acknowledged their need to prove their "value" to their adult children within these complex processes of cultural and social transition. Noting that their "value" to their family members was dependent on their ability "to help out and make [themselves] useful," seniors laid bare the new cultural landscape through which they could no longer depend on traditional ideas of social obligation and respect to ensure their own security and well-being. Without "value," senior migrants' relationships with their adult children in the U.S. could add to adjustment difficulties and social and economic marginalization in the U.S. Seniors' dependency on their adult children was more than just an uncomfortable social situation; senior migrants were often reliant on adult children for access to food, pocket money, and other daily needs.

Some of my interviewees definitely talked about everyday conflicts that arise when multiple family members live together in small residential units—conflicts over shared uses of space and objects within those spaces that might at first appear to be relatively insignificant but which caused real stress for family members engaged in seemingly petty battles over the use and display of everyday furniture and other household objects (see also Newendorp 2008). However, more of my senior interviewees complained about the daily indignities and sense of servitude that resulted when they were living with adult children. My interviewees made wry jokes about their attempts to try to squirrel away some pocket money for their own needs while shopping for the family. They also described the stress involved with trying to buy good quality meat and produce to cook delicious meals for their children's family all while being on a tightly-controlled family budget: "[W]hen old people go out to the market, you will hear them say, 'Oh—what can I get today? This isn't good, that's not good: how can I buy food [to prepare for the family] with just the tiny bit of money my kids have given me?'". Likewise, my interviewees stressed that there is no "free lunch" (*baahk sihk, baahk jyuh*) when seniors live with their adult children, and that ultimately it's the adult children, not the seniors, who benefit from these arrangements in which seniors often do most (if not all) of

the housework, cooking, cleaning, and washing—in addition to caring for American-born grandchildren.

Thus, the same family caregiving work that provided the primary rationale for so many seniors to migrate to the U.S. also left them particularly economically and socially vulnerable. Occupying a murky space somewhere between the commodification of care (since seniors were performing important labor that kept families economically afloat and supported their daily life) and familial duty (as seniors performed the same kinds of caregiving work for grandchildren that they were used to doing in China and rationalized their work through cultural discourses of "family love"), seniors' caregiving work resulted in fewer economic benefits for them rather than for their extended families. One interviewee in her late 70s who was past working age wished that she had understood that vulnerability ten years earlier. She told me: "Now, I've only worked three years; I need to work for ten years to get [Social Security]. People told me that when I worked for my daughter I should have filed tax returns; that way I would be able to get retirement [benefits] now. But I didn't know…. So it's too late."

Since there was no guarantee that adult children—who were also negotiating a new context of changing family "values" both in China and through their experience as Chinese Americans—would support seniors in their older age, some Chinese-born senior migrants were left in more precarious situations than if they had remained in China, where they were more likely to have networks of co-workers, friends, and neighbors to help them. Nonetheless, seniors valued the caregiving work that they performed out of family love; moreover, the skills they gained through doing that work were easily applicable to caregiving and other contexts outside their home, enabling many seniors to find paid work to help support themselves and contribute to their family's income. Seniors were also able to use the paid and unpaid caregiving work that they performed both outside the home and for their Chinese American families to prove their "value" for families. This caregiving work, which had both economic *and* sentimental value, provided seniors with important possibilities for making a case as to why they should still be valued by their family members and taken care of as older adults once they were no longer productive members of family life.

Forging Value through Caregiving: Emotional, Economic, and Cultural Returns

Caregiving work done by grandparents included moments of joy—through developing intimate ties with grandchildren and closer emotional bonds with adult children as all family adults worked together to provide the best upbringing possible for the first American-born generation. It also included significant hardships, ranging from regret at having left familiar faces and networks behind in China to daily conflict with adult children. The case of Mrs. Lung,[7] whose caregiving duties for her disabled granddaughter were exceptionally challenging, speaks both to the sense of fulfillment and hardship experienced by grandparent caregivers in the U.S.

[7] Mrs. Lung is a pseudonym, as are all names of Chinese senior migrants used in this article.

