An Exploration of the Identities and Gender Discourses of a Taiwanese Woman: A Case Study of a Working Mother

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Abstract

This exploratory study sets out to examine the identities of a Taiwanese woman in the 21st century. Adopting the case study as a research strategy, I probe into a working mother's life story to understand firstly a Taiwanese working mother's perspectives on her family roles as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. Secondly, I investigate how social institutions, which transmit different and often-conflicting Confucian and non-Confucian "gender discourses" influence her identities.

This thesis adopts narrative interviews as the major method to probe into the life story of a Taiwanese working mother. The dimensions of domestic work and childcare, verbal communication, marital sex and looking after parents-in-law are examined in order to understand how she has taken on gender discourses and developed identities through her contact with different social institutions. Informed by post-structuralism and feminist theories, I consider the Taiwanese working mother as an individual who has "agency", meaning she recognizes and values her ability to use and integrate gender discourses into her sense of self through the process of self-attribution.

My research results found that "differentiation" "reflection" and "reflexivity" are themes that play important roles in affecting how a Taiwanese working

mother perceives herself as an individual and defines her social and family roles. The findings also show that a working mother is able to negotiate different gender discourses. Despite the influence of the Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary, her interactions with different social institutions, especially her native family, counselling services and women's self-help groups, enable her to develop a sense of "who I am". She is able to reflect on her life experiences and perceive gender discourses in a critical manner and thus take on gender discourses that she identifies with to develop her own identities.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The women's movement has experienced great growth in the West, such as in the US and UK, since the early 20th century, especially after the 1960s (Sicherman 1975, Kent 1999). This growth has affected the Taiwanese society of 21st century. Although the women's movement was originally launched to alleviate women's unequal social position and raise women's consciousness of their legal rights in society (Kent 1999, Vickery 1993), feminist women have lately extended their concerns to women's family, domestic and personal lives (Kent 1999). The women's movement, together with other developments, such as women's employment and higher education, appear to have shaken "tradition" in many societies. Informed by Giddens (1991), I use the term "tradition" to describe Confucianism, a Chinese philosophy, which was introduced to the Taiwanese society in the 16th century, which reinforces ideas about what a woman should be in a male dominant society. Before the 1980s Confuciansim was a form of "primary source of authority" in Taiwan (Giddens 1991: 194).

After the Second World War, it was used by the government as a means of social control in order to "stabilize" political, economic and social systems. The tradition was exclusive and dominant because it "created a sense of

firmness of things that typically mixes cognitive and moral elements"
(Giddens 1991: 48). Before the 1980s, Confucianism was passed down to
many generations. It was perceived by family members as a set of
guidelines for family life. Having embraced Confucianism and considered it
as the standard of correctness in many aspects of family life, a married
woman perceived and defined herself in terms of her family roles within the
framework of Confucianism because it was morally right to do so. A
restrictive political and social system further preserved the domination of
Confucianism and prevented married women from taking on "non-
traditional" information and knowledge as a means of guidance.

Confucian tradition can be seen as a form of male dominant culture in
many ways. "Traditions", such as patriarchy, which in many countries,
including Taiwan, is used to strictly define women and men's roles, such as
women as homemakers and carers and men as breadwinners (Rupp 1981,
Vickery 1993, Kent 1999, Charles 1993, Office for National Statistics UK
2005, US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics
Administration, US Census Bureau 2004). It often connotes ideas that
women are expressive, emotional and domesticity-oriented. For example,
within the context of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition, a married
woman is defined by her contribution to domestic work and childcare as a
wife and mother.

However, "tradition" (patriarchy) might have less influence on women of the
21st century compared to the previous historical era due to social, economic

and political changes. This study sets out to investigate how these developments influence a Taiwanese married woman's perceptions of her family roles and identities.

I expect to explore the possibility that a Taiwanese woman today does not necessarily conform to the Confucian family tradition because of the influence of the social changes and developments described above. This research focus echoes the fundamental feminist viewpoint that values women's subjective experience (Robinson and Godbey 1997:18). Adopting feminist thinking, this study values "women's concrete experiences across culture, society and history… from women's points of view" (Benhabit 1987: 1).

1.2 Research question and its disclosure

This study investigates the identities of a Taiwanese working mother. The research question is: An exploration of the identities and gender discourses of a Taiwanese woman: a case study of a working mother. I look at how a Taiwanese working mother defines herself as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. The aims of the research are firstly to provide insight into a Taiwanese working mother's perspectives on her family roles and secondly, to investigate how "gender discourses" influence her identities.

"Gender discourses" that represent the influences of different social institutions, such as families and educational institutions, on women are a

form of social discourse. They contain not just "a language or a text but a historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs" (Scott 2005:447). Social discourses exist in relation to all facets of lives, such as around the social enterprise of education and on how societies define women and men. These social discourses influence how individuals interpret, perceive and define matters. A social discourse does not represent what is "real". Rather it actually produces what individuals come to understand as real. It gives individuals the words and conceptual frameworks by which individuals attempt to understand themselves and their experiences. By using the concept of social discourse, this study recognizes that how an individual develops a sense of self has to be understood within social contexts. Individuals use words and hence understand a sense of self that represents socially constructed meanings (Bilton et al 1996).

Various social discourses about what constitutes "woman" and "man" have appeared over time. Gender discourses in this study, however, refer to social discourses that contain meanings about what constitutes "woman". Gender discourses are being created and transmitted through political, economic and social developments and have frequently embraced meanings that are delivered systematically and coherently. Gender discourses can be transmitted in diverse forms, for example, through press and the mass media, such as books, magazines, advertising slogans and political propaganda, as well as through different social institutions, such as schools and families. The widespread gender discourses shape women's

sense of who they are in a "traditional" way, for example, they transmit ideas that women should take the major responsibility for domestic work and childcare.

The identities of a woman are explored by investigating how a working mother attributes gender discourses to her sense of self. In other words, in this study the identity of a woman is described as her self-attributions of who she is. The self-attribution is used to describe "an individual's own feelings" (Kessler and Mckenna 1978: 8) that values her/his subjective views about who she/he is. This study uses self-attribution to emphasize that a woman is capable of cultivating a sense of self and deciding what she is.

This study proposes that a woman develops identities via her own accord and thus does not necessarily define herself according to tradition that often transmits patriarchal gender discourses. As a result of social, economic and political developments in Taiwan since the 1980s, different social institutions have transmitted Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses that contain different and often conflicting meanings about what women are or what women should be. Therefore, despite the influence of Confucianism, this study does not pre-determine the identities of a Taiwanese working mother as Confucianism-oriented, but investigates how a Taiwanese working mother attributes her sense of self by negotiating Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses.

Four dimensions in relation to a woman's family roles are investigated: 1. Domestic work and childcare. 2. Verbal communication. 3. Marital sex. 4. Looking after parents-in-law. Through the four dimensions, this study expects to understand how both Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses influence the perspectives and identities of a Taiwanese working mother in relation to her family roles.

1.3 The focus of the study

This study particularly focuses on an educated and employed woman. An educated and employed Taiwanese working mother is chosen. Research on Western women has indicated that educated and employed women are able to challenge patriarchal tradition. This includes them rejecting or challenging ideas, such as that marriage provides financial security and that a married woman should take on primary domestic responsibilities (e.g. Giddens 1991, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Available evidence shows that employed women are more likely to end their marriage than un-employed ones if they have an unhappy marital relationship (Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish and Kim 2002). Higher education causes married women to have a somewhat higher expectation of negotiation with their husbands regarding gender division of domestic work and childcare (Houseknecht, Vaughan and Macke 1984).

Scholars state that the paid labour market enables workers, including working mothers, to become financially independent and thus empowers

them to make decisions in favour of their circumstances (Beck 1992). Because of the level of education and their employment, educated and employed women might be able to "think about, criticize, and alter (gender) discourse" that they consider problematic (Alcoff 2005:433). Accordingly, an educated and employed married woman becomes capable of challenging gender discourses and as a result, is likely to think about what she wants or what is important for her, such as her own happiness in the marriage (Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish and Kim 2002). This in turn indicates that women's "subjectivity can be reconstructed" despite the influences of patriarchal tradition (Alcoff 2005:433).

However, I argue that how an educated woman defines herself is also affected by her interactions with social institutions. For example, a study of Taiwanese women during the colonization of Japan stated that because of living in a patriarchal dominant society, Taiwanese women considered themselves as homemakers. An educated woman believed that a "proper" husband had to support the family, while a "proper" wife should stay at home to look after the family. A married woman who was able to study and obtain qualifications to work as a midwife was seen as having a "poor destiny" because her husband had failed to perform as an "appropriate" breadwinner and was unable to earn enough money to support her and the family (Song Jin-shiu 2000). Conversely, research on Taiwanese women of the 21st century shows that educated women in modern era are likely to challenge or disagree with the Taiwanese Confucian tradition. For example, one survey found that educated married Taiwanese women feel less

obligated to have sons to carry on family line for their husbands' family (Thornton, Yang, Fricke and Chang 1994). Similar research shows that educated married Taiwanese women do not necessarily believe that paying living expenses and living with parents-in-law are the only ways to demonstrate filial obligation (Marsh 1998, Weinstein, Sun, Chang and Freedman 1994). This study thus sets out to study an employed married woman with higher education to understand how she contributes to her sense of self by negotiating Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses and how she develops identities in the Taiwanese society of the 21st century.

1.4 Why is this study important?

This study contributes to research into women by positively asserting a woman's capabilities to cultivate her sense of self in a gendered society. Instead of treating her as passive and negative recipients of gender discourses, this study is open to the possibility that she is able to think for herself and live as an independent and wilful individual. I value the subjective experiences of women and expect to explore how in a changing society, a married woman negotiates gender discourses which transmit different and often conflicting ideas about what women are, and how she develops identities from these negotiations. This study's contribution also includes exploring a woman's ability of self-attribution to develop her identities. I have examined how a working mother interacts with others and

manages her family roles to find put how she relates gender discourses to her sense of self.

1.5 Thesis structure

I have divided the thesis into nine chapters. The thesis begins by offering contextual information that provides background knowledge of how Taiwanese society in the 21st century has become an 'intricate' society. I explain that the Taiwanese society of the 21st century is open and changeable and that allows for the transmission of not only Confucian gender discourses but also non-Confucian ones. In Chapter Three I review available studies on the dimensions of domestic work and childcare, verbal communication, marital sex and looking after in-laws that are associated with married Taiwanese women's family roles as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law. I also examine research on the identities of Western women. In Chapter Four, I explain the theoretical perspective of this study, including how I perceive a woman's identities in terms of Post-structuralism, and the conceptual framework regarding how this study perceives the process of a woman developing a sense of self. In Chapter Five, I illustrate the research strategy and methods that are used to explore my research question. I also depict how this study analyzes and presents findings. Issues, including validity, reliability and ethical issues are discussed. In Chapter Six, I present interview data that reveal the narrative of my interviewee concerning her perceptions and identities of family roles in relation to the four dimensions. I also include other dimensions that provide

unexpected but important information about how my interviewee perceives and defines her family roles. In Chapter Seven, I present interview data that is related to my interviewee's perceptions of family roles. I include the data that do not fall into the categories of the four dimensions or family role identities but nevertheless further reveal how my interviewee perceives herself in marital life. In Chapter Eight, I explain how the findings answer the research question. I illustrate the influences of gender discourses on a woman's perceptions and identities. These findings are discussed by examining my interviewee's stories about the four dimensions and her interactions with social institutions. I also discuss how the findings are related to theoretical perspectives and the methods that I have used to collect and analyze the data. In Chapter Nine, I summarize key research findings, discuss limitations to the study and consider areas for further work.

CHAPTER TWO FAMILY LIFE, SOCIAL CHANGE AND GENDER DISCOURSES IN TAIWAN

As this study investigates a Taiwanese woman's perceptions and identities in relation to her family roles, I will provide an overview of women's marital lives and the family structure of Taiwanese society.

2.1 Background: Marital life and family structure in Taiwan

The marrying age of Taiwanese people has been delayed compared to the previous era. In 2007 the average age of a first marriage for males and females was 30.3 and 27.7 respectively (Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, Taiwan 2009). The marital rate of couples per 1,000 persons was 6.7% in 1998 and remained the same in 2008. However, the divorce rate has increased. The divorce rate of couples per 1,000 persons was 2% in 1998 and had increased to 2.6% in 2007 (DGBAS 2009). In 2009, the divorce rates of women and men aged 15 or over were 7.2% and 6.6% respectively (DGBAS 2011). According to national statistics in 2002, the nuclear family, despite its having decreased by 3.87% compared with 1998 due to a falling fertility rate, is still the main family type, accounting for 63.34% of families in Taiwan. Between 1998 and 2002, the number of extended families decreased, accounting for 18.47% of families in Taiwan (Third Department DGBAS 2008). Among those who live with their parents, married couples are more likely to live

with the parents of husbands than with the wives' parents, accounting for 32.9% and 2.1% respectively (DGBAS 1999). With the recent "South-going" policy of the Taiwanese government that encourages business partnerships with South-east Asian countries, many married Taiwanese business men and women work abroad, such as in China, with their spouses, children and elder parents staying in Taiwan. However, it is not clear how this type of separation has or will affect family and marital lives (DGBAS 2011:7).

In 2009, the average Taiwanese life expectancy was 79 years, with the difference between male and female being 76 and 82 years, respectively (DGBAS 2011). The total fertility rate of women aged 15-49 (the average number of children that would be born alive to a hypothetical cohort of 1,000 women) was below 2 in 1985 but decreased to 1.1 in 2007 (DGBAS 2009, DGBAS 2011). Because of the increasing rate of employment among married women, the proportion of double-income families have increased. In 2006, the percentage of families with two incomes was 37.0%, an increase of 2.7% compared to 2003 (DGBAS 2009).

Taiwanese society of the 21st century is described as a "friendly" society by Yu (2005) in her research on working mothers because of its "family-work" friendly environment whereby married women have opportunities to return to the paid labour market after getting married or maternity leave. The features of this friendly society, according to Yu (2005), are higher education opportunities for men and women, a nuclear family as the predominant family pattern and increasing job opportunities for both single

and married women. From my point of view, however, what makes for the friendliness is the social environment created by those developments because these allow for more personal choices and mobility for women. That is, the friendly Taiwanese society of the 21st century is one which provides opportunities for women to examine various gender discourses. Within a Confucian context, this means that not only the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition is considered but also the current social developments which are allowing Taiwanese women to come into contact with non-Confucian gender discourses. These in turn are having an influence on married Taiwanese women in the modern era.

As this study aims to understand the identities of married Taiwanese women in relation to gender discourses in the 21st century, a review of literature that looks into the features of Taiwanese society in the 21st century is necessary. The following section aims to explain why I consider Taiwanese society as an open society for married women to take on both Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses.

2.2 Confucianism as a Taiwanese tradition

In this section I will explain in more detail how before the 1980s Confucianism was well-preserved and formed a Taiwanese family tradition that predominated and determined how married Taiwanese women perceived and defined their family roles.

2.2-1 The development of Confucianism

Since the 1600s, Han[1] (Chinese) people have been migrating to Taiwan from China. With this migration, the Han brought with them the many ways of their culture. One of their beliefs was that of Confucianism, which evolved out of the philosophy and teachings of Confucius (551-479 BC). In general, Confucianism reinforces family hierarchy and an ancestor-worship tradition in which individuals are valued based on their contributions to the family. As such, the roles of family members are strictly defined in terms of their age and gender, for example men should be breadwinners and women are considered as homemakers. With the migration came the education of young children in the ways of Confucianism. This education was placed initially in the hands of public and private schools, which were operated by immigrant sinologists and other Han authorities (Shue Hua-yuan 2000). Since its initiation in the 1600s, Confucianism has been deemed to be representative of many aspects of Taiwanese tradition (Shue Hua-yuan 2000).

Above all, political factors were crucial for preserving Confucianism before the 1980s. Between 1895 and 1946, during the colonization of Taiwan by Japan, the political power of the Japanese empire coerced Taiwanese society by its assimilation policies that reinforced the Japanese male-dominant culture. Yet, Japan's colonization of Taiwan did not eliminate

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[1] Immigrant Chinese people were addressed as Han people or the Hans. This differentiated them from the aboriginal peoples on the island.

Confucianism. It preserved Confucianism because both the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition and the colonial Japanese power adhered to the patriarchal doctrine that determined that males were superior to female family members. (Lu Hsiu-lien 1991,You Jian-ming 1999, Han Zuo-liang 1949 in You Jian-ming 1999). Taiwanese Confucian family tradition was further preserved by the inclusive economic activities of agriculture that reinforced the extended family pattern. This in turn reinforced the idea that males were more valuable than female family members.

Confucianism continued to be preserved after the colonial period. After the Second World War, Japan withdrew from Taiwan in 1945. Taiwan was returned to Mainland China as a province. However, in 1949, soon after being defeated by the Chinese Communists in a civil war in Mainland China, the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) government, along with the remnants of its army, took over Taiwan. The KMT government coerced the Taiwanese people into submission by reinforcing Confucian Chinese culture in order to complete its hold over Taiwan (Song Jin-shiu 2000). Through political control, Confucianism was well preserved between 1946 and 1987. The social control was further intensified when the KMT government issued the Emergency Decree, bringing martial law into effect. To address the unstable social and economic position of Taiwan, this conservative political movement imposed restrictions on the freedom to publish and the right to social and political assembly, or any other activities that were considered "endangering" the stability of the society and thus the development of Confucianism. Because of the restrictions, the Confucian culture in Taiwan

was once again preserved (Song Jin-shiu 2000, Shue Hua-yuan 2000).

