

Teachers' Stories of Children Coping with Family Situations and Family Changes – A Hong Kong Hybrid Case

Abstract

This paper examines teachers' stories of children's coping with changing family situations such as divorce or family separation which can induce discontinuities in their lives. Using the case of Hong Kong, a place where 'East meets West' in cultures and family relationships, this paper argues for the use of the concept of hybridities in understanding the experiences of children in changing family situations. Teachers' stories show that children in changing family situations are facing new kinds of difficulties from the mixing of modern family forms and traditional family values. Implications to teacher education, policy and practice are suggested.

Keywords: changing family situations, stories, children's coping, hybridities

Teachers' Stories of Children Coping with Family Situations and Family Changes – A Hong Kong Hybrid Case

This paper examines the particular difficulties primary school children in Hong Kong face when coping with changing family situations which might affect the effective learning and development of children. It employs a qualitative case study methodology in which 30 primary school teachers/personnel were interviewed in great depth to find out their perceptions on the experiencing of children in changing family situations in Hong Kong. Using four stories told by the school teachers/personnel, the paper further argues for employing the concept of hybridities in understanding the experiences of children in Hong Kong - a place where East meets West in culture and family relationships. This study addresses the following two research questions:

1. What is the experiencing of children in changing family situations in the Hong Kong context from the perceptions of primary school teachers?
2. How far do cases of family transitions exhibit features of hybridities? What issues are raised about supporting children in changing familial situations from the case stories?

Implications of this study for other countries with similar issues or settings are discussed.

An increasing number of children in Hong Kong are growing up in a variety of family forms such as single-parent families, divorced families, blended families, 'cross-border families'¹, 'astronaut families'² and grandparent/relatives-headed families (Luk-Fong 2000). Situated on the southern coast of China, Hong Kong has been a meeting place of people and ideas from East and West. Hong Kong has always been a transitory place, greatly affected by migrations of its population. During various periods of political unrest in China, Hong Kong had been a political refuge. Then it became a working place, and for some, a stepping stone to go abroad. The 1997 return to China saw many people leaving Hong Kong. Yet some of them returned after having acquired permanent residence in another country. The comings and goings help to put Hong Kong very much in the international arena. Indeed, Hong Kong has become a global city, with strong links to the outside. Post-1997 sees a closer relationship with China, with many jobs moved to China and more Mainland Chinese coming to live in Hong Kong. It is against this backdrop that this paper focuses discussions on four case stories from the typical changing family forms in Hong Kong which arise from its historical and geographical contexts. All four cases involve some form of family separation (a grandfather-headed globalised family; a joint-custody divorce family; a cross-border family and a father-headed repartnered family).

The number of children living in single-parent families rose from 52,826 in 1991 to about 103,500 in 2006 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2007). At the same time, the number of divorce rose from 6,295 cases in 1991 to 13,425 cases in 2001 cases, and then up to 17,424 cases in 2006 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2007). The actual proportion of single-parent families caused by divorce increased from 54.1% in 1991 to 76% in 2001. Since most single-parents are in the 30-49 age group, the chances of remarriage and cohabitation are great (Cheng 1999) and the children are involved in difficult transitions. Moreover, the number of family violence cases and the number of cross-border marriages have also risen. The former rose from 1,253 cases in 1996 to 2,628 cases in 2005; while the latter rose from 19,203 cases in 1999 to 29,800 in 2005. It is not only the rise in absolute figures but also the rapidly increasing trend that needs cautioning.

International and Local Literature on Family and Children's Development

Literature shows that whether in academic performance or school behavior, children growing up in two-parent families have better adjustments than children growing up in single-parent, mother-headed or stepfather-headed families (Zill 1996). Literature on divorce and single parenting abounds but there is not much literature devoted to the study of children in family separation situations. When there is family separation, the

families are sometimes called ‘pseudo-single families’ signifying the lack of support from both parents in raising up their children. This paper attempts to fill the gap in the literature.