When I met Mrs. Lung in 2009, she was 65 years old and had migrated to the U.S. four years previously. Like many other Chinese senior migrants, she was retired in China and had already been looking after a grandchild there before coming to the Boston area. Mrs. Lung had never planned to leave China and live abroad. However, after her daughter gave birth to a disabled child here in the U.S., and her daughter's mother-in-law refused to continue to help care for that child, Mrs. Lung and her husband decided to emigrate, leaving behind their other family members, including the grandchild she had cared for since birth. Mrs. Lung told me:

> In the beginning, I didn't really want to come because I had a grandchild in China. My son had a kid. My son's child and my daughter's child were born in the same year…. At the time, my daughter-in-law said, "Mom, we can take care of our child. But sister's daughter's situation [is too difficult]; you should go and help her." So in the end, we decided to come and immigrated here.

Unlike many other Chinese seniors from Guangzhou who have migrated to Boston following their retirement, Mrs. Lung did not have other friends or family from China in the U.S. besides the daughter she came to help. In addition to leaving behind her son's family, she left behind three other siblings and her elderly mother, whose care she helped to support with the small retirement pension she still received from her pre-retirement employment in China. Moreover, Mrs. Lung had only been able to return to China once since migrating. At that time, her mother was 86 years old and seriously ill. When her mother's health improved, Mrs. Lung returned to the U.S., where the daily care involved with her granddaughter kept her fully occupied.

Mrs. Lung's granddaughter, her daughter's first child, was born severely disabled. At the time of our interview, Mrs. Lung's granddaughter was twelve years old. She required help with most daily tasks and could not speak, although she had found ways to communicate with her family: "… if she's thirsty she can get water to drink herself. If she's hungry she will drag you over to the fridge and get something out …. She can go to the microwave and open the door and let me know to put something there and warm it up for her." Although Mrs. Lung's granddaughter was out of the house part of each day at a school for disabled children, her caregiving needs extended throughout the day and night. Mrs. Lung's duties included sustained intimate care, such as changing her diapers and sleeping in the same room with her granddaughter. As a result, a special bond had developed between grandmother and granddaughter over time, as Mrs. Lung's granddaughter identified her as her primary caregiver and the only household member to whom she would routinely respond. Mrs. Lung told me: "This granddaughter of mine, the older she gets, the more disobedient she is. She doesn't listen to my daughter. When my daughter holds her hand to go to school, she pushes it away. She has to hold on to *me* and walk out with *me*."

Mrs. Lung was also working outside her daughter's home, in Boston's Chinatown, for four hours each day, at a job she had obtained as part of a training program for low-income seniors. The work conditions of this job (including light kitchen work, cleaning, and companionship with elderly Chinese immigrants) were not difficult, and the job allowed her both to contribute to the family income and, as she told me, "to pass the time" when her granddaughter was away at school and the house would otherwise be empty. She told me: "Well if I don't work, my son-in-law has to work; my daughter

goes out with her kids' friends' parents, I'm left alone at home and it's very boring. Even if you clean the house, you can't do it for eight hours a day, after an hour or so you will be done. So working here, time passes by easier." Although Mrs. Lung would not have been working outside the home had she stayed in China, she enjoyed her work in the U.S. Not only did her job grant her a sense of freedom from the concerns that she faced with her disabled granddaughter at home, but it also allowed her daily interaction with a community of Cantonese-speaking individuals beyond the narrow circle of her immediate family members. Moreover, Mrs. Lung's small income, just a few hundred dollars each month, contributed to the family economy, covering all additional costs associated with her and her husband's inclusion in their daughter's home life and preventing the need for them to rely on their daughter for pocket money.