Through these previous eras, the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition was formed and preserved. The intensifying social control deprived women from taking on any gender discourse other than Confucianism. Confucianism adhered to the patriarchal doctrine under which women learned to perceive their family roles through the filter of Confucianism.

Confucianism represents the comprehensive principles that determine Taiwanese people's manners and behaviours differently within different social contexts. However, because the primary research interest is about women's family experience, the discussion will focus on the aspect of Confucianism in relation to married women's family roles. In the following sections I will review the available material to gain a picture of how Confucianism was preserved from the 1880s to the 1980s and formed the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition that has influenced married Taiwanese women in the modern era. The following sections will explain that the Confucian tradition transmitted gender discourses that determined married Taiwanese women's positions in the family, as well as their perceptions and identities as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law.

2.2-2 The position of married Taiwanese women in the family

Before the 1980s, in the agricultural era, family members lived and worked together for the sake of collective welfare. As a result, the extended family

became the main family structure. This in turn preserved and promoted family hierarchy. Often two or three generations lived under the same roof and worked together which valued seniority and male family members. The extended family pattern reinforced family hierarchy and that together with an ancestor-worship tradition defined the strict roles of family members (Coombs and Sun 1981). Based on that, the principles of "men are superior to women" (男尊女卑) and "filial obligation" (孝道) were valued. These determined the "inferior" position of married Taiwanese women to the male members in the family (Coombs and Sun 1981).

With regard to the principle of "men are superior to women" (男尊女卑), women were inferior to men because the family structure was built upon patrilineal descent. Male descendents were expected to take the responsibility for carrying on the family line (Wang Sung-hsing 1981). Husbands often took on this duty and thus became the head of the household. Their superiority in households was further preserved by the expectation of the son as the head of the family to honour the family and worship the ancestors (Coombs and Sun 1981). As a result, married women were allocated an inferior position to male members and thus their husbands.

Wives were assigned the role of homemaker and took the primary responsibility for domestic labour and childcare. The principle of "filial obligation" (孝道) further determined married women's family duties. Under

this principle, children were obligated to pay their parents back for nurturing them by submitting to their parents and looking after their parents as they aged. Because of patrilineal descent, parents relied heavily on their sons for financial and moral support (Coombs and Sun 1981). However, in reality, it was married women who cared for the parents of their husbands (Lee, Parish and Willis 1994). Consequently, married Taiwanese women were assigned the major responsibilities of looking after their parents-in-law, a duty often associated with a great amount of domestic work.

The above material has shown that up until the 1980s, the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition, which transmitted the Confucian gender discourses that determined the family responsibilities of Taiwanese married women as mothers, wives and daughters-in-law, as well as their inferiority to their husbands, was well preserved. However, attached to these family roles were the moral standards of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" (三從四德) and "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother" (賢妻良母) that shaped the perceptions and identities of married Taiwanese women.

2.2-3 Married Taiwanese women under Confucianism

The "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" (三從四德) instructed Taiwanese women to "obey the father before marriage, to obey the husband when married and the son, if widowed" and established the four womanly virtues: "virginity, skill in needlework, language and manner" (Lu Hsiu-lien

1991:340, Lamley 1998). Virginity implies that women should not have strong sexual longing[2]; skill in needlework implies that women must be able to undertake domestic related tasks properly; language suggests that women should be reserved and cautious, not showing their (negative) emotions and feelings about others, or expressing their needs. In other words, traditionally, married Taiwanese women should always put their husbands and parents-in-law first and submissively accept family responsibilities that were assigned to them. Manner implies that they ought to be tender, generous and behave appropriately according to family roles. These gender discourses determined the family roles of married Taiwanese women by transmitting the idea that a married woman should behave and think in accordance with the four womanly virtues, thus being submissive, domesticity-oriented and virtuous. The saying, "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother" (賢妻良母) further reinforced the Confucian gender discourse that an ideal married woman ought to put her family first by devoting herself to domestic work and caring tasks to accomplish her family role as wife and mother and daughter-in-law.

The following are some examples that evidence the inevitable influences of

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[2]In pre-modern China and Taiwan, married women's sexuality was completely controlled. This can be seen from what they were praised for. Women were considered as respectable for their 'great' family roles as mothers, especially if their sons were successful, such as working as a governor for the empire. Another 'praiseworthy' status of the pre-modern women was widowhood. A widow received respect from everyone if she showed that she was determined not to remarry and to die a widow, even though it meant that she had to endure such hardships as starvation, raising her children with a lack of resources or being bullied or oppressed by others. If the story of her spread far and wide and reached the empire, she might be praised for her 'great virtue' and be rewarded with a monumental inscription saying she was virtuous. This monument was placed in front of her house so everyone could see it and pay tribute to her.

the Confucianism society on the perceptions and identities of married Taiwanese women, including those who were educated and employed: educated married women of the Japanese colonization period defined themselves as homemakers, believing that a "proper" husband had to support the family, while a "proper" wife should stay at home and look after the family. A married woman who was able to study and obtain qualifications to work as a midwife was considered to have a "poor destiny" because her husband was unable to earn enough money to support the family as an "appropriate" breadwinner (Song Jin-shiu 2000). A study of employed married women from the post war period is also instructive about women's identities within a Confucian dominant society. Once women were married, they were considered as 'guests' to their native families and were expected to seek support within their marriages. In 1981, there were about 36 percent of married Taiwanese women who were employed (DGBAS 2001a, DGBAS 2001). However, research shows that they were aware of their unequal position in the family as their financial contributions did not decrease their family duties. Nevertheless, they felt obligated to look after their unemployed husbands. These married women felt they had no choice but to accept and fulfil their assigned family responsibilities (Hsiung Ping-chun 1996, Kaufman 2000).

Political control and agricultural industry, which encouraged an extended family pattern, further preserved Confucianism that formed the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition before the 1980s. The strict social control created

a conservative social atmosphere that incorporated women into the Confucian framework and because of that, married women, including educated and employed ones, were deprived of any resources that could enable them to challenge the tradition. As research on Western women has shown, living in a conservative society with a rigid social atmosphere or strict social control, working women are likely to be integrated into the preserved social system (Allen and Hawkins 1999, Demaris and Longmore 1996, Rogers and Amato 2000, Greenstein 1995, Pina and Bengtson 1993, Greenstein 1996). Living under the influence of the Confucian patriarchal tradition, for example, working Taiwanese women, despite their employment, tend to integrate the male dominant culture into their sense of self and thus would not see any other possibilities for identity other than seeing themselves as family-bound, dutiful mothers and wives. From this perspective, this study therefore maintains that living in a Confucianism-dominated society, married Taiwanese women tended to define their family roles monotonously because of the lack of opportunities to take on different gender discourses other than those offered by Confucianism.

The Taiwanese Confucian family tradition has been influencing Taiwanese society since the 1600s and especially for the last 100 years. Since the 1980s however, the political atmosphere has changed dramatically. As a result, the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition has been confronted by "non-Confucian" social practices. In the following sections, I will explain that married Taiwanese women have been affected by non-Confucian social practices, resulting from social, economic and political developments since

the 1980s. I will depict how after the 1980s and up to the modern era, both Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses have been transmitted and have turned 21st century Taiwanese society from a traditional into an 'intricate' society that is open and changeable and allows for the transmission of various gender discourses to women (Shue Hua-yuan 2000, Lin Zhong-shiong 1998).

2.3 Social factors that transmit non-Confucian gender discourses

I will look at the factors of education, employment, the women's movement, helping professions and the key aspects of the media to illustrate how the rising non-Confucian social forces in 21st century Taiwan play an important role in creating an open and changeable Taiwanese society, thereby transmitting not only Confucian but also non-Confucian gender discourses to women.

2.3-1. Higher education for women

The educational opportunities of Taiwanese women are an important issue for this study as they contribute to a friendly social environment. Higher education is considered by this study as a means of transmitting non-Confucian gender discourses to women because learned knowledge and skills enable women to think about their circumstances from different perspectives (Beck 1992). Indeed, education enables individuals "to learn subjects beyond the demands of everyday life, opening their minds to new

areas of experiences, different traditions and ways of thinking" (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1995:46). This view inspires this study to examine how the higher educational system of 21st century Taiwan enables married Taiwanese women to impose their thoughts on the influences of various gender discourses

Resulting from economic development after the 1980s, higher education serves as the contextual support of social factors transmitting non-Confucian gender discourses. Since the 1980s, educational opportunities at all levels of education have become more accessible to Taiwanese women than ever before. This has been the result of a social policy of raising the education levels of the Taiwanese population to fulfil the requirements of a work force for the tertiary sector. The percentage of female students aged 18-21 studying in college, supplementary schools and national open universities (excluding those studying in vocational schools) was only 11.9 percent of all students in 1976, but this had increased to 64.4 percent by 2000 (Ministry of Education 2001). Although the number of female students studying postgraduate programs was still much lower than male students for this period, the number of female students studying undergraduate programmes was nearly as high as the number of male students (Ministry of Education 2002). In 2007, the sex ratio between male and female students in doctoral and master level courses was 266 and 148 (per 100 female students) respectively. For the college and university level courses, the sex ratio between male and female students was 98 (per 100 female students) in 2007, meaning that female graduates outnumbered male

graduates. In 2009, 60.2 percent of women aged 25-34 had received higher education compared to 54.8 percent of their male counterparts (DGBAS 2009). These figures indicate that since the 1980s, Taiwanese women have been more likely to obtain job opportunities because of their level of education (DGBAS 2001, DGBAS 2001a, DGBAS 2002).

Another example that shows higher education has played a vital role in transmitting non-Confucian gender discourses is the establishment of Gender Studies in universities in Taiwan. Gender Studies programmes in universities were established in the 1980s and have since then been greatly expanded. Since the 1990s, issues such as gender equality have been taught not only in women's study centres, in which the majority of students are women, but have also been listed as compulsory courses for both female and male students in all academic departments. Such perspectives might enable women to disagree with Confucianism and view their circumstances differently from proscribed Confucian roles. For example, women graduates might criticize or challenge the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition from a feminist perspective. Because of that, educated married women might confront Confucianism by questioning women's inferior position to male family members in the family and by disapproving of women's roles as dutiful wives (Centre for the Study of Sexualities at National Central University 2001, Sociology Department of National Taiwan University 2001). For these reasons, it is correct to say that higher education is an important social factor that contributes to the

creation of an open society that in turn allows educated married women to integrate non-Confucian gender discourses into their Confucian mindset.

2.3-2 Women's employment

With the promotion of women's higher education, the rate of women participating in the paid labour market has been increasing over the years. The trigger for women's employment resulted from increased foreign investments from the West and Japan that began in the 1980s, and the corresponding development of Taiwan's export-oriented industrialization and labour-intensive export processing industries (Lionberger and H.C. Chang 1970, Shue Hua-yuan 2000, Lin Zhong-shiong 1998, Kung 1978). These developments created a number of job opportunities for female workers (Kung 1978). As a result, since the 1980s, the percentage of working married women has dramatically increased as the economy has shifted from a labour-intensive, export processing-based industry to a tertiary sector-based one. By 2000, compared with the two previous decades, the participation of married women in the paid labour market had increased by 14.04% to 49.73% of the population of married women (DGBAS 2001, DGBAS 2001a).

However, the employment rate of married women is influenced by their children's ages. In the 1990s, among working women, 20% of them withdrew from the paid labour market after getting married and 10% of them left paid employment after giving birth. In 2006, the figure increased

by 10% and 5% respectively (DGBAS 2009). However, the percentage of married women who left their paid employment because of marriage and then returned to the paid labour market increased from 20.3% in 1990 to 40.9% in 2006. The percentage of mothers who left their jobs after giving birth re-entering the paid labour market increased from 28.4% in 1990 to 56.4% in 2006 (DGBAS 2009). The figures show that in the 21st century, like their female counterparts in the West, married Taiwanese women of the 21st century are likely to become non-employed due to marriage and childcare, but are also more likely to return to the paid labour market than women of the previous era.

Legislation on women's employment has further promoted the employment of married women. Since the 1990s, the Taiwanese government has drawn up a budget particularly for promoting women's job opportunities and has marked women's employment as a key area for political development (Ministry of Interior 2002). This includes a law concerning parental leave that was passed in the 1990s (Chang Jin-fen and Chang Dao-yi 1997). Together with the law of Gender Equality in Employment passed by the Legislative Yuan in March 2002 (DGBAS 2009), they have imposed on employers the duty to offer childcare service support for working mothers in order to ensure their employment. In 2007, the percentages of institutions that provided maternity leave and spouse leave to their employees were 95.7% and 46.6%, respectively, an increase of 17.6 percent for both figures from 2002 (DGBAS 2009). I conclude that together with higher education and the demands of a work force in the tertiary sector, the legal right of

married Taiwanese women to work has encouraged Taiwanese women to continue working after marriage.

While the above statistics are significant, it is not the growth in the employment rate of married women that is the focus of this study, but rather how their jobs influence their views on family roles during the industrialized era, which leads this section to the next point.

Perhaps the most significant impact of the promotion of the employment of married women is that it has weakened the control of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition over women's family roles. Married women of 21st-century Taiwan are no longer shackled to domestic lifestyles of the "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother" (賢妻良母). The employment of married Taiwanese women, particularly as white-collar workers, has not only enabled them to become financially independent. The labour market mechanism in the modern era has also somewhat enabled married women to develop qualities that promote their independence (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1995). This is largely a result of the labour market system in the 21st century developing in association with the promotion of education and the development of personal values. For example, employed women in white collar jobs might be required to obtain qualifications in order to improve their work skills. As they undertake the jobs, they then are likely to be pressed to participate in training or further study in order to obtain job promotions or negotiate for higher salaries. As a result, working women have to "plan how to take care of themselves" and they have to consider

themselves as independent individuals "with corresponding rights and interests, their own futures and their own options" (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1995:60). By means of this 21st century employment system, I argue that married Taiwanese working women, especially the educated ones, are likely to view themselves as capable and independent persons and thus challenge the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition.

While it is possible that educated and employed married Taiwanese women are able to challenge the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition, they cannot develop these qualities without the contextual support of other social factors. The influence of these factors upon Taiwanese women that transmit non-Confucian gender discourses includes the women's movement and helping professions.

2.3-3 The women's movement

Politically, in 1987 the restrictions on the freedom of speech and assembly were lifted. Since then social activities, such as the women's movement, have grown greatly and as a result, Taiwanese women have been able to have contact with different gender discourses other than the dominant Confucianism (Shue Hua-yuan 2000). The women's movement is considered by this study as an important social development that has contributed to the transmission of non-Confucian gender discourses, and which has encouraged the independence of (married) women. For example, in the 1990s women's groups proposed that the legal rights of

married women should be protected. The success of this legal move served as a strong blow against the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition. The successes included a campaign to lift the restriction which required that the residential places of husbands were the legal "home" for married women. In addition, under the new family law, married Taiwanese women were not obligated to take on the family names of their husbands (Huang Sue-ying 2001).

Another case that exemplifies how the women's movement has served the purpose of helping women reject Confucian gender discourses is its confrontation with domestic violence. Women's groups have advocated that domestic violence is a "public matter", that is, a "public crime to women's disadvantage at home" (Huang Sue-ying 2001). For more than a decade, the women's movement campaigned for the provision of the Domestic Violence Prevention Law. This law was finally passed and took effect in 1999. The new law allows for the prosecution of the abuser, usually the husband, and protects the rights and interests of the victims, often the wife (Huang Sue-ying 2001). The new law proclaims that married women should be treated as independent individuals, instead of as the possession of their husbands. The legal statement challenges the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition, in particular, the aspects of Confucian principles that determine that married women "belong" to their procreative families and thus are subjected to the authorities of male family members, especially their husbands.

2.3-4 Helping professions

Helping professions have played an important part in creating a "friendly" society for Taiwanese (married) women by transmitting non-Confucian gender discourses. The lifting of the restrictions on freedom of social activities in 1987 launched the development of helping professions, such as counselling services. In 2001, there were 88 government-funded and private institutions established in Taiwan that aimed at promoting the rights and interests of service users (Ministry of Interior 2002, Shue Hua-yuan 2000). Many welfare institutions offered counselling services, especially in major cities, like Taipei. Although these institutions did not necessarily limit their services to female clients, the majority of service users were women (Ministry of Interior 2002).

The reason for highlighting counselling services is because, like the women's movement, these helping professions in general inspire women to raise their sense of independence. This is because the emphasis on personal growth encourages women to value themselves as independent individuals. For example, counselling services encourage married women to value themselves as unique individuals and become aware of their own well being emotionally and physically. This includes encouraging married women to express their needs or discuss any personal issues that are of their concern with husbands (Lin 2005). By placing the focus on women's

needs and wellbeing, helping professions promote married women's sense of self as independent individuals and that in turn empowers them to challenge the Confucian principles, which value married Taiwanese women according to their family relations.

The above sections have depicted that higher education, women's employment, the women's movement and helping professions transmit non-Confucian gender discourses that form part of the features of Taiwanese society in the 21st century. However, it is the press and mass media that play an important role in transmitting not only the non-Confucian but also Confucian gender discourses, thereby creating an intricate Taiwanese society which allows married Taiwanese women to have contact with various gender discourses.