Hybridities and the Hong Kong Case

The theoretical framework guiding this study is the concept of hybridity (Bhabha 1996). Rowe and Schelling (1991, 231) define ‘hybridisation’ as ‘the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in practices.’ Pieterse (1995, 62) further suggests that ‘hybridisation as a perspective belongs to the fluid end of relations between cultures: it is the mixing of cultures and not their separateness that is emphasised.’ In this sense, the present paper illustrates in the Hong Kong case there are mixes and interactions of ‘Western’ tendencies and ‘Chinese traditions’. This evolving hybridity may also be described in terms of the Chinese idea of *yin-yang*, which can be used to explain dynamic change processes. In the present case, *yin* corresponds to the original Chinese family traditions whereas *yang* corresponds to incoming western traditions or modern family forms. The two traditions are constantly mixing, interacting and changing to reach equilibrium of harmony and balance. The equilibrium is represented by the Daoist symbol (Figure 1) of one wholeness divided into equal halves of black and white. Convergences of traditions

would occur but divergences will remain. Thus in each half of the whole, there is a dot of the opposite color signifying a seed of the opposite nature.

[Figure 1 about here]

Hong Kong is a good case for using hybridity as it has always been a place where East meets West. Under the 150 years of British colonialism up to 1997, westernisation has been grafted onto the indigenous Chinese culture. As a result, Hong Kong demonstrates hybridities in relation to families. Lee's (2000) notion of 'resilient familialism' which includes both an increasing dominance of nuclear families and the prevalence of traditional family values and norms with active mutual aid networks among kin and relatives is a classical example of hybridity in Hong Kong families. Thus, the boundary of the Hong Kong family is not restricted to the physical boundary of a household but extends outward to form a family network with the nuclear families of other kinsmen (Chan and Lee 1995). Moreover, nuclear family units, cross-border and astronaut families, decline in marriage and birth rates (for details, see Luk-Fong 2000, 2005a; Sullivan 2005) coexist with the patriarchal and child centred Chinese families and the traditional cultural belief that 'family should be intact'. Given that family functioning in Hong Kong is influenced by both Chinese and Western traditions,

in order to understand how Hong Kong children cope with family situations and changes, one has to start with the hybridities of the Hong Kong family context.

School as Site of Investigation

In this paper, the site of investigation is the primary school setting. This is different from most publications in this area which draw their data either from the children or their parents as part of the family. Many scholars think that school is the best institution to help children cope during family changes and divorce, because it can provide a safe and secure environment, with regular routines and disciplines during periods of transitions and turmoil (Allers 1982; Hetherington 1987). This is in line with Dowling and Barnes (2000), who posit that a caring and supporting school environment, sensitive to the needs of students and family situations, is most helpful to children during family transitions. They consider it essential that schools should provide support to children in the changing familial contexts for two reasons. This is because in the child's mind, the two worlds of home and school are held together and what is happening in one context is constantly having an impact on the other. Moreover, schools often neglect the emotional factors which affect children's capacity for learning as they mainly focus on the cognitive development and academic performance of the children. In highlighting the importance of the school and teachers in helping children

cope with changing family situations and contexts, the choice of the school as site for investigation seems most appropriate. Further, guidance service to children in Hong Kong is delivered through a systems approach; namely, through the comprehensive guidance system (Education Bureau 2004). As such, in relating to children's welfare and problems, teachers are to work with class teachers, guidance professionals at school and in the community on the one hand, and with parents at home on the other hand.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative case study methodology. A case study methodology is the best way to capture the uniqueness of Hong Kong (Stake, 1988). This agrees with Yang (1993, 33), who calls for the use of qualitative method 'in doing research for indigenous Chinese people because it can show the concrete details of the actual psychological and behavioural phenomena and their complex relationship in their social-cultural context.' Further, as this paper is concerned with a new area of study, namely teachers' perceptions of school children coping with family situations, there are few categories and concepts from the literature to build on and qualitative methodology is the most suitable (Alasuutari 1995).