Paid work figured prominently in the balancing act negotiated by seniors as they sought to forge a sense of value for themselves within the context of their post-migration family lives in the U.S., since seniors were aware that within the changing context of contemporary Chinese cultural values they could not necessarily depend on adult children to help care for them as they become increasing physically and mentally infirm. While some seniors contributed money they earned outside the home directly to their family, others needed the income from outside employment to help support themselves—either because they lived independently from adult children or because, even while living with adult children, they did not want to have to ask for adult children to help pay for their incidental expenses, thus reducing the economic burden they placed on adult children. Working outside the home also had benefits beyond helping seniors to demonstrate their economic value to children: it enabled seniors to live more independent lives through giving them access to money, networks, and information about American life beyond their immediate family members; it provided them with meaningful social engagement and aided them in feeling like fully contributing members of society; and it allowed them to earn credits towards Social Security, so that seniors would have access to some small income in their later years. Building stronger community networks through working outside the home may have also helped to ease the transition experienced by grandparent caregivers as their American-born grandchildren grew older. In most cases, once grandchildren reached middle school and became more independent, seniors either decided to move out from their adult children's homes or were asked to leave.

Even when grandparents stayed in their adult children's homes, the strong affective relationship between grandparents and grandchildren often weakened over time, primarily because of language differences. Over and over again seniors explained that because they could not speak English, and because their grandchildren's Chinese language skills were often limited, as grandchildren grew older they relied more and more on adult children to translate across generations. Although some college-aged grandchildren had decided to study Chinese, learning Mandarin did not always aid their ability to communicate with Cantonese or Toisanese-speaking grandparents. Mrs. Wong explained the on-going disagreements about Chinese language use that she had with her son and daughter-in-law as her grandson grew older:

> Sometimes I would ask why they wouldn't speak to him in Cantonese, because he understood [Cantonese]. But they only talked to him in English. They

> responded that after I die, no one [would be around] to talk with him in Cantonese. At the time, I thought that [way of thinking] made sense…. Now that [my grandson]'s in college, he decided to study Chinese because he knows that there's a big market [for Chinese] out there. So now I think I was right.

Mrs. Wong's debate with her son and his wife also speaks to another central concern experienced by Chinese grandparent caregivers: conflict with their adult children over their caregiving practices for American-born grandchildren. Although most conflicts reported to me by grandparents had their roots in generational differences among Chinese seniors and their adult children, these conflicts were exacerbated by the immigrant context through which care for American-born grandchildren took place. For example, one older woman from Toisan contrasted the relative inattention to caring for (even quite young) children in the rural area she was from to American practices of "intensive parenting." Her friend elaborated: "As soon as the kids back home can walk, you can just put them in an open space. They can take care of themselves and play on their own. You can just farm on your own. The kids in America are like God's children; you can't just leave them at home or anything like that." Although grandparents from Chinese urban areas, like Guangzhou, were less likely to find American child-centered caregiving practices as strange as these rural grandmothers did, seniors from urban areas who had previously cared for grandchildren in China still found that there were significant differences between caring for their Chinese-born grandchildren and their American-born grandchildren. One woman told me: "The kids here [in the U.S.] are different from the ones in China. In China, when you tell them something they listen to you. Here when you tell them to eat they just keep playing with their toys. They only care about playing around."

Chinese grandparents and their adult children often had different ideas about the best way to educate American-born grandchildren. Mrs. Wong elaborated:

> We [Chinese] like to point out [children's] bad behavior. But [my grandson's parents] think like Americans and praise him about everything. I don't agree with that practice.... Sometimes [my grandson] would have five homework assignments to complete over break, but he didn't do [his work] and just went out to play. [I thought he should work first and play later.] But my daughter-in-law said that [as long as he completed his work], that's fine…. The way they educated him was different. They used the American way, and I used a traditional one.

Yet the ability to transmit Chinese cultural "values" to American-born children—those same values that are currently in flux as China's vast population negotiates the many social repercussions of China's rapid economic development, widening economic and social divide between urban and rural areas, one-child policy, and increasing global interaction—was an additional factor, over and above emotional ties and economic concerns, that led adult children to sponsor their parents to migrate as caregivers for American-born grandchildren. These cultural "values" included not just the family focus that seniors identified as "family love" but also included serving as a bridge to Chinese language and culture (including food, classical tales, holiday celebrations, and so on) more

generally. One grandfather, Mr. Moy, who took an active role in his grandchildren's education, had stayed particularly close to one granddaughter as she transitioned into a teenager and then a young adult. He was delighted with his granddaughter's continued interest in Chinese language and culture and talked with pride about a return visit to China in which he and his wife took their granddaughter, with the specific goal of teaching her about her Chinese heritage. More commonly, however, my interviewees talked with pride about the accomplishments of their grandchildren while also voicing concerns over gradual distancing from them.