2.3-5 The press and the mass media as a channel for transmitting gender discourses

Since 1987 the press and mass media have undergone vigorous changes. Prior to 1987, the conservative social atmosphere allowed limited space for the development of the press and mass media. Rather, they were mostly used by the authorities as tools of political propaganda. Although television and radio became more popular during the 1970s, the programmes broadcast were used to reinforce nationalism. For instance, soap operas or films told the story of the revival of nationhood, aiming to promote a sense of national identity against the threat of the armed forces of mainland China

or as an attempt to stabilize the society. However, after 1987, resulting from new freedoms of speech and publication, the press and mass media has experienced dramatic growth. By the end of 2002, there were five television networks, 514 newspapers, 3,909 magazines and 174 radio stations in Taiwan (DGBAS 2003). In the following sections, I will present key aspects of the press and mass media that include television programmes and women's magazines to depict how the press and mass media have played an important role in transmitting both Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses in 21st century Taiwan.

The example of television

Television is often used by women's groups as a medium to make their views known and these in turn transmit non-Confucian gender discourses to the public. During their push for the revision of family law in the 1990s, for example, which aimed to promote women's safety in marital relationships, many women's groups gave interviews to television programmes to introduce the concept of the revised family law and its application (Awakening Foundation 2005, Foundation of Women Rights Promotion and Development 2005, Taipei Association for the Promotion of Women's Right 2005). Below is an excerpt from the weekly programme, 'Chinese Television News Magazine', which was broadcast in 1999 on one of the main television networks, *CTV*, on a weekday evening around ten pm:

A Taiwanese woman should pay attention to her legal right to ensure her safety in marriage. This includes knowing how to win a lawsuit in the case of stopping her husband's violence towards her. Before a battered married woman had to collect three medical documents to prove that she had suffered from physical injuries if she wanted to prove her husband's domestic violence, otherwise, she did not have a chance to win the case. But the situation is different now. According to the new family law, three medical documents are no longer the required documentary evidence. Your case can be sustained with only one certificate or if you do not have any but you have a witness to corroborate your claim in court (my translation and paraphrase) (Chinese television 1999).

However, on the television Confucian gender discourses are also transmitted. To demonstrate this, I take examples from an advertisement of a disposable static mop, and a soap opera.

An advertisement broadcast in 2003 for a disposable static mop claimed to sufficiently decrease married women's domestic burdens. In this advertisement, a hard working female homemaker juggled cleaning dusty floors and attending to her naughty toddler. With this handy mop, however, the housewife was able to finish the cleaning quickly and at the same time give her full attention to the child. At the end of this advertisement, it was said that the disposable static mop was designed to help 'good' mothers and wives perform their domestic work efficiently. This advertisement in turn reinforced the Confucian gender discourse that determined that an ideal married woman ought to be a dutiful wife and loving mother who was

expected to take on the primary responsibilities for domestic work and childcare.

Like the above advertisement, popular culture, such as soap operas, which frequently targets female audiences, also transmits Confucian gender discourses. In one of the drama series broadcast in 2005, for example, a "respectful" married woman endured the oppression of her husband and parents-in-law and dutifully devoted herself to domestic chores, and "kindly" looked after other family members of her husband. The TV series went on long enough to show this 'virtuous' woman going through hardship in her marital relationships and eventually becoming a mother-in-law herself. However, when she finally enjoyed more power in the family as a senior member and was able to make decisions on family affairs, she was 'virtuously' forgiving with those who used to oppress her and devalued her as a wife and daughter-in-law. By the end of this family drama series, the woman was sentimentally praised by family members of her husband for putting the family first, which proved her worthiness. Her self-sacrifice for the family as a wife and daughter-in-law in order to make a happy family was treated as a happy ending. Such soap operas reinforce Confucian gender discourses by suggesting that a married woman is valued by her contributions to her husband's family and that she should follow the Confucian womanly virtues and perform as a dutiful wife and daughter-in-law. The above examples evidence that the television might transmit Confucian gender discourses that reinforce Confucian gender discourses,

such as the Confucian womanly moral standards of 'Three Obediences and Four Virtues'.

The example of women's magazines

This study also depicts women's magazines as being a mediator in transmitting various gender discourses. This is because as women's magazines target female readers, the content which brings out or makes comments and suggestions on women's issues, may have an impact on (married) Taiwanese women. Relevant research on Taiwanese women has shown that women's magazines often present readers with complex themes that transmit both non-Confucian and Confucian gender discourses. One study suggests that women's magazines disseminate non-Confucian gender discourses, such as autonomy and assertiveness (Farris 1991, Thornton, Fricke, Yang and Chang 1994). An article in the Taiwanese edition of an international women's magazine, Elle, illustrates this thrust. In edition 122, in an article entitled 'Women's Decade, the Faces at Work', the editor interviewed a female manager about the 'trade mark' of being a successful career woman:

You cannot take on an additional shift because you are married? This kind of situation should not have happened. Everybody should be in an equal position in the work place. You cannot say that you cannot work as much as your male colleagues and other single female workers just because you have family responsibility, (my translation and paraphrase) (Jiang Fu-ching 2001).

The above statement delivers non-Confucian gender discourses because it suggests that a career woman's family responsibilities should not hinder her work commitment and that in turn implies that a (married) woman should be valued in terms of her work performance, instead of her family contribution. Other studies further suggest that Taiwanese women are likely to take on non-Confucian gender discourses through reading women's magazines. This includes ideas that a woman should show concern about social and political issues instead of being domestically orientated, and that she should pay attention to her thoughts and feelings and look after her psychological well-being (Shaw Ping 2000:156) instead of putting family first. The suggestion that a woman needs not focus her mind only on family matters challenges the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition that determines the family roles of a married woman as a homemaker, dutiful wife and loving mother. Encouraging a woman to pay attention to her well-being challenges the Confucian womanly moral standards that expect a married woman to be "virtuous" by putting her family first.

However, research has also shown that Confucian gender discourses are disseminated in women's magazines. For example, they transmit ideas that an ideal married woman should be an efficient homemaker or that marriage is a woman's destiny (Farris 1991, Thornton, Fricke, Yang and Chang 1994, Shaw Ping 2000). More recent research on an international women's magazine, Cosmopolitan, has demonstrated that "modern womanhood" in a

Taiwanese context is portrayed in a complex way (Chang 2004). This research investigated how women's magazines served as a mediator transmitting both Western (non-Confucian) and Chinese (Taiwanese Confucian) cultural elements to female audiences. It studied Taiwanese editions of Cosmopolitan published from 1992 to 1997, among which six issues (one issue per year) were randomly selected from the 72 issues over the six years. Articles that contained debate or addressed issues that revealed Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses were examined. The material covered subjects about relationships and careers that generated debate on or discussions about the meaning of womanhood.

The research on Taiwanese editions of Cosmopolitan concludes that women's magazines on the one hand deliver non-Confucian (Western) gender discourses. Take the subject of break up as an example. The magazine suggested that a break up offered an opportunity for a woman to think about who she was. For instance, a woman should feel free to "dump" her man if she could not be true to herself in a relationship. Within a Confucian context, marital breakdown is not an option for married women as they are expected to seek protection from their marriage. Perceiving break up as a positive outcome in a relationship, therefore, represents non-Confucian gender discourses. What is more, the focus of a (married) woman's self fulfilment challenges the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition because it implies that it is not a virtue for married women to put the family first, or be submissive to husbands by 'compromising to men all the time' (Chang 2004: 374-376).

On the other hand, however, the above research also evidences that women's magazines reinforce ideas about Confucian womanly virtue to its female readers. I take the magazine, Cosmopolitan, as an example to further explain this point. In the magazine, for instance, it suggested that although free choices and personal interest might be necessary, being a 'mean' person alone did not deliver happiness. An ideal woman should be "other-centered", and be sociable in order to enjoy harmonious relationships with others. In that sense, an ideal woman was valued by her contributions to "good" relations with others. In this magazine a "good" woman was portrayed as "flexible and friendly" because she was kind and "avoiding being calculating towards people". A "self-centred" woman, who paid too much attention to herself and could not interact with others harmoniously, was unable to "truly" fulfil her sense of self and be happy. Such views about a woman echoes the Confucian womanly moral standard that determines that a "good" (married) woman ought to be tender, generous and act and think appropriately according to her (family) roles.

The Taiwanese edition of Cosmopolitan is popular mostly among young women, who often seek advice on how to fulfil their sense of self, manage their career or deal with relationships (Chang 2004). The magazine is likely to influence single women prior to marital life. It is therefore correct to say that women's magazines in Taiwan serve as a mediator delivering both Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses to (married) Taiwanese women.

The above current studies of the press and the mass media indicate that 21st century Taiwan is an intricate society that allows married Taiwanese women to have contacts with both Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses.

2.4 Summary

The above review of Taiwanese society offers contextual information that provides background knowledge of how Taiwanese society in the 21st century has become an intricate society. Political and economic developments have contributed to women's higher education, their increasing participation in the paid labour market, the development of the women's movement, helping professions and the press and mass media. Taiwanese society of the 21st century is open and changeable. Because of those social factors the Confucian-based Taiwanese society allows for the transmission of not only Confucian gender discourses but also non-Confucian ones.

I expect to explore how, by transmitting various (Confucian and non-Confucian) gender discourses, the intricate society influences a Taiwanese working mother's perceptions and identities, especially if she is educated and employed. In the next chapter, I will review current literature to explain how my study is related to available research.

CHAPTER THREE LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Background: Women's family roles

As shown in the previous chapter, Taiwanese Confucian society in general defined and valued married Taiwanese women in terms of their relationships with their procreative families (Shue Hua-yuan 2000; Lamley 1998). This chapter expects to understand how current literature and research has examined the influences of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition on married women. In this review, I am also hoping to find out how current literature and research has explored the identities of Taiwanese married women in relation to non-Confucian gender discourses.

Since I focus on a Taiwanese married woman's family roles as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law, in the following sections, this study will firstly review literature that shows that in 21st century Taiwan, these family roles play an important role in Taiwanese working mothers' marital lives.

Research has suggested that married Taiwanese women of the 21st century continue to live under the influences of Taiwanese Confucian family tradition and therefore are likely to consider themselves as wives and mothers (Shue Hua-yuan 2000; Lamley 1998). However the role of daughter-in-law also plays a part in their marital life.

The Taiwanese Confucian family tradition has a long history of obliging married women to have a close relationship with their parents-in-law, especially with the mothers-in-law. Since the 1970s, however, as a result of industrialization, parents-in-law have been less likely to live with their married children and therefore married women have had less chance to be confronted with tense relationships with their parents-in-law (Cheng Jen-chiao and Chen Jeaw-mei 1994). However, parent-in-law relationships remain important in the marital lives of married Taiwanese women (Chen Hui-wen 1999). An important reason for this is that married Taiwanese women in the modern era are still taking on the major responsibility of childcare and domestic work.

For example, in 2001 over half of married women in Taiwan were non-employed. Among those non-employed married women 34.25 percent of them reported that they had decided to withdraw from the paid labour market because of family responsibilities, such as looking after young children or elderly parents-in-law (DGBAS 2001, DGBAS 2001a, DGBAS, 2009). However, despite being employed, 21st century married Taiwanese women take on major responsibilities for domestic work. For example, in 2001 married women spent more time on domestic work and childcare, which was on average 2.19 hours per day, whereas their husbands' contribution accounted for 1.51 hours per day (DGBAS 2001b). Many of these employed women continued to believe that it was their duty to undertake domestic work and childcare and reported that despite their employment, they performed more domestic work and childcare than their

husbands (e.g. Statistical Units of Government Agencies 1998, Chien Wen-yin and Hsuen Cherng-tay 1996, Chang Jin-fen and Chang Dao-yi 1997, Liu Mei-chun 1997, Lin Yi-hui 1998).

As long as married Taiwanese women continue to take on major responsibilities for domestic work, their family role as daughter-in-law remains important. This is because the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition which determines that men are the head of the family and the breadwinner, while designating women as the homemakers, remains unchallenged. Husbands are left out of domestic duties; whereas their family-centred wives have more opportunities to interact with their parents-in-law. Wives are likely to have close relationships with their mothers-in-law, due to sharing domestic responsibilities that are seen as "women's jobs", such as cooking (Chen Hui-wen 1999). Because of their continuous responsibility for domestic work and childcare, it is correct to say that Taiwanese married women's relationship with their parents-in-law still plays an important role. For this reason, in this literature review, I look at research on the family roles of daughters-in-law.

Thus far I have used the above section to explain that this literature review will examine research on women's family roles as mothers, wives and in-laws, as these roles remain important in the marital lives of 21st century married Taiwanese women.

Despite the focus on Taiwanese women, I will also review Western literature. The reason for that is because married Western women of the 21st century have experienced similar transformations in their status of employment, education, and family role compared to married women in Taiwan (e.g. Bianchi, Milkie; Sayer and Robinson 2000; Baxter 2000; Coltrane 2000; Christopher and Sprecher 2000; Office for National Statistics UK 2005; US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, US Census Bureau 2003). For example, in the 21st century Western women are more likely to enter into the paid labour market than ever before. According to the national survey of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, between 1984 and 2004, the percentage of employed working women in the UK has increased. This growth in the employment rate among British women was due to the increasing participation of married women in the labour market, especially by those who were educated (Office for National Statistics UK 2005). What is more, like married women in Taiwan, many employed married women in the UK take on major responsibilities for homemaking and childcare and that often interrupts their employment (Office for National Statistics UK 2005).

3.2 Literature review of four dimensions

Since this study expects to understand how women take on Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses to develop their identities, I will particularly examine two issues: First, how has current research

investigated women's perceptions of their family roles? Second, how has current research explored women's identities in relation to gender discourses?

The following review investigates four dimensions of women's family lives: (1) domestic work and childcare, (2) verbal communication, (3) marital sex and (4) looking after parents-in-law. The four dimensions are examined because they are associated with women's family roles as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law.

3.2-1 Domestic work and childcare

Women's perceptions

Instead of investigating how women perceive their family roles, research on Western working mothers has mostly examined how they perform domestic responsibilities. The available research however yielded different results of how working mothers share domestic work with their husbands. For example, working mothers dutifully took on the dual burden of paid jobs and major family responsibilities (e.g. Tichenor 1999, Artis and Pavalko 2003, Greenstein 1995). In contrast, other research reported that higher education positively enabled married women to negotiate with their husbands on the sharing of domestic work and childcare (Houseknecht, Vaughan and Macke 1984). However, such inconsistency indicates that simply examining the performances of married women is insufficient and thus is unable to accurately predict how women perceive their family roles. Scholars have pointed out that it is women's perceptions of family roles that

have an impact on their family life (Kessler and Mckenna 1978, Thompson 1991).

Scholars who have paid attention to women's perceptions suggested that it was the "interpersonal values" (informed by Thompson 1991) of married women, especially educated women, that played an important role in determining women's domestic responsibilities (eg Baxter 2000, Coltrane 2000). The available research adopted surveys and looked at the correlations between domestic tasks, how women performed domestic work and their perceptions of fairness. It insightfully emphasized the importance of "symbolic meanings", which referred to the views of married women about what they perceived to be important. For example, a husband performing domestic work that was considered as "women's work", such as cooking, was perceived by wives as helpful and thus had "symbolic meanings" for their wives. Because their husbands' domestic work was perceived as meaningful to them, the wives were happy with their husbands' domestic contribution and therefore less likely to argue with their husbands about domestic work sharing (Baxter 2000). However, I argue that the above research outcome is unable to fully capture women's subjective views. Although it recognized that women's family performances are associated with their perceptions, it restricted the focus to the category of "fairness". In addition, its research design, which used predetermined items, such as lists of domestic tasks, in order to testify correlations between domestic work (performance) and perception, quantified married

women's views and thus were unable to comprehensively represent how married women perceived their family roles.

Other existing research has studied the perceptions of married Taiwanese women regarding their beliefs or attitudes. For example, in a cross-national survey, "Perceptions, Personal Traits, Lifestyles and Leadership" (Wu and Minor 1997), 216 educated and employed women from the US, Japan and Taiwan, aged 31-50, who worked as managers or at higher positions in the work place, were sampled. The research results showed that Taiwanese women scored higher on items that conformed to the gender discourse that transmitted the idea that women are homemakers and husbands are breadwinners. Married Taiwanese women in this survey also scored high on items that presumed that women should be 'gentle', 'careful', 'intimate', 'benevolent', 'tender' and 'dignified'. The survey concluded that compared to married career women in the US and Japan, Taiwanese women were more "traditional" because the perceptions of their family roles were influenced by Confucianism (Wu and Minor 1997).

However, I argue that women's attitudes towards gender discourses cannot be interpreted as women's identities. That is, women's beliefs in Confucianism should not be equated to them defining themselves as "traditional". Kessler and Mckenna (1978) mention that the identities of married women entails the process of married women "committing" themselves to gender discourses and then defining themselves accordingly (Kessler and Mckenna 1978:8). So while the above survey might have

shown that Taiwanese women were willing to believe in Confucian values, to examine how the Confucian gender discourses have contributed to their sense of self, one has to look into the narratives of women. By doing so, it is possible to see how they identify with Confucianism and then define themselves consequently (Kroska 1997).