Teachers' Case Stories

The major data collection method was in-depth individual interviews ranging from 30 to 90 minutes each. The focus of the interview was on teachers' perceptions of children living in alternative family styles or experiencing family transitions. Teachers were asked to recall cases of children living in alternative family styles or experiencing family transitions during their teaching careers from memories. Following Gardner's (1961) suggestion that projective techniques are suitable for cross-cultural research, this study also used projective techniques to investigate teachers' thought about different family types in Hong Kong's unique context, as compared with the West. Teachers' case stories of children's coping and adjustment in different familial situations is the main source of data used in this study. The stories represent snapshots of teachers' perception of children's struggles in difficult family situations. Stories are useful as they can embody children's lived experiences in their changing family situations and illustrate the kind of hybridities children are facing in the hybrid Hong Kong context. About narratives, Rosaldo (1986, 98) puts it well, 'Narrative can provide a particular rich source of knowledge about the significance people find in their workaday lives.' Data in this study were obtained by asking school personnel to recall and retell stories of children in changing and difficult situations that impressed them most during their teaching careers. This way of recall has a great limitation in that data

may have been lost or distorted by teachers' memory. The researcher is also aware that teachers have their own biases about divorces and alternative family forms (Drake 1981; Luk-Fong 2006). Indeed, it is the intention of this paper to capture the personal values of teachers about family types, because it is through the lenses of their biases that they provide care and support to children from these families. The case studies in this paper, from the teacher's perceptions, are to illuminate the actual mixing and blending of East and West contexts, to identify the actual experiencing of children in changing familial situations in the Hong Kong context and to propose implications for actions.

Four cases were selected from more than 10 typical cases narrated by the teachers. Illustrative stories of typical family types were chosen; they suffice to show the complex and multiple ways of families negotiating with the hybrid situations in Hong Kong. All cases were obtained from in-depth interviews with 30 primary school personnel in different age groups and working in different positions at school. Each story involved in-depth descriptions by one (a male or a female class teacher alone) or several (a mix of class teacher, guidance teacher, discipline teacher and school principal) school personnel. The triangulation of data from different personnel, if available, makes the data more rich and reliable. Both boys and girls at different levels, with father-, mother- or grand-father-headed families were included in the four cases.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following two research questions:

3. What is the experiencing of children in changing family situations in the Hong Kong context from the perceptions of primary school teachers?
4. How far do cases of family transitions exhibit features of hybridities? What issues are raised about supporting children in changing familial situations from the case stories?

Presentation of Case Stories

For each case, the background information (about the story teller, the student and the school), the main difficulties that the child was facing, and the family structure and family relation as perceived by the teacher(s) will be given. It is important to include who tells the story and in what context, for as Narayan and George (2003, 126) put it well, 'People tell their stories according to their own feelings and the feelings of their audience.' All the four case stories are analysed using the framework of hybridities. All the names of the children are pseudonyms in order to protect the children and their families.

Case 1: Grandfather-headed globalised family

The following excerpt is a case story told by a female class teacher who has 15 years of teaching experience in a co-educational government primary school in the urban area of Hong Kong. The socio-economic status of the students' family is average.

Ah Ming was a primary six³ boy. He wore untidy uniforms in summer, and did not wear jackets nor sweaters in winter. He often had no breakfast. He slept in class. Ah Ming's mother left for England to study and his father worked in China. He was taken care most of the time by his grandfather. Talking with the boy at length, the teacher found out that the grandfather was unable to find winter clothings for him. Ah Ming slept in class because his father took him to a karaoke in Shenzhen, across the border, the night before and they returned home during midnight. Ah Ming was very unhappy when he talked about his parents, and would be in tears when asked about his mother. Ah Ming was bright but chose to give up on himself in academic work.