The transition from childhood to adulthood of the grandchildren to whom seniors had developed close ties was a difficult one for many seniors, who often struggled with loneliness that resulted once their caregiving work was no longer of "value" to the family as it once was. Mr. Cheung described his mixed feelings at moving into senior housing with his wife when his daughter and son-in-law moved to a smaller apartment in a new town with a better school district but higher rents, so that they no longer had enough space to house the extended family. Although he and his wife still looked after their grandchildren a few days a week after school, he missed living together with his grandchildren. He told me:

> [Living on our own] is better sometimes; but other times it just feels very lonely. There's only the two of us. Everyone else keeps their doors closed [and] there's very little communication. Also we don't know very much English. We say hello and good morning but we can't really communicate. It just feels very lonely and quiet....

On the other hand, he also emphasized how moving away had benefits for his relationship with his wife:

> The environment is very quiet and peaceful. We can eat whatever we want. We can eat whenever we want. Back [when we lived with my daughter] we had to wait until they got off work at 7 or 8 PM [to eat]. [Now] the two of us can eat at 6 PM. There are positives and negatives.

Overall, Mr. Cheung's thoughts echo the expressions of convenience, freedom, and independence voiced by many seniors about their moves to senior housing (Newendorp 2014), even as they also focus on the difficulty of letting go from the daily routines that he shared with his grandchildren when they were younger.

Thus, caregiving for American-born grandchildren was often a great source of pride and happiness for Chinese seniors, who demonstrated their continued support for Chinese "family values" through this work by developing intimate and emotionally caring relationships with grandchildren which also eased adult children's economic and emotional burdens. At the same time, this work also allowed seniors to lay claims about their "value" within the context of their immigrant family life—claims that seniors hoped would translate into sufficiently strong sentimental ties to ensure that adult children and grandchildren would care for them once they grew old and infirm.

Values in Flux: Caregiving Futures for Chinese Senior Migrants and Their Families

In addition to juggling paid work and grandchild caregiving, many Chinese seniors also needed to help take care of their own aged parents. In some cases, parents were in China. In other cases, however, elderly parents were in the U.S., but because transnational engagement between Southeast China and the U.S. meant that family networks often extended across the U.S.—from Boston to New York to Chicago to San Francisco to Los Angeles—adult children did not always live nearby to help out.

One Toisanese woman in her 60s explained how her siblings negotiated care for her parents, already ninety years old, who lived in Boston. With one sibling in Macau, one in San Francisco, one in New York, and two others in Boston, daily care for their parents was primarily the responsibility of the Boston-based siblings. As my interviewee was the most recent to have migrated, with less stable job prospects than her siblings, and with adult children still in China, she was perceived as the natural choice to take over caring for their parents. Her mother had put particular pressure on her to provide daily care. She told me:

> One of my sisters lives very close [to my parents] and mostly takes care of them. My brothers are very far away. … [My parents] are still pretty healthy. My dad still cooks for my mom. My mom also has a lot of problems with her feet and back.… My mother is always telling me I should go take care of them. I go sometimes. She's always telling me to move in with her.… She even told my husband he should go back to China, so I could take care of her. I told her that he couldn't do that.… Every time I go there to visit she tells me that I should stay with her…. When they really can't take care of themselves anymore then we will see…. Now that I've become a citizen, and I don't have to go to the [citizenship] classes anymore, [I have more time to visit than I used to].

For this senior migrant, the family pressure to care for her elderly parents, despite their relatively good health, was extreme. At the same time, what others perceived as a favorable situation—with relatively few family responsibilities in the U.S. coupled with free time that could be used caring for her parents—was not. Just a few months earlier, she had almost been unable to attend her citizenship swearing-in ceremony because she was so impoverished that she could not afford the transportation cost to the area outside of Boston where the ceremony was to be held. Thus, her primary concern was her need to find a job that could provide an income, no matter how small. Once found, that job would mean that she would no longer have any flexibility to care for her parents.