Another example of available research shows that the views of married women about the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition were varied. The research focuses on the financial power of employed Taiwanese women (Gates 1991). Seventy-one self-employed married Taiwanese women and those who worked in their husbands' family business were interviewed to find out about those women's attitudes towards childcare and its relevant issues (Gates 1991). The research finding showed that women had different and even contrasting ideas about the Confucian tradition of childrearing and filial obligation. While some married Taiwanese women felt it was their duty to carry on the family line for their husbands, others stated that because of their financial contributions they were able to say no to this family obligation. However, regarding the issue of filial obligation, none of the female interviewees expected their children to look after them in old age as a "good return", and appeared to reject the Confucian tradition that stated that an elder son should take the responsibility of looking after his parents (Gates 1991).

The complexity of these married Taiwanese women's accounts suggests that it is possible for employed women to view Confucian gender discourses in different ways other than submissively conforming to

Taiwanese Confucian family tradition. Unfortunately, the above research can only suggest that the attitudes of women towards childcare and filial obligation might not be entirely determined by Confucianism. It has not explored further how women commit themselves to Confucian and (or) non-Confucian gender discourses and develop their sense of self.

However, research on Western women provides insightful outcomes that prove that working mothers are able to perceive gender discourses and develop identities in different ways. It is worth looking at these research results because married Western women have experienced similar transformations, such as continuing to take on paid work after marriage, receiving higher education and taking on the major responsibilities of domestic work and childcare as mothers and wives. Take the research on the views of career women about their domestic contributions as an example (Tichenor 1999). It shows that wives perceive the term "provider", which transmits the idea of men being the breadwinner within the context of Western culture, in different ways (Tichenor 1999:648-649). For example, one woman phrased the concept of "provider" by reporting that she defined both she and her non-employed house-husband as the "providers" of the family because they worked together to look after the family. Some women stated that their non-employed husbands were "providers" because they contributed to domestic work and childcare that was valuable for the family (Tichenor 1999). By probing into women's subjective views about the term "provider", the above research revealed that married women are able to perceive gender discourses in their own ways. The above research also

shows that the ways that women integrate gender discourses into their sense of self and develop identities is varied.

The above research outcome informs this study by showing that the manner in which married women perceive their family roles, in this case, as wives, is complex. It in turn indicates that women are capable of perceiving gender discourses differently and subsequently develop their own identities.

The above research outcome is inspiring because by investigating domestic work and childcare, I expect to explore the possibilities that a Taiwanese working mother is able to perceive her family roles by interrogating her thoughts about Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses.

In the following section, I will examine research and literature on verbal communication as this dimension is able to reveal women's perceptions and identities in relation to gender discourses.

3.2-2 Verbal communication

Verbal communication represents an important element in counselling services. A counselling culture raises women's consciousness of their well-being. This includes enabling women to become aware of their sense of satisfaction, fulfilment and happiness, especially in their family relationships (Wouters 1992). Very often this awareness of self comes with the practice of verbal communication that encourages a woman (as an individual) to express or negotiate their needs with others (Meeks, Arnkoff, Glass and

Notarius 1986, Sporakowski 1988, Lin 2005). The reason for that is because the counselling 'expressive' culture in general draws more attention to verbal expression, sharing feelings, emotions and thoughts (Meeks, Arnkoff, Glass and Notarius 1986, Rallings 1969, Dame, Finck, Reiner and Smith1965, Hickman and Baldwin 1971, Sporakowski 1988).

Since the 1980s, there have been many government-funded and private welfare institutions established in Taiwan that have aimed at promoting the rights and interests of service users. Many of them offered counselling services, especially in major cities like Taipei. (Ministry of Interior 2002, Shue Hua-yuan 2000). Although these institutions opened their services to both Taiwanese men and women, a majority of service users were women (Ministry of Interior 2002). What is more, as the press and mass media has grown, non-Confucian gender discourses, such as women's rights and interests at home and in the paid labour market, are transmitted to Taiwanese women and these include counselling ideas (Shaw Ping 2000). In the following section, I will examine current research on how married (Taiwanese) women, especially the educated ones, identify with verbal communication-related ideas to develop their perceptions and identities.

Women's perceptions and identities

Research on married Western women has shown that women's views about verbal communication reveal the perceptions of their family roles as wives. For example, wives who believe in verbal communication tend to care about how they feel (their own well-being) and that in turn makes them value the feedback from their husbands (Wilkie, Ferree and Ratcliff 1998,

Erickson 1993, Coltrane 2000, Hawkins, Marshall and Meiners, 1995). This suggests that verbal communication reinforces the idea of expressiveness that, within a Western culture, is often seen as a woman's characteristic. This gender discourse transmits the idea that a wife and a husband should discuss issues that are of both their concerns and share feelings with each other. The above research outcome showed that wives who took on this idea were likely to challenge "traditional" (male dominant) gender discourses. For instance, wives expected their husbands to be "expressive". This includes expecting husbands to express their passions or love for them or be verbally responsive to issues that they considered as close to their hearts (Erickson 1993, Duncombe and Marsden 1993). Otherwise, wives felt dissatisfied with their marital relationships.

The above research on married Western women is informative for this study. Seen from the above evidence, within a Confucian context, it is worth examining whether a married Taiwanese woman who identifies with verbal communication is able to challenge the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition. Expressing one's needs and negotiating with each other in general has not been the way in which Taiwanese people have dealt with their family relationships in the past. Instead, couples have followed the Confucian family hierarchy, and acting upon that, strictly adhered to defined roles in which junior members are submissive to senior members and women obey the superiority of men. What is more, Taiwanese people in general value practical help. Showing affection for others merely by saying some nice words might be considered simply as "lip-service", and in the

extreme, as deceiving people by playing with their feelings (Yan Xunxiang 2003). Seeking verbal communication, therefore, means not only learning a new communication pattern but also challenging this aspect of Taiwanese culture.

For Taiwanese women, however, engaging in verbal communication means not only learning a new communication pattern but also challenging the Confucian womanly moral standards of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues". According to this tradition, an ideal married Taiwanese woman should be "humble" and ought not to speak of her needs. If she did, it would be assumed that she was not in control of herself and therefore not respectable. She was also not expected to directly request what she wanted from others, otherwise she was considered to have bad manners or be disgraceful. In this sense, it is worth examining how a married Taiwanese woman views verbal communication so as to understand how she perceives the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition and develops identities under the influences of non-Confucian gender discourses.

3.2-3 Marital sex

Women's identities and gender discourses

There is little research on identities in relation to the marital sex of wives. But this dimension is important for my study because it reveals the influences of Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses on how married Taiwanese women perceive their family role as wives. Traditionally,

married Taiwanese women's views about marital sex were restricted to the Confucian womanly moral standards of the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" that, for example, repressed women's sexual desire by imposing virginity, "virtue", or "purity" on them. Living under the influence of Confucian morality, a (married) woman is likely to consider sexual desire as "immoral". On the other hand, however, social factors of the modern era that have transmitted non-Confucian gender discourses might have challenged this tradition.

One example is the growing counselling services that draw the attention of married Taiwanese women to the quality of their marital sex. Although there is a lack of relevant research, documentary evidence has indicated that the counselling culture might have encouraged married Taiwanese women to pay attention to their sexual satisfaction. For example, a counselling book written by a marriage expert in Taiwan, which augmented stories told to her by female authors with her own comments, showed that many married women sought advice from marriage experts about difficulties of having orgasms (Lin 2005). This same book suggests that in the past decade, many married Taiwanese women have admitted that they have felt disturbed with engaging in extramarital sex. Many of them thus are advised to express to their husbands their frustration at being unable to tell their husbands about how to satisfy their sexual desires (Lin 2005).

Another example shows that higher education enables women to challenge Confucianism in their views about marital sex. Available research on

Western women shows that educated women are likely to raise their consciousness of sexual satisfaction. Educated married women are aware of their sexual desires and think that it is important to have their personal sexual needs met in their marital lives. Educated married women are less likely to define their family role as wives as that of marital obligations or completing reproductive activity, compared to uneducated married women (Kane and Schippers 1996, Christopher and Sprecher 2000).

The above research on Western women inspires my study to look at the possibilities that within a Confucian context, the level of education might enable educated married Taiwanese women to challenge Confucian family tradition by becoming aware of the quality of their sex life in marriage. However, only a limited amount of research has provided any direct evidence of how married Taiwanese women view their family roles as wives in relation to marital sex. One such study used interviews to explore the narratives of educated married Taiwanese women regarding their sexual experiences during pregnancy (Lee 2002). Among the 12 interviewees, one woman attributed her sense of self to the sexual satisfaction of her husband. Her account of sexual experiences was interpreted as "positive". She reported that she felt "valuable" as a wife because she felt her husband had a sexual desire for her. If it were not for that, she would describe herself as "lonely" because her husband's feelings were "important" to her (Lee 2002: 284).

However, I argue that the above research outcome did not adequately look into women's narrative or take into account the influences of the Taiwanese Confucian tradition. It simply considered the sexual satisfaction as a positive outcome of a marital interaction, with this "positive" or "good" experience being directly related to the woman feeling "valuable". The social complexity of the narrative was ignored by overlooking the conflicting themes embodied in her account. On the one hand, she can be described as a traditional (other-centred) woman in a Confucianism-based society. She felt valuable because of the sexual satisfaction of her husband that suggests that she valued herself in terms of her relationship with her husband. On the other hand, her account of being "lonely" represents her non-Confucian insight of dissatisfaction about being a wife and her self-awareness of personal well-being. The outcome of the above research has not discussed how the two conflicting elements, which might represent the interweaving influences of Confucianism and non-Confucian elements, affect her perceptions of marital sex as a wife.

Because of the influences of counselling culture and higher education on them, 21st century married Taiwanese women who continue to live under the influence of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition might take on non-Confucian gender discourses. By investigating a woman's views about marital sex, this study allows for an examination of how the identities of a married Taiwanese woman are being influenced by taking on both Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses.

3.2-4 Looking after parents-in-law

Women's identities and gender discourses

There is a shortage of research concerning how married Taiwanese women take on gender discourses and develop their sense of self as daughters-in-law. Yet the dimension of looking after parents-in-law is important because it reveals how Taiwanese Confucian family tradition continues to influence the identities of 21st century married Taiwanese women. Available literature shows that traditionally married Taiwanese women identified with the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition and thus defined themselves as dutiful daughters-in-law. They bore the major responsibility of looking after their parents-in-law, especially when they were ill (Wang Ling-yi 1998). Other available research on 21st century married Taiwanese women looked at women's performance of caring tasks. For example, the ways in which married Taiwanese women fulfilled their filial obligation included sending their parents-in-law to nursing/residential homes (Kao and Stuifbergen 1999, Statistical Units of Government Agencies 1998). The limited research implied that 21st century married Taiwanese women might have different attitudes towards looking after their parents-in-law, such as not considering caring for parents-in-laws as their duty. However, the available study has not focused on how they integrate Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses into their sense of self as daughters-in-law.

The above sections explain that this study explores the perceptions and identities of a married Taiwanese woman by investigating the four

dimensions of: (1) domestic work and childcare; (2) verbal communication; (3) marital sex and (4) looking after parents-in-law. Informed by the review of relevant research and literature on the four dimensions, I conclude that to investigate a married Taiwanese woman's perceptions and identities in an intricate 21st century Taiwanese society, one should probe for her subjective views about how she relates Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses to her sense of self and develops identities as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law.

I use a study of married Taiwanese women (Tsai 2006) to stress that to capture how a woman integrates different gender discourses into her sense of self, her subjective views cannot be overlooked. This recent study that interviewed 29 working women from a textile company concluded that women did not participate in leisure activities as much as their husbands. The research used a qualitative design that contained questions, such as "how you get permission from husbands" and "how you feel about the constraint of family", to examine women's views about the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition. The research outcome suggested that Taiwanese working mothers were under the influence of tradition. For example, "women's self-identity was defined by men" and "male control and pressure exerted on their (women's) lifestyles" (Tsai 2006:471). However, I argue that the questions put to the interviewees restricted the women's answers to Confucian categories and the approach in a way risks pre-determining women's identities. Despite its qualitative design, the predetermined items, such as "getting permission" and "constraint",

prevented the interviewees telling their stories in their own words. The interviewees did not tell stories that showed they were capable of challenging Confucianism because they were already predefined as being "oppressed" by Confucian culture. Because of the close-ended nature of the questions, the conclusion, which stated that Taiwanese women were universally oppressed by Confucianism and thus developed an identical identity in favour of Confucianism, is unlikely to present the subjective views of female interviewees about how they define their role as a wife in relation to the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition.

By reviewing the above study, I maintain that pre-determined or close-ended questionnaires limit the possibilities of exploring women's subjective views about how they perceive gender discourses and relate those discourses to their sense of self. Scholars have suggested that to understand the subjective experiences of women by taking into account cultural influences on them, it is important to explore the narrative contexts of women (Doucet 1995). For this reason, I expect to explore the possibilities that having lived in an intricate society, a married Taiwanese woman in 21st century Taiwan is able to perceive Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses in her own ways and develop identities that reveal her subjective experiences.

3.3 Research on the identities of Western mothers

In the following paragraphs, I will review research on the identities of Western women. The research often defines identities in terms of "femininity". It is worth looking at the research because its focus of 'femininity' defines women in terms of "tradition", which in many Western countries and a Confucian-based society refers to gender discourses that transmit patriarchal ideas, such as women 'by nature' are homemakers (see Burke 1991; Burke and Cast 1997; Stets 1995). By reviewing the literature on 'femininity', I expect to understand how research on Western women has examined the impact of "tradition" on the identities of working mothers.

An Australian study (Moulding 2003) stated that femininity reinforces the idea that men are superior to women in terms of their ability to think and reason. The research interviewed 31 health workers and reported that they tended to define women with eating disorders as 'feminine' in that women were described as "connected and superficial" (emotional) in contrast to the "individualism" (independence) of "rational" men. Workers differentiated men and women by categorizing them within the "discursive framework that place[d] women's subjectivity in the midst of a central contradiction". Items that indicated instrumental roles, such as "disembodied, masculinized autonomy", were used to define men, while feminine women were characterized as expressive and less "powerful" than their male counterparts. This "femininity" is an example that shows that "feminine"

women are associated with dependency and "deficiency" (Moulding 2003:69-70) and thus are inferior to the masculinity of men in a patriarchal context.

I found that some research on married Western women employed similar views to examine how (working) mothers defined themselves. Take the research (Burke and Cast 1997) of newly married American couples as an example. The research results suggested that wives and husbands committed themselves to masculine tradition. Wives and husbands' views about women and men were defined in terms of "femininity" and "masculinity". These include items such as being not aggressive and aggressive, gentle and rough, passive and active, and so forth. However, I argue that the quantitative methods are unable to comprehensively capture the subjective experiences of women. The identity of wives was defined by discriminating between women (wives) and men (husbands) in that women were exclusively feminine and men were exclusively masculine. Based on those parameters, themes that divided women and men in terms of "femininity" and "masculinity" were then developed. The research only selected items that clearly indicated the qualities of "femininity" in contrast to "masculinity". The typology missed the opportunities to probe for some "unclear" or "ambiguous" information that could have authentically revealed how women narrated a sense of self. What is more, the quantitative methods might overlook the subjectivity of women by restricting their focus to how women submissively fitted themselves into the category of femininity.

It is correct to say that women's ability to love and nurture should be valued and seen as virtuous and "to be credited and learned from rather than despised" (Alcoff 2005:429). However, one should avoid the "tendency toward invoking universalizing conceptions of woman and mother in an essentialist way" (Alcoff 2005:429). Quantitative research on Western women tends to define women in terms of femininity against the assertiveness and breadwinner status of masculinity (Alcoff 2005). It has not looked into the possibilities that women might be capable of disagreeing with or challenging gender discourses that transmit ideas about femininity and masculinity. I argue that a universally defined identity is unable to show how women might integrate their subjective experiences into a sense of self and thus develop identities differently, depending on their complex social circumstances, especially in the 21st century.

I argue that women's narratives should be explored by comprehending the subjective experiences of working mothers as to how they integrate gender discourses into identities. With this, I take some qualitative research as examples. Research on 20 American couples, who reported that they identified themselves with feminist views, looked at how couples related feminist views to their marital lives. The research, through probing into the narrative of feminist wives, understood that married women integrated the gender discourse of gender equality into their sense of self. For instance, wives who identified with feminist ideas reported that they could enjoy a "[marriage] relationship…where they could voice their own thoughts" (Blaisure and Allen 1995:12); and that it was important to be "themselves"

in the marriage. One of the wives reported that she did not want to take the name of her husband because she was herself and not his 'possession'. By exploring the narrative of female subjects, the above research developed a concept of "vigilance" to address how women are capable of integrating particular gender discourses, in this case, gender equality, into their sense of self. This developed concept of "vigilance" was otherwise unlikely to be explored if the identities of those wives had been measured by quantitative methods that categorized women in terms of feminine qualities.

Another qualitative research on 25 married women who do not have children has positively pointed out that one can explore women's subjective views about how they define themselves by avoiding the restriction of its focus to femininity, which in turn asserts women's capabilities to decide who they want to be (Gillespie 2003). By investigating stories about how the female interviewees defined themselves, the research found that those married women "rejected" or "pushed away" the gender discourse that stated that women were bound to motherhood. It reveals that married women do not necessarily embrace feminine qualities because they are able to "reject and resist pronatalist cultural imperatives of femininity that conflate woman with mother" (Gillespie 2003:133). This above qualitative study of married women suggests that one should recognize that a woman is able to develop an identity "that is separate and uncoupled from the hegemonic ideal of motherhood [as feminine qualities]" (Gillespie 2003:134).