When asked how she thought about the case, the teacher responded,

Maybe he felt being abandoned by his mother. Sometimes, I feel we have no ability to handle these problems. Although Ah Ming graduated from the school two years ago, I'm still worried about him. I feel very unhappy, I would give him clothes that my son had outgrown. If he had not eaten breakfast, I would give him some biscuits. I did not want him to feel my pity on him. Hence, I only talked with him occasionally, avoiding others' notice. Like if he was lying on the table, I would ask if he was sick to show my care to him.

This case shows the separation of family members in an astronaut family impacted on by the changing societal conditions in Hong Kong. As Hong Kong become more globalised and modernised, Ah Ming's mother could go abroad for study (reversal of traditional feminine role) which would be unthought of half a century ago. After Hong Kong was reunited with China in 1997, more people like Ah Ming's father have to cross the border to work in China. While the mother was abroad, the father and

the grandfather (though he was willing to help) seemed incapable of looking after Ah Ming's healthy growth. Ah Ming lacked basic physical care, even proper meals and proper clothes. Moreover, family members were apparently not aware of or incapable of dealing with Ah Ming's emotional needs and yearning for the 'loss' of his mother.

Case 2: A joint-custody divorce family

This story was told by a male class teacher in his early 30s. The school was a government co-educational school in an outlying district in Hong Kong. The socio-economic status of the student's family was low. This was a divorce case of joint custody by both parents. Excerpts of the story were as below:

Siu Keung was a primary six boy. He was unruly and talkative in class. He often ran around the classroom, at times kneeling down and lying on the floor and often failing to hand in homework. Siu Keung stayed with each of his parents half time. The teacher only saw either the father or the mother during parents' days. He saw both parents together only once during Siu Keung's graduation ceremony. The father drove Siu Keung to school and the mother sat with Siu Keung during the ceremony. The child seemed to lack love. He did participate in the guidance programme 'Space for growing up.' His case had been discussed in school for two years.

Case 2 is an example of co-parenting in a divorced family. Despite Siu Keung's restlessness, unruly behaviors in class and failures in handing in assignments, he managed to have good social relationships with friends. The teacher formulated his problem:

His problems with homework were related to the fact that he had missed too much work since primary one and so he lagged too far behind...Every year he just got by. His homework were copied from others. He would do homework that just required

copying... Teachers tried to ask him to do homework during recess and after school, but he owed so many teachers' homework. Which teacher could he entertain? If he failed to hand in homework for me, I would not chase after him.

Teachers' time was limited and they could not help him to make up for work missed in the previous years. Siu Keung never mentioned his parents' divorce to the teacher, but he wanted this class teacher to be his father. To this the male teacher reacted quite uncomfortably,

I tell him to ask his father, I said, 'If your father heard you call everyone father, how would he think? How would he feel?' Siu Keung did not say a word. Siu Keung enjoyed talking to me and would keep order if I gave him sweets secretly in the staff room. When waiting for his father to pick him up after extra-curricular activities, he felt lonesome and being abandoned.

Siu Keung's showed some good adjustment which may be related to structures provided at home and in school. His parents negotiated in attending his graduation. His participation in extra-curricular activities and guidance programme in school apparently enhanced his relations with friends. The class teacher's care and support seemed important for alleviating some of Siu Keung's difficulties. However, the class teacher alone was not able to help Siu Keung keep up with his academic work nor ease his emotional stress from the family situation. This case demonstrated the ambivalences and emotional burdens that both Siu Keung and the class teacher were experiencing. Although the parents seemed near, they were not near for Siu Keung's emotional needs. The class teacher cared about Siu Keung but was very uncomfortable

when Siu Keung called him father. Though under a modern form of child custody, Sin Keung's silence about the divorce suggested the stigma attached to divorce by teachers and the child. Its knowledge by many people in the school might have created enormous stress for the child.

Case 3: A cross-border family

This story was told by an experienced discipline female teacher, in her 40s, with over 20 years of experience. The school is a Christian co-educational school in a new town.