Seniors needing to care for elderly parents did not just have to contend with the daily work necessary to help aged and infirm individuals. They also had to negotiate between elderly parents' more traditional conceptions of filial piety, requiring adult children to be their primary caregivers. In Quincy's senior housing complexes, I met a number of senior migrants who were looking after their parents almost full time. One woman, who had lost her paid job when the supermarket where she worked as a stocker had closed down a year earlier, spent every day with her parents. Although she lived elsewhere in the Boston area, she arrived at her parents' apartment at 6am each morning and spent the entire day with them—accompanying them on walks, keeping them physically

active, and cooking and cleaning for them. When they would nap during the day, she would come to the common room to socialize with other senior residents of the building. This family caregiving work was the same work that paid caregivers could also do: shopping, cooking, cleaning, doing wash, giving medications, and accompanying the elderly. As a result, many senior migrants who had otherwise not been able to find paid employment were able to take caregiving jobs, found either through informal networks or after training with an NGO in Chinatown that also helped place senior migrants in paid caregiving positions. Most seniors I knew who provided paid caregiving services to other Chinese American elderly largely enjoyed their work and felt positive about having a marketable skill and about earning money that would help cover their own expenses as they aged.

Younger seniors who were still actively providing caregiving services to others wondered whether anyone would be available to similarly help them once they, too, had reached an age when they would be less mobile and more mentally fragile. Mr. Lee, who had immigrated in his 70s and had just turned 90 when I interviewed him, had already navigated the transition from doing daily paid and volunteer work in Chinatown to staying at home in his senior apartment. Still fit and physically active in late 2009, he nonetheless needed help with cooking and cleaning. He said:

> I'm old now. I'm 90 this year. My kids discussed [what to do] and they pooled together some money and hired someone to cook dinner for me. [T]he senior center can only provide someone to help me cook once a week, and that's Wednesday. So what do I do on the other days? [M]y kids helped me hire someone who's from the same village as me… to help me cook dinner at night. It's been half a year already.

Other seniors, who had yet to navigate that transition, weighed the pros and cons of potentially returning to China, where migrants from rural areas knew they still had a significant infrastructure of friends and family to help care for them as they aged. One Toisanese woman, only in her early 60s, was considering returning to China once she was older:

> My sons think that when I'm older then I should go back [to my village in Toisan] because it would be better. Seniors in America mostly live in senior houses. If you don't, then it's not as convenient, because everyone has to go to work and no one can take care of you. If you're in China, all the old people live together in the same village and everyone takes care of each other….

Nevertheless, this view was uncommon among my interviewees, who, after having adjusted to living in the U.S. as older migrants planned to stay near family here, where they had access to good medical care and the possibility of buying a funeral plot that would allow them to be buried, rather than cremated.[8] One Toisanese man in his 70s, who did have access to a family plot in his village, nonetheless reinforced how his thinking about eventually returning to his village had changed over the ten years since he had first migrated to Boston.

[8] For the cultural importance of burial in China, see Watson and Rawski 1990. Burial is increasingly rare in contemporary China, where officially only cremation is now allowed (Ikels 2004b).

When he was newly arrived, he said, "I even joked with my daughter that if I ever got really sick, she should buy me an airplane ticket to get me back quickly to China. I said that I couldn't afford to be buried here." Now, however, he no longer has plans to return to China. He told me: "I do not think that way anymore; now I want to stay with my family and children here."