The above qualitative studies suggest that the context of identities of women is "highly complex and individual", especially with those who live in an intricate society whereby they have many opportunities to take on different and often conflicting gender discourses (Gillespie 2003:134). I have argued that quantitative methods cannot comprehensively explore women's identities when using pre-determined items, such as feminine qualities, to determine what women are.

3.4 Summary

As the focus of this research is a woman's family roles, this chapter has reviewed available studies on the four dimensions associated with married Taiwanese women's family roles as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law, as well as research on the identities of Western women. However, this study concludes that available research is unable to comprehensively interpret the identities of a Taiwanese working mother for three reasons. Firstly, women's perceptions of their family roles are not investigated by taking into account their subjective experiences. Available research on married Taiwanese women and Western women has merely used pre-determined items, which restrict the understanding of women's identities to Confucian characters, fairness, or femininity to investigate the identities of women, and thus cannot capture women's subjective views about how they define themselves by employing their thoughts. Secondly, the research has not focused on how women commit themselves to gender discourses and develop their sense of self. Thirdly, available studies that used quantitative

methods to define women treated women as negative and passive recipients of gender discourses, such as femininity.

However, research on Western women has positively suggested that employed and educated married women are able to perceive gender discourses in their own ways and integrate ideas that they identify with into their sense of self. The research findings inspire this study to explore the subjective experiences of a 21st century married Taiwanese woman by looking at how she negotiates different gender discourses, including Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses, and thereby develops her identities.

In the following chapter, I will explain how this study theorizes identities in ways that represent the subjective experiences of a woman. How this study conceptualizes the process of a woman developing identities in relation to gender discourses will also be discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section explains the theoretical perspective of this study. The second section explains the conceptual framework regarding how this study perceives the process of a woman developing a sense of self.

Theoretical perspective:

In this section two issues will be discussed. Firstly, how this study interprets the relations between gender discourse and identity. How this study defines identity will also be explained.

4.1 Gender discourse and identity

This study sets out to explore the identities of a woman by investigating how she interprets gender discourses and relates them to her sense of self. It is therefore important to clarify how this study constructs the concepts of identity and gender discourses. To discuss that, first of all, I propose that a woman's identities become meaningful only when she is treated as a 'capable' being.

4.1-1 Women and agency

A woman should be perceived as a determined individual who is "in charge" (Walker 2005:11). This quotation echoes my proposition that presupposes that a woman has "agency", meaning that she is able to think for herself as a human being. The emphasis of a woman's agency makes identity meaningful to a woman. It asserts that she is aware of the influences of social circumstances on her. Despite the influences of gender discourses, she selects ideas that she identifies with and integrates those into her sense of self. Affirming a woman's agency in turn verifies that the identities of a woman are particular to her, whereby "the subject's [a woman's] ability to reflect on the social discourse and challenge its determinations" is assumed (Alcoff 2005:430).

I use Foucault's (1984) ideal account of "self" to argue that a woman's abilities to decide who she is should be recognized and valued in order to validate her sense of self. Foucault's account of the self positively suggests that the ability of individuals, including women and men, to think for themselves should be presumed. In his book, *The Care of The Self, The History of Sexuality: Volume Three*, Foucault describes that an individual is capable of making a "rational choice" for her/himself as to who they want to be (Foucault 1984:64). Reviewing the ancient Greek culture, Foucault describes that human beings are different from animals because human history presupposes that the man is able to "make free use of himself; and it was for this purpose that he endowed him[self] with reason" (Foucault 1984:46). Accordingly, women, like their male counterparts, should be

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perceived as capable persons who are able to understand and form opinions about themselves. This perspective presupposes that the ability of cultivating the self is a universal quality belonging to both men and women through a presupposed quality of rationality, or as Foucault puts it, "crowning with this reasoning faculty all that is already given to us by nature" (Foucault 1984:46).

The account of an ideal self is a suitable concept for this study because it asserts the possibility that a woman has the capacity to perceive gender discourses from different perspectives, and decide what she is as a thinking subject. This study also takes the view that this capacity should not be considered as a "privilege" that a woman has to fight for. As Foucault has described: Individuals, including women and men, should be treated as a conscious and decorous being who embraces "the possibility and the duty to take care of ourselves (as human beings)…ensuring our freedom while forcing us to take ourselves as the object of all our diligence" (Foucault 1984:46).

However, Foucault's account of an ideal identity that appears to be universally available to both women and men has not considered the influences of gender on women. In many societies gender discourses transmit ideas that determine what women are and it cannot be denied that gender discourses are related to women's identities. In the following sections, I will first explain how this study considers the context of gender discourses.

4.1-2 Gender discourse, gendered binary and identity

Gender discourses in relation to women often transmit ideas of "femininity" (see Wright 1992, Foster 1999). "Femininity" is a term that has to be examined within the context of gendered binary. According to Freud, a woman is "feminine" because she is characterized as "dependent on a formal masculinity" and is considered to be "incomplete compared to the men", due to biological difference (Wright 1992:92). Defining women as feminine is a failure to abandon the biological thinking (Robinson 1993, Robinson 1996). This is because femininity is created against the existence of masculinity that is "constructed according to the presence and absence of a single defining term, the very term that designates male superiority: the phallus" (Wright 1992:130). That is, a feminine woman is restricted to the category of "not a male" because she does not have a penis (Wright 1992:130). From that perspective, femininity enforces "a general acceptance of a conceptual split" on women that fits women into the criteria of the female category based on their biological sex, which discriminates them from their male counterparts (Foster 1999:433). Gender discourses that transmit ideas about femininity to women have "remained binary...[and appear] to naturalize the distinction between men and women" (Wright 1992:144). Such typology can only enforce an "essentialism" on women (Butler 2005; Kessler and McKenna 1978), which reinforces the idea that the differences between women and men are not challengeable because

men and women are born to be different and should be treated differently (Hawkesworth 1997, Foster 1999).

Using femininity to determine a woman's identities restricts the concept of identity to a gendered binary. Scholars explain that in many societies individuals are categorized into women and men in terms of the difference of feminine and masculine characteristics that regulate how women and men should think and behave (Cerulo 1997). For example, a woman is defined as "the degree to which [she] sees herself as feminine on the basis of meanings associated with being a woman in society" (see Burke 1991). This raises the issue of a gendered binary.

Femininity is often defined within the framework of a gendered binary in that a woman is seen as universally and naturally constructed and she is expected to embrace socially decided gendered characteristics. Scholars point out that femininity is defined in contrast to masculinity so as to fit into the gendered binary that "is crowded with the over-determinations of male supremacy, invoking in every formulation the limit, contrasting other" (Alcoff 2005:426). "Femininity" within the context of this dualism can be best explained by post-structuralism, which describes that a gendered binary represents an example of binary oppositions that underpin classical Western thinking (Sikka 2008, Butler 2005).

The binary opposition indicates a way of perceiving and analyzing concepts whereby social reality is understood and expressed by "linguistics" (Sikka

2008). The binary thinking is based on Aristotle's axiom. For example, A cannot be "not A". If A is Logos then "not A" is never Logos. It is the absence of presence that is considered inherent in Logos. A woman, if she is perceived as feminine within the context of the linguistics of the binary system, it is because she is lacking any of the attributes of the male, and thus seen as "not a man". Femininity therefore is differentiated from the masculinity of men. An identity within the framework of a gendered binary does not assert the agency of a woman because it categorizes a woman as "not male" and thus she can only be "feminine".

An identity within a gendered binary undermines a woman's agency also because within the framework, a woman is perceived as inferior to a man. Within the framework of a gendered binary, a feminine woman is less likely to be seen as a capable being. The reason for that is because in the binary system, concepts that are divided into two mutually exclusive, opposed, or contradictory binary groups, such as femininity/masculinity, are organized into hierarchical ranks or grades with each level subordinate to the one above. This binary hierarchal system constructs reality within a binary frame, whereby matters are perceived in terms of the power relations of superiority and inferiority (Sikka 2008). It is this hierarchal power relation, according to feminist researchers, that leads to the inferiority of women (Wright 1992:170). Within the frame of a gendered binary, femininity is restrictively defined as inferior or powerless. Women perceived in a gendered power relationship are subjected to the domination of male power (masculinity). Femininity and masculinity as a form of "power", as Foucault

puts it, is a set of (social) 'laws'. This social construction requires women and men to take on feminine and masculine characteristics, because "confronted by a power that is law, the subject who is constituted as subject is he who obeys" (Foucault 1977:85). This view about gender as (social) law points out that research that defines women in terms of femininity within the framework of a gendered binary very often negatively perceives women as subjected to the social control of a patriarchal hierarchy. Women as feminine are perceived as having no choice but obeying the law of gender and are defined in ways against the superiority of masculinity (Cerulo 1997). Under such a dualist definition, a woman who develops a feminine identity has no agency because she can only perceive herself as a powerless female and thus inferior to the male.

So far I have highlighted one point: Simply defining the identities of women in terms of the gender discourses of femininity undermines the possibility that a woman is able to develop identities through the agency of her own thoughts. I reject the concept of a gendered binary and its restrictions to the meanings of femininity, which determines that women are essentially inferior to men because they are contrasted against masculine characteristics. This study thus argues that a woman's identity should not be investigated in terms of femininity within the gendered binary. However, this does not mean that the influences of a gendered binary on women and their identities should be disregarded.

4.1-3 Gender discourse as social influence

I will use Judith Butler's (Butler 2005) "gender-as- performative" to explain that this study perceives femininity as a form of social influence. That is, to assert a woman's agency, femininity that represents gender discourses and transmits ideas of what a woman is within the frame of a gendered binary should be seen as a form of social influence instead of as an essential element to her sense of self. Women are not born with the essence of femininity, but rather, are socialized and thus perform as feminine. Butler uses Foucault's concept of body-soul to argue that femininity/masculinity are merely body performances that are socially constructed and therefore should not be treated as essential to individuals' (women's) ways of thinking. Foucault (1977) in his book, *Discipline & Punish, The Birth of the Prison,* illustrates that individuals (defined as comprising body and soul) are malleable by social elements (such as gender discourses) through a set of socially-designed strategies.

Using Foucault's body-soul concept, Butler (Butler 2005) describes that a gendered binary that defines what women and men are in terms of femininity and masculinity is merely "performative". In other words, a gendered binary is a social strategy that drives individuals to "act" either as women or as men within roles that are clearly distinguished and characterized as feminine and masculine.

However, this socialization entails a certain digress of compulsion. To ensure that one's behaviour is under social control, however, "punitive power" is used to make sure that individuals obey specific social rules. For example, in prison, punitive power is used to discipline the condemned men through "a calculated manipulation of its (the body's) elements, its gestures, its behaviour" (Foucault 1977:168). The strategies are developed to discipline the condemned men so as to "compel their bodies to signify the prohibitive laws as their very essence" (Foucault 1977:168). By manipulating the bodies of the condemned men through the construction of gestures and behaviour, the social body is produced to make individuals obey the law, which in turn signifies that the law is "on and through the body". The "subjected and practiced bodies" are thus produced, and are namely the "docile body" (Foucault 1977:168).

By this "docile body", Butler depicts that a gendered binary is only a series of socially manipulated body performances and should not be seen as essential to any individuals (Butler 2005). A gendered binary to individuals, like the "law" to prisoners, is socially made and enforced onto individuals with coercion. The gender law is enforced upon them through the regulating of each individual's body language, from how one dresses, wears make up and hair styles, to one's manner of living, working and speaking (Lucal 1999). Such a regulation of gender is merely "performative" because it stands on no essential ground, but is purposely constructed to ensure the propagation of the binary opposition that expects individuals to act as female or male, feminine or masculine. This gender law, however, comes

with "punitive power". Under the gendered binary, one is obligated to demonstrate the gender or sex of oneself by identifying unambiguously with gender discourses that conform to either femininity or masculinity. But if one violates this "gender law", s(he) is "punished", for example, by being labelled as "deviant" or "abnormal" (Butler 2005; Lucal 1999). Butler's theory that insightfully describes gendered binary as "performative" and socially conducted inspires this study to argue that femininity, although a form of social influence that transmits gender discourses to women, should not be seen as essential to the identity of a woman. It might be true that a gendered binary/gender discourse is a form of social control to ensure that a woman acts in a way that fits into the feminine category that is subservient to the masculinity of men. But femininity entails no respect or consideration for cultural, social and historical factors, but only signifies the control of a gendered binary system through body performances.

The above points depict that femininity as a gender discourse within the framework of a gendered binary serves the purpose of social control and should not be seen as an essential quality of women. In the following paragraphs, I will explain that this study asserts the agency of women through recognizing the influences of a gendered binary on women's identities.

4.1-4 Women, gender discourse, and identity

Thus far, this study has explained that femininity should not be seen as essential to a woman's identity. It should not be used to describe what a woman is because it is a social construct that restricts a woman to femininity within the framework of a gendered binary and denies her agency. However, this study is aware that a gendered binary in many societies determines what women should be and thus its influence on women cannot be disregarded. The question then is how to find a way to conceptualize a woman's identity that shows that she is capable of cultivating a sense of self despite being under the influence of a gendered binary.

Foucault offers an ideal depiction that presupposes that one can be freed from the restriction of binary oppositions, such as femininity and masculinity, by escaping (social) elements that enforce any determinants on individuals. Individuals, if embracing any social determinants, can be "enslaved" by their social surroundings and lose their independence from social control. To liberate oneself from a binary restriction, therefore, is to become "independent in its own fortress", meaning to "reject" the influences of any form of social control in order to "rejoin oneself" (Foucault 1984:65). Accordingly, to explore how a woman can "ultimately rejoin herself", that is, define herself in her own way free from the restriction of femininity, a gendered binary as a form of social control that enforces femininity on women has to be "renounced" (Weir 1996). However, rejecting or

renouncing the influence of a gendered binary does not mean that it is to be overlooked or denied.

To assert women's agency, a gendered binary should be seen as a human history "in which we are both subjects of and subjected to social construction" (Alcoff 2005:434). Femininity is not essential to a woman's identity but is "relevant" to her sense of self. This relativity, according to Lauretis (1984), pertains to a woman's "experience". A gendered binary as a social construction represents an outside world, whereas the identity of a woman represents an inner process. A woman develops identity through her interaction with the outside world. This outside world refers to "the cultural discursive context to which she has access" (Alcoff 2005:435) and often builds "gender relations (which are) social relations and, therefore, historically grounded and culturally bound" (Oyewumim 1998:1055). Her experience is "the effect of such interaction" (Lauretis 1984:159) that affects how she develops identities. It is therefore correct to say that women's identities are "produced by her personal, subjective, engagement" through her interactions with the outside world (gendered society). Such inner process asserts a woman's agency because it does not overlook or deny her ability to "lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world" as a subject (Lauretis 1984:159). This subjective experience of a woman rightly inspires this study to treat femininity as not essential to a woman's identity but yet taking into account the influence of a gendered binary, which transmit gender discourses, on women. By treating a gendered binary as an important cultural influence on a woman's identity, a

"particular discursive constellation" (Alcoff 2005:434), which in this study refers to a 21st century intricate Taiwanese society, is recognized. In this society, Confucian feminine and masculine gender discourses might still play an important role in affecting how women and men define their family roles. However, the ideals of what women are are "subject to revisions, diversity and fluidity" (Miller 2011:176) depending on recent social, political and economic developments. The "changing cultural and individual variability" (Miller 2011:171) resulting from the social changes should not be ignored, as that reflects how women in 21st century Taiwanese society negotiate Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses to develop their sense of self. By recognizing the changing gender discourses and their influence on women, a woman's capability to "produce her own interpretation and reconstruction", meaning her ability to perceive gender discourses by employing her thoughts in a gendered society is asserted (Alcoff 2005:435).

This study states that "all women can think about, criticize, and alter discourse, and thus (their) subjectivity can be reconstructed", despite the influences of a gendered binary (Alcoff 2005:433). This study expects to understand how an intricate Taiwanese society that transmits Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses shapes the subjective experiences of a working mother and thus her identities. This study will explore the possibility of a Taiwanese working mother developing identities that go beyond the restrictions of the Taiwanese Confucian-based family tradition, which represents a form of gendered binary, by integrating both Confucian

and non-Confucian gender discourses into her sense of self. With this, identity has to be conceptualized in a way that is outside of the binary impasse so that a woman's capability to cultivate subjective experiences can be asserted. In the following section, I will use post-structuralism, a view greatly influenced by Derrida, to explain this point.

4.2 The definition of identity

The previous sections have illuminated that in this study, identities are seen as a woman's sense of self that reveals how she relates gender discourses to herself by employing her thought. That is, a woman is not a passive or negative recipient of gender discourses of femininity. This standpoint proposes that women's identities should be explored in a way that avoids conceptualizing women within the context of a gendered binary opposition that restrictively defines women in terms of femininity. The following section will explain how I use the thinking of Derrida to conceptualize the identity of a woman in relation to this proposition.

"De-stabilized and indeterminable thinking" is a key feature of Derrida's work. Loosely called deconstructionism, Derrida argues that one should not take "the authentic reading of a text" for granted, but instead, one should criticize and question what has come to the eyes of the reader so that meanings which fix the frame of binary oppositions, such as femininity/masculinity, can be deferred and disrupted (Sikka 2008:233-234). The thinking behind deconstructing binary oppositions aims to dismantle

the hierarchal power relation of superiority and inferiority by using a method of "reversing and then displacing hierarchical binaries" (Sikka 2008:233). "*Revising*" is a method that includes questioning how meanings of words determine the way individuals perceive matters and challenge words that construct "social reality" into the form of binary opposition. This deconstructionist thinking is useful for this study because only through problematizing the concept of a gendered identity can the identity of women be defined in a way that deconstructs the frame of femininity, so that women's abilities to reflect on and challenge gender discourses can be asserted. To further explain this, I adopt Derrida's view of "Differance" (Sikka 2008).