Ping Heung was a gifted boy. However, he was unhappy and bad-tempered. As the only son in the family, he was pampered by his patriarchal father, who was a retired soldier. Deeply affected by the traditions of male dominance and preference for sons, the father looked down upon his wife and daughter. Following his father's example, Ping Heung was disrespectful to his mother, who could not control him. Thus, Ping Heung was treated as if he was a little emperor at home. When his father abandoned the family after meeting a woman across the border in China, Ping Heung became aggressive and hit his teachers and classmates. He was later referred to a school for children with behavior problems. I feel very sad that his giftedness was wasted. At first, all teachers accepted him but later on nobody wanted him.

The discipline teacher talked to him, taught him how to handle his emotions, but to no avail. He was then referred to the school guidance officer and community resources. However, the support was still not enough for his adjustment.

This case shows how a chauvinistic father who upset the equilibrium at home led to the aggressive behaviors of his son in school. The mother did not have the power to discipline the son as he was pampered by his father. When the father finally abandoned

the family, it was a loss too great for Ping Heung to bear. The case also shows that traditional patriarchal ideas still prevail in modern Hong Kong. After the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997, extra-marital affairs across the Hong Kong-China border became common. The unrespectable absence of a father figure in a patriarchal family had a great impact on the son. School support alone was inadequate to help the child.

Case 4: Father-headed repartnered family

This case came from a Catholic girls' school in the urban area in Hong Kong. This school has high reputation, with students from the middle/upper middle class. According to the principal, children from divorce families in this school could generally manage well with adequate resources (such as domestic helpers). However, the school principal, the guidance teacher and an experienced teacher all recalled one girl who had great difficulties in her adjustment. The story contributed by the three school personnel converged as follows:

Mei Ling was now a primary four girl living in a Children's Home. She had been a student of the school when she was in primary two, but she had repeated twice. She could not concentrate in class and often failed to hand in homework. Assessment showed that she has reasonable IQ. Her mother was invited to talk to the class teacher about her academic problems. Owing to marital discord, the mother later left the family. The father often beat the girl and demanded that she finished her homework even working till midnight. Mei Ling would be scolded for meeting with her mother. After his wife left, the father looked for a woman to take care of her two daughters because of his long working hours. He met one in the park. They later cohabitated. The woman wished to build a new family with Mei Ling's father and younger sister by placing Mei Ling in a Children's Home. The teacher

thought that Mei Ling was bright and fluent in expression, but she could not concentrate on her studies because of her family situation.

All the school personnel in this case co-operated to help Mei Ling. The teacher and guidance teachers remarked that they would be like a mother to her; both gave her their telephone numbers. The guidance teacher would visit her in the Children's Home and let her own daughter talk with Mei Ling. The Principal tried to boost Mei Ling's self-esteem by publicly presenting the prize she won in the Children's Home to her during school assembly. All the school personnel said that they helped by loving Mei Ling more. They were angry that her father, though an educated doctor from China, could mistreat her own daughter in such a way.

This case as described by the personnel has evolved over a number of years, from the father fighting for to giving up custodies of the daughters, then to sending Mei Ling to a Children's Home. Meetings have been conducted by school personnel, a worker from social welfare department and a psychologist on issues relating to Mei Ling's adjustment and placement to different educational settings. Most probably, the emotional tensions caused by parental conflicts, missing the non-custodian parent, readjustment to the 'step-mother' and separation from her younger sister were too great for Mei Ming to be able to concentrate on her studies. Again, this case demonstrated the

father's lack of ability to take care of the children alone. A woman from the park was grabbed to take care of his daughters.

Discussion

New Family Forms Co-Existing with Traditional Family Values – Children's Problems Are Hidden

The case studies show that modern alternative family forms such as grand-parent headed family, pseudo-single parent families (in astronaut families), blended family, child abused family, and co-parenting were emerging. However, traditional family values such as 'family disgrace should not be disclosed' and 'families should be intact' were still strong as one can see that in Case 3, Siu Keung never talked about his own parents' divorce in school, and in Case 4, Mei Ling only talked about happy things in schools.