Conclusion

In this article, I discussed how Chinese senior migrants' family lives in the U.S. are bound up with caregiving needs—needs that they initially provide to grandchildren and other members of the larger Chinese American community who are disabled or infirm through both unpaid and paid work. Those needs gradually change over time, as seniors transition from younger and healthier older adults to older and more infirm individuals over the decades that follow their initial migration to the U.S. The caregiving work in which seniors are involved is made more emotionally and economically fraught because of the changing value systems in which that work is embedded. On the one hand, these changing value systems reflect the rapid pace of social change in contemporary China, where traditional concepts governing family relationships, like filial piety, are being contested and re-invented in ways that may initially seem to violate traditional conceptions of these concepts. On the other hand, the migration trajectories of seniors, who must negotiate these changing systems of value not just with family members in China but also with Chinese American family members in the new and unfamiliar social context of the U.S., create an additional level of complication, as it further refracts these malleable cultural values through an immigrant lens.

This centrality of caregiving to negotiations of "value" in family life should come as no surprise. In recent years, Arthur Kleinman has been a strong proponent for a politics of recognition around the importance and benefits of carework. Unlike previous scholars whose scholarship on caregiving often highlights the possibilities for exploitation among caregivers and their employers (see, for example, Hochschild 2003; Constable 2007), Kleinman's focus propels caregiving to the forefront of family life by arguing that our engagement with this deeply affecting and intimate work reinforces fundamental ideals of what it means to be "human" (2009). While Kleinman makes clear that caregiving is a deeply moral practice integral to all human relationships, he also draws heavily on his familiarity with Chinese Confucian value systems of self-cultivation to explain how the process of providing carework is meaningful for individuals who, through that work, engage in moral and social practices that make them ever more "human."

The Chinese senior migrants I know rationalize their experiences as caregivers for their American-born grandchildren, their infirm parents or spouses, or other elderly Chinese Americans more through a language of pragmatics than of Confucian self-cultivation as they detail their conscious contributions to family life. Yet if we follow the logic of traditional Chinese cultural values, Chinese seniors in past decades could assume they would be "valued" by their family members in their own right, whether or not they were active contributors to the economic and sentimental well-being of their households. Seniors' place of respect in family life was buttressed by the Confucian concept of filial piety and a familial caregiving model dictating that adult children were socially obligated to provide support for their elderly parents. This traditional cultural model is still upheld by many seniors who provide care for their aged parents, even as seniors are simultaneously aware that their own adult children are unlikely to

follow this cultural model in caring for them in future years. As a result, today's Chinese seniors have to find ways to compensate for this future of potential insecurity.

As I have detailed in this article, today's Chinese-born seniors are able to demonstrate that they are in fact of "value" to their families through the caregiving work that serves as one main rationale for senior migration to the U.S. Seniors contribute economic value to family life through the childcare they provide to American-born grandchildren, relieving adult children from the burden of paying for childcare in U.S. and freeing up income for necessities or family savings. As an additional bonus, many seniors also perform paid caregiving or other work outside the home—earning money that saves adult children the responsibility of paying for seniors' daily needs and that can help families in tight economic circumstances make ends meet. Yet the value of seniors' caregiving work is not only economic; the money earned and saved through seniors' caregiving work also has other important social effects. In particular, the value that senior migrants accrue through their work is also sentimental, through developing strong ties to their American-born grandchildren and reinforcing ties with adult children (particularly daughters), as seniors' work eases adult children's economic and emotional burdens while also helping to raise the family's first American-born generation. Moreover, seniors' caregiving work also has cultural value for families, as migrants pass on not only Chinese language capability but also the value of "family love"—which remains a powerful Chinese cultural ideal despite society's rapid changes and the resulting contested landscape for senior support in China today.

Thus, there can be no denying how centrally important senior migrants' caregiving work is to bolstering both the sentimental and economic well-being of their family members. At the same time, through their caregiving work, seniors are actively engaging with the changing cultural landscape of support for Chinese elders in both China and the U.S. to negotiate new terms for securing support for themselves from their families as they grow old. Having proven their value through economic, emotional, and cultural contributions to their extended families, seniors hope their adult children and American-born grandchildren will in turn continue to value them and fulfill seniors' own caregiving needs as they grow old in future years.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent As there is no person or personal data appearing in the paper, there is no one from whom a permission should be obtained in order to publish personal data.

Ethical Treatment of Experimental Subjects (Animal and Human) All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Harvard University. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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