I use the concept of "Differance" as coined by Derrida to argue that despite living under the influence of a gendered binary, women should not be defined as passive recipients of gender discourses. For Derrida, "Differance" had two facets.

In the first instance it refers to the dictionary meaning of difference as describing the state or way in which two people or things are not the same or in which something or somebody has changed so as to make it not the same as something else. This meaning of difference asserts that an individual has the ability to free and differentiate her/himself from the restrictions of a binary system. In this sense, identity should be treated as "differential to women" in that women have the capacity to think for themselves, not within a gendered binary, but as free agents in the chain of

possible meanings that lies between the two binaries but never reaches them.

In the second instance, "Differance" becomes "the temporizing detour of deferral" (Sikka 2008:233-234) that makes it possible for difference to take place. That is, instead of defining women as feminine, how women define themselves can be perceived as different depending on their circumstances. This "*deferral*", which echoes the theme of "reversing", entails a process of overturning and rearranging hierarchical binaries in order to dismantle the restrictions placed on individuals by a binary system. This process of deferral asserts that one should challenge the socially defined meanings attached to the frame of binary oppositions, so that the hierarchical power relations of especially the one who is in an inferior situation, can be reversed and disrupted. In this sense, women, despite living under the influence of a gendered binary, should be seen as capable persons able to reverse and disrupt the restrictions of hierarchical power relations. That is, one should assert women's capabilities of perceiving the gender discourses of femininity in their own ways, and then challenging the pre-determined meanings of what a woman should be within a gendered binary, thereby developing identities that represent their subjective views about themselves.

The theme of "deferral" that is derived from the concept of "Differance" is useful for this study because it proposes that an individual has the ability to "corrupt any notion of finality or meaningfulness" (Sikka 2008:233-234).

Accordingly, if the meanings of a binary system can be challenged, there is hope that an individual can become aware of and thereby challenge the restriction of gendered binary oppositions. "Differance" can rightly suggest that by asserting women's abilities to question how the gender discourses of femininity affect the way they define themselves, the identities of women become meaningful. This offers a positive way of thinking that proposes that the identities of a woman can be defined in a way that reveals that she is capable of challenging and criticizing gender discourses, so that her identities can show that she can reject their meanings, such as inferiority, which are inscribed on her by living under the influence of a gendered binary.

By "differance", Derrida suggests that to construct meanings of identity, one has to define a woman in a way that shows that she can decide who she is by employing her thoughts and thus reject the gendered binary frame. She is thus able to see herself as distinguished from others (men and other women). However, to differentiate oneself from others and or the binary frame and develop an identity that is true to oneself, an individual has to deconstruct the element of "sameness" that is embodied in the context of identity.

Derrida notes that identity, although indicating a sense of self that distinguishes oneself from others, is only suggesting that the self and the other are similarly constructed as selfless. Take an individual using language as an example. Language is constructed through socially shared

meanings. An individual who speaks the language cannot think independently from the discourse of that language. An individual is thus not a speaking subject who has a free will, but only one who is determined as "a 'function' of language and becomes a (submissive) speaking subject only by making its speech conform to the system of the rules of language…" (Derrida 1982:15). In this sense, identity only represents a deprived self subjected to words and phrases that entail social meanings (Ruthrof 1997). Identity, if being perceived within a binary opposition, contains the meaning of sameness because identity to an individual is like a speaking subject to the language, or one who is merely representing a product of the social control of linguistics (gender). An individual, as the recipients of social control, eventually "shrinks to signifiers" (social institutions) and loses her/his specificity.

Considering identities as universally identical denies the agency of individuals. It suggests that individuals are passively and socially constructed and that "erases any room for manoeuvre by the individuals within a social discourse, or set of institutions" (Alcoff 2005:430). The statement of sameness about identity denies a woman's capability of challenging gender discourses and embracing herself as her own possession. A woman is merely treated as "history's imprint" and therefore her existence in human history is rejected and her chance to become self-determined is deprived (Alcoff 2005).

Like Foucault and Butler, Derrida's thinking about sameness stresses that an individual is a social construct. However, Derrida further proposes that the sameness has to be deconstructed in order to develop an autonomous identity. This offers a solution that suggests that identity can be constructed in a way that renders specificity to individuals (women), but at the same time takes into account the influence of gender discourses on them. Namely, an individual (a woman) can positively develop a sense of self that is not confined to a binary frame.

The concept of "Differance" by the themes of difference and "deferral" explains that the socially constructed binary frame can be deconstructed by recognizing individuals' agency (Ruthrof 1997). Despite living under the influence of a binary frame, individuals still have the capacity to look at the system from the outside and deconstruct it by becoming aware of what has been forced on them by social discourses. Identity, if treated as being passively and socially constructed, does not represent a self that is able to think outside the frame of language. There is no room for a thinking process because the signified (individuals) is prescribed. However, by asserting that a person is able to develop the consciousness of who they want, the restriction of a binary frame is deconstructed. This consciousness in turn indicates that every individual is different. That is, individuals are able to perceive social discourses in their own ways and define the meanings of words or phrases that they feel related to, and because of such a capability, the socially constructed binary frame can be challenged, meaning the status of sameness is deconstructed and thus every individual

can be seen as a different being. This identity can then positively perform as a "subjective existence" of oneself in a binary society.

Through such a deconstruction process individuals are able to "reverse" a binary system (Derrida 1982). To "reverse" the socially constructed binary frame is to challenge its hierarchy. If defining identity in this way, one can invite oneself to rejoin her/himself as a "living present" whereby an identity represents an active and capable self that is able to think about her/his role. Through the assertion of this active and capable self, an individual becomes a "determination…within a system which is no longer that of [the] presence [of determinants]…but a system that no longer tolerates the opposition of activity and passivity…" (Derrida 1982:16).

Informed by the concept of "reverse", I argue that to assert a woman's thinking capacity in a gendered society, one has to question the method that defines women in terms of femininity within the framework of a gendered binary. That is, to deconstruct a gendered binary is to lay bare its "unitary concept that contains repressed or negated material" (Sikka 2008:233). Defining the identities of women in terms of femininity within the frame of a gendered binary opposition is to enforce that they can only define themselves as inferior to men and thus are unable to speak for themselves. To "reverse" the socially constructed binary, women should not be defined in terms of femininity that devalues women as universally emotional (incapable), dependent and oppressed or be contrasted against the rationality and assertiveness of the superior male. Women's agency

has to be asserted so that women are not devalued as the same kind of femininity in relation to the superiority of masculinity (Scott 2005: 448). To do so, to explore the "multiplicity" of the identities of women is necessary. The "philosophy of multiplicity" is a deconstructive strategy that can "reverse" the socially constructed binary frame. This "multiplicity" refers to revealing women's subjective experiences within different historical, social and cultural contexts. This is to assert that it is possible for a woman to be a thinking person who can therefore say no to the binary oppositions (Sikka 2008:234) and develop a sense of self from the diverse life experiences that are particular to her. Accordingly, I will explore the possibility of a Taiwanese working mother redeeming from the frame of the Confucian gendered binary by asserting her abilities to challenge the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition in a changing Taiwanese society.

The concept of "reversing", together with the thinking of "Differance" that contains the themes of difference and "deferral" has inspired this study to define a woman's identities as her "self-attributions of who she is". To probe for women's self-attributions of who they are, one should ask the question: "[I]n what specific contexts, among which specific communities of people, and by what textual and social processes has meaning been acquired (within the narrative contexts of women)?" (Scott 2005:447). By looking at the self-attributions of a woman, I am rejecting the methods that restrictively define women within the framework of gendered binary oppositions and categorize women by feminine characteristics. Instead, I am open to the possibilities that women are capable of engaging in a "free play of a

plurality of differences" (Scott 2005:447) that have been cultivated by their diverse life experiences within different cultural contexts. Such identifying processes involve the subjectivity of women perceiving particular gender discourses by following their ways of interpreting issues related to them, their personal tastes and views as such. By exploring the self-attributions of women, this study understands that the identities of women involve their subjective experiences. This definition is used to reveal how women relate to particular gender discourses which are meaningful to them and to their sense of self within different cultural contexts, and that in turn assert their capability to decide who they want to be by taking into account their life experiences.

The definition of identity is developed by deconstructing a gendered binary that "render(s) formally clear ideas ambiguous…" (Sikka 2008:233). I expect to find out whether a Taiwanese working mother is able to 'render' the meanings of the Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary and "reverse" their socially constructed meanings of what a woman should be in 21st century Taiwan. I take into account how an intricate Taiwanese society in the 21st century, which transmits Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses that contain different and often conflicting ideas about who women are, influences a working Taiwanese mother. By doing so, I recognize and expect to deconstruct the determination of the Confucian-based gendered binary and explore the possibilities of a Taiwanese working mother challenging the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition and developing her own identities. I argue that defining the identity of a

Taiwanese working mother as *her self-attributions of who she is* can verify and unveil the multiplicity of her identities. This study expects to defer and interrupt the "unitary concept" of the Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary. This binary reinforces the meaning of "sameness" that defines Taiwanese women as being inferior to male power and seniority, and devalues them as domesticity-oriented and incapable subjects who submissively conform to womanly moral standards in a male-dominant society. In this way, this study recognizes a Taiwanese working mother's subjective experiences. I assert that she is capable of negotiating Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses, or of integrating non-Confucian gender discourses into her Confucian mindset. The definition of self-attributions also helps to avoid using predetermined Confucian characteristics to categorize a Taiwanese working mother within the framework of Confucian gendered binary.

The approach that I have adopted to define the identities of women is described by Cohen (1994) as an 'inductive" method: "[I]nstead of conceptualizing the self as a replicate in miniature of society, one could begin by paying attention to the ways in which people reflect on themselves, and then see in what ways these reflections are indicative of social and cultural context, or require such contextualization to be intelligible to us" (Cohen 1994:29). By exploring the self-attributions of a married Taiwanese woman I am able to capture her subjective views about herself and how she perceives gender discourses and their influences on her.

Conceptual framework:

4.3 The process of women developing identities

In this current section I will illustrate how I define the process of a woman developing her various identities. How women develop identities is related to their perceptions of the outside world (Lauretis 1984). In other words, a woman's subjective experience is related to how she "lends significance" to gender discourses. Her identities, therefore, are related to how she "gives herself a label to signify" her support of gender discourses (Kessler and Mckenna 1978:8). This self-signification indicates that a woman develops identity through relating gender discourses to her sense of self by following her ways of thinking (Kroska 1997). For example, those who identify themselves with idea of gender equality tend to define themselves as feminist women compared to those who do not engage themselves in such self-signification (Blaisure and Allen 1995).

How women develop a sense of self thus can be perceived as a social and inner process that involves "the continuous engagement of self or subject in social reality" (Lauretis 1984 in Alcoff 2005:433). This social and self engagement can be seen as an ongoing and daily construction that influences women's identities (Lauretis 1984). Informed by this perspective, I perceive the process of a woman developing an identity as her taking on gender discourses through her contact with social institutions, which, in this

study, include educational institutions, work places, helping professions, the press and mass media, family and helping professions. Because of the developments in 21st century Taiwan, these social institutions play important roles in transmitting gender discourses to working Taiwanese mothers. Through her contact with the social institutions, a Taiwanese working mother embraces gender discourses that she perceives as meaningful or important to her and integrates those into her sense of self. In the following paragraphs, I will explain in detail the important roles social institutions play in enabling women to take on gender discourses.

Educational institutions, especially higher education and employment, are important social institutions that have an impact on women's identities. Through attending courses, obtaining degrees certificates and acquiring job promotions and so on, it is possible that women take on gender discourses, such as the ideas of assertiveness and self-reliance which inspire them to think for themselves (Beck 1992; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1995).

Through their contacts with helping professions, for instance, seeking advice from counselling services and reading articles that provide advice on promoting psychological wellbeing, women in general are becoming familiar with gender discourses that transmit ideas such as expressing feelings and sharing thoughts with significant others (see Coltrane 2000; Lin 2005; Christopher and Sprecher 2000).

The press and mass media are also an important social institution because through reading, for example, women are likely to be introduced gender

discourses that deliver ideas of what women should be/want to be. For instance, research suggests that magazines transmit gender discourses that serve as "references" for women to think about who they want to be (Gauntlett 2002). A study looked at how internet users in the West, particularly in the UK and US, identified themselves with gender discourses transmitted through television programmes, films, magazines, web pages, books and newspapers. This cyberspace-based study found that through reading women's magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue*, women related what they read to their sense of who they wanted to be. One of the female interviewees expressed her feelings about empowerment after reading a magazine. She said that she considered the female figures presented in the magazine as her role models and that she would expect herself to be as independent and successful as these women. However, gender discourses transmitted through women's magazines can also serve as sources of 'negative identification' which reminds female readers of the kinds of person with whom they do not want to identify. For instance, in the same study, a female reader reported that she did not want to be as "superficial" as some of the female models presented in the magazine (Gauntlett 2002).

Family is also considered by this study as an important social institution. This is because research evidences that family plays an important role in transmitting ideas about what husbands/wives should be (Cunningham 2001). The survey examined how parenting had an impact on the attitudes of teenage children towards the gender division of domestic labour in the

household. The research result suggests that through observation, young children learn ideas about how couples should share domestic work. For example, children who observe that their parents division of domestic work conforms to masculine gender discourses, such as men being the breadwinner and women being the homemaker, tended to report that they, as men or women, should follow the same pattern when deciding how to share domestic labour with their spouses. The same survey also states that family is important source for introducing gender discourses to women, especially young girls. I therefore consider family as an important social interaction that might transmit gender discourses to women and influence women's identities.

However, it is not to say that these social institutions determine the identities of working Taiwanese mothers. Rather, the above paragraphs suggest that women are capable of perceiving gender discourses by employing their thoughts and developing identities according to their life experiences. This study expects to understand the process of a working Taiwanese mother relating gender discourses to her sense of self through her contact with different social institutions. Through this self-attribution process, she takes on Confucian and/or non-Confucian gender discourses and develops identities that represent her subjective views about who she is.

4.4 Summary

I propose that a woman's identities should be investigated by asserting her capacity to perceive gender discourses by employing her thoughts. Informed by post-structuralism, this study presupposes that the methods of defining women in terms of gendered binary oppositions that reinforce feminine characteristics should be rejected. In other words, what women are should not be restrictively defined by femininity within a gendered binary framework. This rejection will allow for the assumptions of inferiority to be deconstructed ("reversed").

However, "reversing" a gendered binary is not a reversal between femininity and masculinity that makes femininity become superior, but is a refusal to categorize women by clearly defined contrasting feminine and masculine characteristics. Defining women as universally feminine and against a universal masculinity within a gendered binary opposition can only lead to defining women as dependent, deficient and domesticity-oriented as opposed to the assertiveness and bread-winner status of a masculinity that implies the superiority of the male (masculinity). Within the gendered binary framework, a woman is devalued because in a hierarchal power structure, she has no choice but to see herself as a negative and passive powerless subject who conforms to the category of femininity in opposition to male superiority.

This study is aware that a woman's sense of self should not be disassociated from the influences of a gendered binary. Nevertheless, I assert that a woman's identities can be verified or unveiled only when her capabilities to perceive gender discourses are recognized. I argue that the social determinism of femininity and masculinity has to be disrupted by placing the focus on the diverse subjective experiences of women. To reverse the binary is to recognize and look into women's abilities to integrate diverse life experiences into a sense of self and form identities that reflect on the influences of social, historical and cultural factors upon them. Accordingly, I expect to find out the possibilities of a woman committing herself to a thinking process and defining a sense of self that reflects on how she makes sense of her life experiences.

Regarding the process of women developing identities, I have discussed how women develop identities that involve the process of them interacting with social institutions, including educational institutions, the work place, helping professions, the press and mass media and the family. These institutions might transmit different gender discourses to them. Developing identities is defined as a process of a woman engaging in self-attributions that reveals how an educated and employed married Taiwanese woman, who lives in an intricate society, incorporates Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses into her sense of self.

In the following chapter, I will explain the research methods that are employed by this study to capture a woman's subjective experiences in

order to explore how a Taiwanese working mother takes on gender

discourses and develops her identities.

CHAPTER FIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 An overview of research design

The research design explains how the research strategy and methods are used to explore two research aims: (1) How does a Taiwanese working mother perceives her family roles? (2) How do gender discourses influence a Taiwanese working mother's identities? I will then explain how this study analyzes and presents its findings. Finally, validity, reliability and ethical issues will be discussed.

5.2 Case study as a research strategy

A case study is used as a research strategy to explore the research aims of this study. Case study strategy is often used as an "empirical inquiry" (Yin 2003:12) that "calls for an in-depth examination" (Mctavish and Loether 2002:195) and aims to explore "a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin 2003:1) with the guidance of pre-developed theories or propositions (Yin 2003). The "contemporary" in this study entails "the process of change" (Mctavish and Loether 2002:195) from the 1980s in Taiwan until the present. The "phenomenon" in this study refers to a woman's self-attributions as to how she makes sense of the world that involves the process of her integrating subjective experiences into her sense of self. The "real life context" in relation to a woman's identities refers

in this study to how a woman views her family life experiences and identities. However, this study expects to understand her subjective views about her family roles and identities rather than focusing on a reconstruction of the "factual process" or proving objective truth or fact (Flick 2006:332). That is, the aim of using the case study strategy is to gain "an insight story" (Mctavish and Loether 2002:184) that reveals how a woman in 21st century Taiwanese society perceives her family roles and makes sense of the influence of political, economic and social developments on her.