With hybridities arising when new family forms co-exist with traditional family values, children are suffering from their family situations. They preferred hiding their problems to receiving intervention or help from any third party. Only when their problems became acute did they catch the eyes of the teachers as 'problematic students'. Thus, much of the children's emotional difficulties were unknown. When problems surfaced, teachers only dealt with them as secrets.

Modern Family Forms But Traditional Family Values – New Forms of Care to Children Are Needed

The case studies managed to unveil some of the problems children are facing in the hybrid contexts of modern family forms with traditional family values, using the school as site of investigation. Children's family problems might not have been foregrounded if only the home was site of investigation, as only families with serious problems might openly seek for treatment in family services centres. All subjects in the four cases were suffering high emotional distress and having difficulties in their concentration/motivation for studies.

The ad-hoc ways in which teachers helped school children as 'fathers' or 'mothers' of a traditional family in the school context was highly inadequate. More sustained co-operative efforts from the families of the children must be elicited. The personal, sometimes intense ways that teachers took in these cases, such as giving their own phone numbers, visiting students in Children's Home and letting students to talk with their own children, perhaps relate to cultural traditions of Chinese teachers as proposed by Hayhoe (1999) and Luk-Fong (2005b). Chinese teachers' concerns go beyond students' academic knowledge to their whole person development (Cheng and Wong 1996), including their moral development. The pleasing thing shown in this study is that teachers loved their students very much. However, the close personal

relationship with the students and a lack of boundary between students and teachers created great stress for the teachers, particularly in view of the relatively large class size (32.2 students per class) in local schools (Education Bureau 2006) and the heavy workload of the teachers. There is a great need to care for the teachers as ‘carers’.

Despite role changes and increasingly important status of women in the Hong Kong society, the family system did not seem to have changed accordingly. Traditional Chinese family values ‘men take charge of the outside and women take charge of the inside of the family’ and the caring role of woman as ‘a good wife and mother’ still prevail in the lived experiences of families. Fathers and Grandfathers, though willing, could not competently take up the caring role for children. Traditional Chinese ideas of male dominance were still significant in many families, particularly in cross-border families. Case 3 demonstrated that power relationships in the family could not be ignored when addressing a patriarchal and male-chavistic family. In such a family, the mother was powerless to exert discipline on a son. The negotiations between traditional family values and changing family forms were often not easy.

Implications of This Study

Need for Reconfigurations of 'Family', 'Workplace' and 'Gender And Power' in the Hong Kong Hybrid Context

The above case studies have shown in concrete details how family separations induced by divorce, remarriages, globalisation of workforce, and cross-border marriages are giving challenges to children's academic and healthy development and how teachers are responding to their families when parents cannot cope with the provision of child care. Without reconfiguration of gender role, family, workplace and power relationship, 'resilient familialism' alone is inadequate in helping families to nurture their children.

Tu's (2002) call for a reconfiguration of family and gender is very apt here, in his words,

I think one important implication for the rise of feminism as a form of humanism, is not simply the quest of gender equality, but a fundamental transformation of what is a family, what is a public place, for work, basic nature of human relationships, even the pattern of authority and power (p. 160).

Perhaps a good starting point for action is the awareness of the multiple manifestations of 'families' in Hong Kong. In the re-configurations of 'families', one crucial question to ask is how the nurturing of children best be supported in a culture where 'family disgrace should not be disclosed' is the norm.

Training Needs of Teachers

Teachers are stressed and overwhelmed and they need to be supported. In pre-service and in-service teaching training, teachers must be made aware of how the changing family terrains are affecting the children they teach. They should also be taught the skills in understanding and sensitively responding to these children. Moreover, children's academic and emotional problems must be tackled hand in hand. School principals and administrators must ensure that policies and practices enhance a culture of acceptance and non-discrimination to all children and families.

Needs for Comprehensive Co-Ordinated Policies and Co-Operative Efforts From Family, School and Society

In this era of changing family and gender relationships, policy makers have to recognise that children are embedded in the family and school systems which are in turn embedded in the hybridised Hong Kong society. In formulating policies in supporting the academic and personal development of children, the roles played by home, school and society, and how their efforts be coordinated should be the focus. Some starting points for action may include the school system using the close personal relationship of teachers, especially class teachers, with students in the school setting, but, at the same time, finding ways to relieve teachers' workload. In the home front, it would benefit the children if mothers' changing roles in work can be acknowledged at

home and the caring roles of fathers can be enhanced and encouraged. One practical issue is perhaps to provide the necessary child caring skills to non-traditional carers (like father and grandfathers). For the society, more community education about the increasing diversities in family forms, better child support policies and a family-friendly support environment should be in place in response to the changing family terrain in the society. The situation may be more stressful in Hong Kong as compared with the West, because the changes in families as a result of industrialisation and globalisation are compressed within a much shorter time span of the last fifty years in contrast to more than a hundred years in the West (Lau, 2005). Moreover, the changes are taking place in families embedded in deep-rooted traditional Chinese family values.

Conclusion

The case stories have provided rich data embedded in their naturalistic settings. This paper has demonstrated in the lived experiences of children how the traditional family values cannot keep pace with rapidly changing modern family forms. It has argued that new kinds of problems were created in the changing hybridised familial contexts in Hong Kong. New ways of coping with the problems are required. In terms of methodology, this paper has attempted to understand children's coping with changing

familial situations from the school site through teachers' perception. As such, it has fore-grounded children's and teachers' voices and difficulties that would otherwise not be heard. This way of data collection is inadequate as a lot of data might have been missed by interviewing the school personnel only. Future directions of the study can include studying the voices of the trio of parents, teachers and children to add to the thickness of data. Another limitation of this study is the way that the subjects were recruited. As subjects were recruited on a voluntary basis, the study might have self-selected teachers who perceive children's family problems as serious. Moreover, students who were coping well would not be identified by the teachers as children were generally not too ready to disclose their problems in the Chinese contexts. Last but not least, this study is very small in scale and hence only exploratory in nature. The purpose of this study is to raise issues rather than to generalise. More large-scaled quantitative and qualitative studies and indeed, longitudinal studies are needed before results can be generalised.

Although this paper is about Hong Kong, it is hoped that this paper will spark off discussions on similar issues in parallel settings in the world particularly in areas where Confucian heritage has met modernisation. The ultimate goal is to search for

ways in which schools and society can start to help the coping of children with methods suitable to hybrid cultures and changing contexts.

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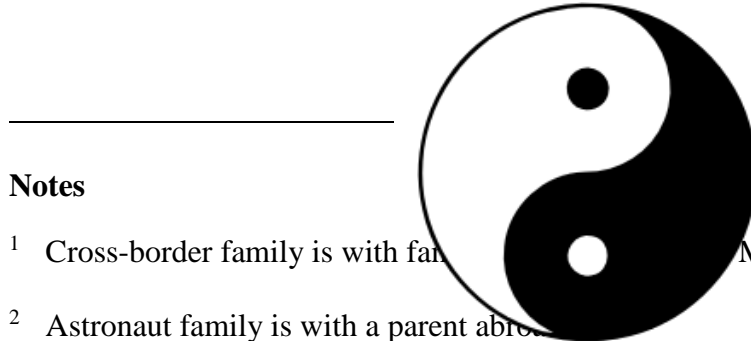
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Figure 1 Daoist symbol of *yin-yang*



Notes

- ¹ Cross-border family is with family members living in Mainland China
- ² Astronaut family is with a parent abroad
- ³ Primary 6 is the last year of elementary school. It is equivalent to grade 6 in the U.S.A. system.