Case study strategy is appropriate for this study for three reasons. Firstly, this study is an exploratory study that is aimed at testing my propositions which argue that it is possible for an educated and employed Taiwanese woman to develop identities that do not necessarily conform to the restrictions of a gendered binary. This study expects to understand how she perceives gender discourses by imposing her own thoughts. A case study is a suitable strategy because it is "generalizable to theoretical propositions" (Yin 2003:10; Yegidis and Weinbach 1996) or because it produces results against a "conceptual critique" (Mctavish and Loether 2002:184) in which "a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study" (Yin 2003:32). That is to say, through the "interaction" of my propositions, which assert a woman's capability, and empirical findings, which show how a woman perceives family roles and develops identities, I am able to test and refine my theoretical framework (Ragin and Becker 1992:10).

Secondly, the case study is suitable because a Taiwanese woman's perceptions and identities are treated as a contemporary phenomenon. This study focuses on how a woman negotiates different gender discourses that represent the influences of an intricate Taiwanese society in the 21st century that has resulted from dramatic political, economic and social developments since the 1980s.

Thirdly, this study explores perceptions and identities by understanding a woman's subjective experience which is related to a "real-life context". I value her own accounts of her life stories because this reveals her sense of who she is and investigates how she perceives her family roles and develops identities by asserting her agency.

By adopting the case study strategy, in the following section I will first explain how I selected an interviewee.

5.3 The sample and population

This study purposely selected an individual case as my research sample. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, a woman's perceptions of her family roles and identities represent rich data because they entail a "broad area of social life" (Berg 2007:286). By focusing on one woman's stories, I am able to understand in depth her life experience comprehensively since "all aspects of an individual's social life are interconnected and often one of

them cannot be adequately understood without consideration of the others"
(Berg 2007:287). Secondly, this single case is treated as a "critical case"
who was carefully chosen to test "whether a theory's propositions are
correct or some alternative set of explanations might be more relevant" (Yin
2003:40) to the "particular times and conditions" (Ragin and Becker
1992:122). This is an exploratory study aiming to test my propositions that
an educated working mother is capable of challenging the Confucian
gender binary and integrating gender discourses which she identifies with
into her sense of self. I expect this individual case to "present a significant
contribution to knowledge", or "refocus future investigations" (Yin 2003:40)
and become a foundation of further studies.

Thirdly, this exploratory study does not intend to cover a representative
sample of the population. In the majority of similar studies, in order to gain
rich and in-depth data that covered narratives exhaustively, the size of
sample in general was small (see Li Yuan-hui and Li Jing Ping 1999, Song
Jin-shiu 2000, Caplan 1997). To the extreme, some only focused on one
woman's stories. For example, literature sponsored by the Taiwanese
government entitled *The Peacock of the North Wall Mansion: Grandma
Liu's Story*, documented the life-story of one old lady and comprehensively
recorded how a woman's life was influenced by dramatic social, political
and economic changes of systems between 1904 and 1997 (Li Yuan-hui
and Li Jing Ping 1999). An oral history, published by women's groups
entitled *Married Women's Life of Tai-Zhong During the Colonization by
Japan,* interviewed ten old ladies to explore how they experienced poverty

and hardship in their family life as a result of political changes (Song Jin-shiu 2000). Despite the small sample, by probing into the diverse stories of each interviewee, the above two studies revealed women's subjective views about their family lives during previous historical eras. For the same reason, considering the time constraints, research budget and the fact that life-story interviews are likely to contain great amounts of "contextual material" (Flick 2006:180), a single case was selected to conduct my case study.

Purposive sampling was used to select my interviewee. The reason for this method is because I "identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation" (Newman and Kreuger 2003:211). That is, instead of generalization, this study specifically sets out to gain insight into the life experience of an educated working mother in the Taiwanese society. I am in particular interested in how she negotiates different gender discourses. This makes it important to select a woman who has opportunities to interact with different social institutions that deliver both Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses.

However, there is no clear way to identify women who meet my research criteria. Some previous research on Taiwanese women identified their target samples through institutes or support groups (Hsiung Ping-chun 1996). However, a similar institute that targets educated working mothers is not available in Taiwan. I recognized that the interviewee should be willing to reveal her thoughts and feelings; she would need to build a trustful

relationship with me as an interviewer. Although there is extensive literature on women's life stories in Taiwan, many aspects of intimate family relationships, such as marital sex, are likely to be considered by many Taiwanese women as sensitive subjects. However, culturally it is more likely to build a trusting relationship if one is introduced through their friends, relatives or other acquaintances. For this reason, I presumed that I would be able to find a potential interviewee to take part in the case study if the primary contact had any connection with the interviewee through a friend or an organization.

One last point that I want to address regarding sample selection is that I expect to select a woman who identifies herself with the research purpose. Scholars have suggested that interviewees who agree to be involved in research should be considered as doing the interviewers a favour (Plummer 2001). However, I argue that interviewees who participate in interviews without any knowledge of the purpose of research or familiarizing themselves with the research questions, might not be motivated to finish the interview sessions. This is especially true considering that a case study demands personal commitments of time and energy. For my study, I am aware that a working mother is likely to have to juggle jobs and family responsibilities. Intensive interview sessions that take up extra time and energy might further distress her. The interviewee's understanding of my research question therefore is important. I expect that she would be able to commit to the interview sessions if she were familiar or agreed with the research purpose (Neuman and Kreuger 2003).

This case study targets sn educated working mother. A Woman with dependents is another important inclusion criterion for the sample population. The reason for that is because looking after young children intensifies a woman's responsibility for domestic work and childcare and that has an impact on how she defines herself as a mother and wife. I further set a criterion for urban women. In the case of Taiwanese society, an urban woman is more likely to be introduced to non-Confucian gender discourses than a woman who lives in the rural areas. In cities like Taipei, social institutions that transmit non-Confucian gender discourses are more numerous than in rural areas in general. For example, in Taiwan, the number of women's social welfare institutions doubled in size between 1996 and 2000 and a majority of them were established in Taipei and other urban areas (DGBAS 2002b). Taiwanese women living or working in urban areas might be likely to gain access to non-Confucian gender discourses through their frequent contact with these social institutions. However, age is not considered as a criterion for sampling. Limited research shows that age plays little if any role in deciding how a woman takes on gender discourses and develops identities.

I was introduced to a few working mothers through friends and formal colleagues. I met Helen through my contact with a women's self-help group. This one particular interviewee was selected because she met my sample selection criteria of a Taiwanese married woman who lives in Taipei (the capital of Taiwan), has young children, is employed and educated, and

has experiences of interacting with different social institutions. When the interviews took place, Helen was working full time as a manager in a business company and was studying for a Masters degree at a university. Formal colleagues introduced her to me and through my contact with this women's self-help group I knew that she used to be employed as a manager in the same organization. Before the interviews, I had a meeting with her explaining the nature of a case study and made sure she understood that the project required a few interviews that might take up quite a bit of time. Helen understood that this study was set up to explore how she perceived and defined her family roles as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. She felt that my research was interesting and meaningful to her and that she would like to take the opportunity to review her life through storytelling as part of an interview process.

In the following section, I explain that this study treats story contexts as a woman's "narrative".

5.4 Narratives

The reason why I treat interview data as narrative is because narratives "encourage storytelling of particular topics…relate[d] to difficult circumstances or issues closely connected with a person's sense of identity and self-worth" (Earthy and Cronin 2008:429). Treating stories as narratives therefore enables this study to understand the developments of politics, economics and society in 21st century Taiwanese society and its

influences on my interviewee. However, I treated the data as "more than statements and reported fact" (Flick 2006:179). I perceived the data as "the reconstructs of internal logic of process" (Flick 2006:179) that revealed the inner process of a woman's self-attributions on how she perceived and defined her sense of herself.

Treating interview data as narrative fits in with my research strategy that examines the life experience of one woman. A woman's self-attributions are a form of "narrative" which entails the thinking process behind the perceptions of her life experiences, and thus can be treated as the database for a case study (Yin 2003). Narratives can be seen as "stories (that) circulate culturally" and that signify cultural meanings embedded in individual's stories (Lawler 2002:242). Yet they also entail how individuals "construct and express meanings…in their own voice" (Mishler 1986:67). Narratives are often used as important data in historical research as they contain stories about life experiences of individuals of a certain period and how these individuals construct meaning through their experiences (Marshall and Rossman 2006). Narratives often entail both past and present life experiences systematically and coherently. The reason for that is because present events and meanings "have their origins in earlier times" (Yegidis and Weinbach 1996:142) and what happened in the past often has an influence on the present or are connected to the present (Berg 2007:265). Narrative therefore is especially useful for this case study for three reasons.

Firstly, narratives are considered as personal life stories connected with social and historical events that help to understand the private life of individuals within particular cultural settings (Osmond and Thorne 1993). The focus of cultural factors and their relationship to life stories helps to reveal how Helen's family life experiences and identities are related to Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses in an intricate Taiwanese society in the 21st century.

Secondly, narratives contain "biographical experiences" (Flick 2006:23) that reveals individuals' subjective experiences in a "comprehensive way" (Flick 2006:172). The reason for that is because narratives "provide background details and relationships necessary for understanding the story" and they reveal information in-depth about every aspect of life and their meanings to particular individuals (Flick 2006:175). Narratives thus help to probe Helen's life experiences more broadly and more comprehensively reveals the details of how a Taiwanese working mother embraces varied gender discourses through self-attributions at different life cycles and builds up her identities of the present time.

Thirdly, narrative that is seen as constructed by "plot", a concept informed by Paul Ricoeur and refined by Lawler (Lawler 2002:245), is useful for this case study. A plot contains time and event which are important elements in narratives. The element of time constructs narratives in a way that builds up storylines and thus reveals one's present and past life experiences. Plot also contains events that are sequential in one's life experiences because

earlier events might contribute to the later ones, even though they might appear to be disparate events (Lawler 2002:245). By treating Helen's stories as narratives, I probe into her life experiences in terms of time and event and understand how she embraced particular gender discourses during particular time periods, such as her childhood, employment and marital life. The plot helps understand how Helen progressed and developed her current identities which are interwoven with her present and past life experiences.

The following sections illuminate how this study adopts narrative interviews as the major method to probe Helen's narratives.

5.4-1 Narrative interview

This study sets out to understand how a Taiwanese working mother develops her sense of self and sheds light on the influence of a variety of gender discourses (Confucian and non-Confucian ones) on her perceptions and identities. The perceptions and identities of a Taiwanese working mother are considered by this study to be her subjective experience of living in a changing Taiwanese Confucian-based society in the 21st century. The methods used to explore the perceptions and identities, therefore, have to be able to probe for the narratives that reveal her subjectivity.

Narrative interviews were adopted as the primary data collection method because "the theoretical background of studies using narrative interviews is

mainly the analysis of subjective views and activities (Flick 2006: 179). I therefore used narrative interviews to probe for Helen's stories in order to understand how she embraced different gender discourses through her interactions with social institutions during different time periods over the years. I aim to capture Helen's subjective views in order to understand how she perceived her family roles and developed her identities in her own words.

5.4-2 How to conduct a narrative interview?

The length of the interviews

Narrative interviews in general require between two and six sessions and each interview takes about one to one-and-a-half hours (Neuman and Kreuger 2003). However, interviews that gather stories about life experiences can take longer, from more than ten hours in length to a few years, depending on the actual research design (Song Jin-shiu 2000, Plummer 2001). For my interviews, I explained to Helen that it might take quite a bit of her time and energy to reveal her past and present life experiences. Time needs to be given for her to recall memories, construct meanings of life and clarify her thoughts and feelings. The reasons why I expect to have several interviewing sessions is because it takes time to build a "trust and rapport relationship that is less distressing with a sense of continuity" (Earthy and Cronin 2008:431). The interviews allow the interviewer and the interviewee some time to "reflect and clarify…and explore stories in great depth in a subsequent conversation" (Earthy and

Cronin 2008:431). The estimated interview length for my research design is three to four sessions, with the estimated time to be around two to three hours. However, I explained to Helen that we should discuss the interview length by taking into account her circumstances, including her family responsibilities and working schedules.

Helen agreed that a two-hour interview for each meeting would be suitable during office hours but that she might be able to spend more time if we had interviews at the weekends.

We decided to have four meetings, either at her office or her house. The interviews took 12 hours in total. On average each session lasted between 2 and 2.5 hours when they took place at her office, with the last interview, conducted at her house on a weekend, lasting 4 hours. We finished the interviews when both of us felt that the significant stories had been told, the important information captured and the key issues clarified. When interviewees start to repeat themselves and the interview data becomes coherent, interviews should come to the end (Plummer 2001).

The "agency" of interviewee

When conducting narrative interviews this study is open to stories that are not originally set out to be explored. That is to say, this study allows for "contingencies or forkings" instead of imposing predetermined categories on data or treating data as variables for "simple rational calculation" (Ragin and Becker 1992:62). The above statements highlight my point about a

woman's agency in the preceding chapter which stresses that the interviewee should not be treated as a passive informant who submissively waits for questions and gives answers. Rather, she should be seen as a capable being able to spontaneously respond to questions and raise issues that are of concern to her, and decide what stories to tell (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). To achieve this, researchers should develop rapport research relationships that are able to encourage their interviewees to tell personal stories (Olesen 2000). In the interviews, therefore, I cultivated a friendly research relationship in a non-judgemental manner with my interviewee, Helen, in order to create an open interviewing atmosphere that encouraged Helen to tell her stories in her own words. It is right to create a trusting and supportive interviewing atmosphere so that interviewees feel free to openly and exclusively speak for themselves and thus tell their stories (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, Plummer 2001).

However, how to build an interview research relationship that is good enough for the researcher and the interviewee to enjoy a reciprocal interview partnership has generated some debate among scholars. It is worth going through the debates as they provide insightful information on what inspired me to build my interview relationship with my interviewee.

What is an "appropriate" interview relationship?

In general, building an "informal" interview relationship with interviewees, or building a rapport with them, is considered important by scholars, especially with interviews that demand a few sessions with each interviewer (see

Plummer 2001, Oakley 1981, Hsiung Ping-chun 1996). However, what is of concern to me is how to cultivate an "informal" research relationship.

Some argue that making friends with interviewees helps to build a trusting research relationship that encourages the interviewees to narrate their life experiences. A close friendship involves researchers and interviewees reciprocally sharing thoughts and feelings about their private personal lives (Oakley 1981). However, scholars have argued that a friendship that intensifies interview partnerships could result in mistrust and generate a power struggle, which makes it difficult to cultivate a friendly and harmonious research relationship (Kirsch 1999). The reason for that is because the two parties might emotionally expect feedback from each other at a personal level and that could result in feeling vulnerable to misunderstandings and negative feelings. However, what concerns this study even more is that a friendship makes it difficult for interviewers to negotiate a balance between performing as a researcher and a 'friend'. Ideally interviewers should be able to avoid feeling dislike and hostility towards interviewees in order to smooth the interviews (Plummer 2001). I argue that making friends with interviewees might have a negative impact on the interviewing outcome. There are two reasons for this. First of all: Interviewers might express personal opinions about certain issues which might be seen as being opposed to the views of their interviewees , and consequently this might intensify the interview atmosphere and thus affect the storytelling. In addition, interviewers might find it difficult to shift roles between being a researcher and a friend with their interviewees and as a

result, discourage the interviewees from expressing their true feelings or giving opinions. Unfortunately, limited research has looked into this issue.

In my interviews, I was aware that a close friendship between my role as an interviewer and Helen might confuse our research relationship and have a negative impact on the interviews. But I intended to build a friendly research relationship with Helen by encouraging her to tell stories in her own words and listening to her stories in a non-judgemental manner. Scholars suggest that when sharing personal information, interviewers should be aware that their own values and judgments might influence interviewees and thus it is important to clarify any concerns with the interviewees (Olesen 2000). In my interviews, I shared my feelings and expressed my thoughts with Helen when she asked for my feedback, but reminded her that her feelings and opinions were valuable and that my feedback should not affect her views about her own life experiences.

What I found useful are scholars' views that suggest that in-depth interviews should be "fluid" (Yin 2003: 89). That is, interviewers should not rigidly pre-determine how to conduct interviews, such as setting up an order of questions. Interviewees who might come from different personal, historical, social and cultural backgrounds may have preferences and specific requests regarding how to interact with interviewers. Scholars have rightly suggested that interviewers should be ready to talk sincerely and discuss openly with interviewees in order to find suitable ways for both parties to conduct interviews (Plummer 2001, Oakley 1981). Conducting in-

depth interviews is a dynamic and creative process and subjects that should be discussed in interviews cannot be strictly pre-defined (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, Plummer 2001). Accordingly being "fluid" means that it is important to be a good listener and show a curiosity and an interest in the stories. The flexibility also includes carefully explaining the interview process and discussing with interviewees how I plan to conduct the interviews (Plummer 2001, Oakley 1981, Hsiung Ping-chun 1996). I found that the suggestion for employing flexibility useful for conducting my interviews because by allowing a personal space for Helen to express her feelings and opinions, I created a friendly interview relationship that encouraged her to express herself and tell stories in her own words. For example, I clarified with Helen what her ideas of giving interviews were. She expressed that she would like to take the opportunity to review her life and therefore would be happy to spend a few hours telling stories.

The construction of interviews: Three stages

Either semi- or unstructured interviews were adopted depending on the stage of the interview process. The interviews involved probing into stories about what had happened in the interviewee's life and how she perceived those events. Considering the change of interviewing atmosphere in each meeting with Helen during the course of interviews, I divided my interviews with Helen into three stages. These include what I described as the "honeymoon stage", the "conflict stage" and the "harmony stage" interview. Throughout the three stages of interviews, I adopted some helping (counselling) skills that helped probe into Helen's stories. The first and

second meetings together formed the "honeymoon stage". During this stage, my aim was to warm up the interview atmosphere and build a friendly relationship with Helen. With this, skills such as "relationship building" were used in order to build a warm and trusting interview relationship. This included showing "respect, genuineness, empathy, and empowerment" (Egan 2002:140,142), "attention giving" and "listening" (Seden 2005:45). These skills helped me create a supportive interview atmosphere that won the trust of Helen and that in turn encouraged her to tell stories.

The purpose of the interviews during this stage was to gain background knowledge of Helen, for example, to understand her family tree, topics that were considered by her as important and subjects that she felt it was easy to start with. During the "honeymoon stage", interviews were unstructured. The interviews started with a few general questions that encouraged Helen to open up with the "minimized influence of the interviewer" (Earthy and Cronin 2008:431). At this stage, my aim was to "provide the interviewee with the scope to tell her stories…[and] generative narrative questions [were] used to stimulate the production of a narrative" (Flick 2006:179). That is to say, I asked "how" questions that cover "generative questions broadly but at the same time sufficiently specifically for the interesting experiential domain to be taken up as a central theme" (Flick 2006:173). Despite being unstructured, I developed questions from each interview and discussed them with Helen at the end of the interview or in the next interview session. This was used to prompt Helen to go though important

stories in detail or help Helen recall her memories of events that otherwise were not mentioned or recalled (Neuman and Kreuger 2003, Song Jin-shiu 2000). Those generative narrative interview questions provide information about topics and specific areas that should be followed up or discussed at a later stage of the interview process (Plummer 2001).

As the interviews went on, the interview relationship moved on to what I described as a "conflict-stage". Drawing on the work of Flick (2006), this is a "question period" where "why" questions were asked to glean explanations and clarifications (Flick 2006:173). By this stage, Helen was becoming enthusiastic in her storytelling and was eager to express her views about events and people that were close to her heart. However, I found that I had lots of discussion with Helen about some specific issues. For example, Helen was not sure about the way that I described the women's organization where she used to work. With this, using some counselling skills such as "understanding defences" was useful. Defensiveness, such as feeling upset or angry, is used by individuals to "avoid discomfort, anxiety or threat". When interviewees become defensive, it is important for interviewers to stay calm in order to show understanding and acceptance to interviewees in order to lower their defence (Seden 2005:47-48). Other skills, such as "Immediacy", meaning being able to reflect on what I observed in the situation, was also useful for easing the tension. This skill includes elements such as "competent basic listening…a willingness to be open and genuine, framing the words honestly in a calm way" (Seden 2005:48). By explaining to Helen my understanding of her

stories in a calm and sincere manner and sharing with Helen my thoughts about the nature of our disagreements, Helen was able to understand that I valued her opinions and appreciated her thinking and the tension was thus eased.

During the "conflict-stage", semi-structured interviews were adopted. As the interviews continued, Helen revealed more key words and significant information, but the discrepancies and confusing figures in the interview data also increased. However, going back and forth between stories and clarifying the discrepancies and confusing figures helped develop coherent story lines.

When the interviews entered what I describe as a "harmony-stage", my interviewee and I were heading towards the end of interviews. During this stage, interview questions are "direct" and the interviewer "takes the lead and asks prepared questions based on the emerging analysis" (Earthy and Cronin 2008:431). A friendly interview relationship had been formed and the relaxing and trusting interview atmosphere by this stage enabled me to probe more deeply into intimate questions such as marital sex. At the same time, Helen was more ready by this stage to discuss these issues and reveal her feelings in depth.

This "harmony-stage" can also be a "question period" where lots of "why" questions are asked in order to explain and clarify unclear issues (Flick 2006:173). I ensured that important information was exhaustively

investigated. I noted down any unclear or confusing information after each interview so that further questions could be developed to clarify any issues during the following interview. Helping skills such as clarification, or helping interviewees to "spell out…concrete details" (Egan 2002:140) were used in order to bring out important themes and resolve inconsistencies in stories (Egan 2002). Despite adopting semi-structured interviews, I made sure that Helen continued to have control of the storytelling. This included developing open-ended questions, encouraging Helen to develop her own topics and being flexible with the question sequences.

As a whole, the main point of adopting semi- or unstructured interviews was to ensure flexibility in the storytelling process in order to capture the narrative context that Helen revealed of her subjective life experience. I started with "how" questions and then on to "why" questions in order to effectively probe her narratives throughout the interviewing process. Throughout the three stages of interviews, helping skills such as "relationship building", "understanding defences", "Immediacy" and "clarification", were used in order to probe the data in depth, develop coherent story lines, encourage open discussions and reduce conflicts in interviews.

Diary keeping

I kept diary after each interview and that helped me to clarify data and thus improve the validity of my research. Any verbal responses or body language that might help to explain unclear information about topics or

issues were noted down. Any communication with Helen that might have had an impact on the conduct of the interviews were also recorded. In addition, "signs of confusion, contradiction, ambiguity and reluctance" in the interviewing process are worth recording. The "problematic" message often reveals important information about interviewees' life experiences that deserve great attention (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 79). I have quoted the following passage from my diary as evidence of my noting down information, for example, of confusing statements that required clarification that helped me to reflect on and examine the interview context and enabled me to develop further interview questions for the next session:

My diary: The second interview meeting on 28/04/06 12:30-14:30 in Helen's office

In the previous interview, I spent some time discussing with Helen how to describe the women's organization, the place where Helen has been working for some years. Initially, Helen did not like the fact that I used "the women's movement" to describe it. For the next interview, I should clarify with Helen how she sees the women's organization…In the previous interview Helen told me that people, including me, tend to use the terms "the women's movement" and "counselling" to address this women's organization. I need to know how Helen views her interaction with the women's organization and its influences on Helen's family roles. I am aware that there is some literature in Taiwan suggesting that this particular women's organization has contributed to the women's movement in terms

of women's legal rights, for example. But with the interviews with Helen, what is more important is to probe into Helen's subjective experience.

The above quotation shows that my diary was as an important tool that enabled me to reflect on the discussions from a previous interview session. The diary served the purpose of a reminder so that I was able to note down unclear information that required further clarification. I then developed interview questions for the next section that enabled Helen to express her views about the women's organization.

The diary can also be used as a "what-to-do list" for later interview sessions (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). I quote the following passage to show how I used my diary to note down questions for further discussions:

My diary: The second meeting on 28/04/06 12:30-14:30 in Helen's office

Helen called me in the evening the day before the interview saying that she had an unexpected meeting on the next day in the morning… I arrived by 12:00. Helen was late. A girl from her office made me a cup of tea and gave me some cookies… Helen later on told me that this girl was the girlfriend of one of the workers in that women's organization. Helen also mentioned that "lesbian stuff" is still not a very open issue in Taiwan. When Helen mentioned it, however, it seemed to me it was nothing strange to her. Helen has worked for the women's organization for many years and that might have changed her attitudes towards women's family roles and

Confucianism that tends to use womanly moral standards to judge Taiwanese women. I will discuss those with Helen in our next interview meeting.

The above quotation shows how I used my diary to note down my reflections and develop research questions for the next interview. My conversation with the girl, although it did not seem to be relevant to Helen's identities, inspired me to ask interviewing questions that revealed how Helen's interactions with certain social institutions influenced her views about family roles and Confucian womanly moral standards.

5.5 Data analysis

The case study strategy is aimed at discovering my interviewee's characteristic ways of perceiving and thinking of herself. When analyzing narrative data, therefore, it is important to focus on the "coherence of the progress of narratives" (Lawler 2002:245). There are two reasons for that. First, the goal of narrative analysis is to "focus on the notion of trustworthiness" (Earthy and Cronin 2008: 483). That is, I aimed to find coherent and understandable storylines that can reveal how my interviewee makes sense of the world in a consistent manner. Narratives that contain the elements of time and event involve their past and present life experiences. Events happening during different time periods often influence their perceptions in different ways. However, there nevertheless is "one story" that reveals that an interviewee perceives those experiences in

particular ways (Lawler 2002:245). Accordingly, when analyzing Helen's narratives my aim was to find consistent and characteristic storylines that capture Helen's subjective views about events and people related to her perceptions and identities, as narratives become meaningful only when the plot, or storyline, becomes coherent and understandable (Lawler 2002).

Second, coherent data helps to test for "analytical generalization" (Yin 2003:37) or "particular discourses or theoretical frameworks" (Earthy and Cronin 2008:483). That is, my data analysis is aimed at "generalizing a particular set of results to some broader theory" (Yin 2003:37) that is pre-developed and that can be compared with the empirical results (Yin 2003; Ragin and Becker 1992). Here, "theory" refers to my proposition that a 21st century Taiwanese working mother is able to challenge the Confucian gendered binary because she lives in an intricate Taiwanese society. Coherent data provides evidence that shows her characteristic ways of perceiving and thinking and that in turn helps this study to examine my proposition. In other words, the purpose of analysing narratives in my case study is to "develop typological or biographical courses as an intermediate step on the way to theory building" (Flick 2006:180).

Interview data were fully transcribed in order to comprehensively present the narratives. After transcription, the data were analyzed through open coding, that is, putting together similar words, phrases and terms to form concepts and develop categories (Ryan and Bernard 2000). This was done with the help of the computer programme *NVivo.* The analysis theory of

open coding was originally developed from content analysis, which involves

conceptualizing and categorizing informative data abstracted from

transcripts (Bryman 2001). With the help of the *NVivo* programme, I was

able to develop diagrams that showed relationships between different

codings. As the data coding was completed and the stories were refined

and categorized, all data were then compared in order to generate coherent

storylines that showed how she perceived her family roles and developed

identities. For example, I categorized stories in terms of the four

dimensions: domestic work and childcare, oral communication, marital sex

and looking after in-laws. Within each dimension, stories were divided into

different sections by subject, including the identities of wife, mother and in-

law. Important themes were developed within different dimensions and

sections. I then compared these themes to find characteristic features that

show how Helen perceives and defines her family roles as a wife, mother

and daughter-in-law. However, as a result of the analysis, I found extra

stories that originally were not included in the four dimensions and family role

identities that were considered important in Helen's narratives.

The primary (unedited) transcripts were kept in a file separate from the

'editing' file. This editing file was used for conceptualizing and categorizing

interview data as the analysis continued. The unedited data remained

important because they contained original and rich material. When

analyzing data, I often checked the original data file in order to fully

comprehend Helen's stories within her contexts. In the editing file, data

were changed around, cut and pasted constantly until the process of data

analysis was completed. In addition, I checked my diary to find useful evidence that showed how interviews were conducted and my reflection of how I interacted with my interviewee and how that influenced story telling. This helps to improve research validity (Plummer 2001).

5.6 Data presentation

In order to reveal Helen's subjective experiences authentically, important interview conversations were quoted in order to faithfully present stories in her own words (Holstein and Gubrium 1995).

This case study considers the conducting interviews as a meaning-making process that is influenced by the interaction between researchers and interviewers. For that reason, in the results chapter, I present information that shows how important issues were discussed to clarify certain words or phrases or stories.

Considering the ethic of confidentiality, Helen's stories are presented under a pseudonym. In order to further protect Helen's identity, her personal details and the context of some stories have been changed to ensure that Helen cannot identified by her acquaintances (Finch and Mason 1993). Some have further argued that if stories contain some extraordinary life events that are highly identifiable, details of these events or people involved should also be changed in order to protect interviewees from being recognized through these details (Plummer 2001). In view of this, I

removed the name of the women's self-help group and counselling organization for in which Helen was involved from the stories. This is to prevent Helen from being identified through association with these organizations.

Regarding the research outcome, apart from presenting stories relating to the four dimensions and family role identities, I also presented data that contained information about other dimensions and identities that originally were not set out to be investigated but were mentioned in Helen's stories and were considered by her as important life experiences.

5.7 Issues of validity and reliability

Regarding validity in general, I expect my data to capture the subjective views of my interviewee. Whether her perceptions and identities are fully captured and revealed, therefore, is my main concern. To achieve that, this study has adopted semi- and unstructured interviews to investigate in-depth my interviewee's past and present life experiences. The open-ended interview methods create a flexible and relaxing interview atmosphere that helps to prompt her to exclusively and openly tell life stories in her own words. The open-ended questions, friendliness and the flexibility improve research validity because they enable my interviewee to exclusively express her opinions about (sensitive) issues. My interview approach allows me to clarify with my interviewee any unclear and confusing information (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, Silverman 2005, Plummer 2001)

and that further ensures the validity of the research. For example, I was aware that my interviewee had strong feelings about the women's self-help group where I used to take part in their social events. To promote the validity, therefore, it is important to avoid imposing my views on her perspectives about this particular organization. In the finding chapters, I have quoted conversations that show how unclear and confusing information and disagreements were clarified and discussed with my interviewee in relation to this women's self-help group.

This case study is aimed at exploring my interviewee's narratives that show her characteristic ways of perceiving her family roles, as well as achieving "analytical generalization", meaning that I examine the data within the pre-developed theoretical framework. The issues of validity therefore include "internal" and "external" validity. An "internal validity" refers to "pattern matching" that shows that patterns across different variables "coincide". For example, the data shows that the interviewee perceives her family roles that are consistent in manner with the issues of domestic work. Her characteristic ways of expressing herself provide evidence that shows that the research findings achieve internal validity (Yin 2003:116). "External validity" is related to "analytical generalization" (Yin 2003:37). To accomplish that, this study compared the case results with the pre-developed theoretical framework. I found that this particular case generalized a conclusion that testified my propositions. The external validity of the research is important for this study since this particular case is

treated as a pilot study to evidence that it is worthwhile conducting a multiple-case study in the future.

Regarding reliability, taking advantage of the long-term interview relationship, I prompted the interviewee to tell stories about similar subjects from different angles at different stages of the interviewing process and that promotes reliability. The effort allows the researcher to examine data and resolve discrepancies in the stories (Silverman 2005). In addition, how the interviews were conducted was discussed in the findings and that also helps to improve the research reliability (Gorard and Taylor 2004; Yin 2003).

In the following section, I will discuss four ethical issues that I considered important when I conducted the interviews and presented the research outcomes.

5.8 Ethical issues

(1) Informed consent

In the first meetings with my interviewee, a consent form was given to her. Helen was reassured that her stories were conducted especially for this study. I agreed that I would discuss it with Helen if my research would be published in non-academic journals or books.

(2) Confidentiality

I explained to Helen that the fully transcribed primary data would be kept confidential. The personal details of Helen were changed or presented under a pseudonym to further ensure confidentiality. For example, I did not specify Helen's job title or the time when she started to work at the women's self-help group and nor did I record the name of this women's group. I also altered the ages of Helen's children to further protect her identity.

(3) Well-being

I informed Helen that it was possible for her to feel distressed during the course of storytelling. Helen was reassured that if this should occur, she had every right to ask for a break and that any issues which caused discomfort or distress would be discussed and perhaps continued at a later session if possible. I encouraged Helen to openly discuss with me any difficulties during the course of the interviews.

(4) Right of withdrawal

Another important ethical issue that I mentioned to Helen is that she retained the right to withdraw herself from this study at any time. I also explained to Helen that she could refuse to discuss any subjects which she felt uncomfortable with or considered offensive at any stage of the interview process. Furthermore, Helen understood that she was not obligated to give any reason for asking for a break or for terminating the interviews.

5.9 Summary

In this chapter issues including research strategy, data collection methods, data analysis and presentation, validity, reliability and ethical issues are discussed.

I adopted the case study as my research strategy to explore how a Taiwanese working mother perceived her family roles and developed identities in 21st century Taiwan. Despite having contacted eight women, a particular case was selected in order to achieve depth of treatment. Life-story interview methods were used to prompt narratives that revealed the subjective experiences of how Helen perceived and defined her family roles through self-attributions. The life-story interview method allowed me to have enough time to collect and conduct in-depth data. The interviews took a total of 12 hours over four meetings to complete. However, the lengthy life-story interview sessions were time and energy consuming and at times caused tension between Helen and myself, especially during the "conflict stage" where I was involved in intense discussions about certain issues. For example, Helen was eager to express her views about how to address the women's self-help group. She requested to know the reasons for why marital sex was listed as an important topic in the storytelling. However, my effort to build an informal and flexible interview relationship, meaning my listening to her stories in a non-judgemental manner and inviting her to decide how to conduct the interviews, helped to smooth the interview process. I used helping (counselling) skills, such as clarification, reflection, and lowering

defence techniques to show that I was understanding and accepting, and that enabled me to create a friendly and supportive interview atmosphere.

Regarding data analysis and presentation, with the help of the *NVivo* software programme, I coded, refined and categorized my data. Through the coding process, I developed themes and divided the data into four dimensions, including domestic work and childcare, oral communication, marital sex and looking after in-laws, and categorized the data into different types of identities, including wife, mother and daughter-in-law. However, I also presented data that were originally not set out to be explored. The unexpected data is important as in Helen's narratives it presented significant information about how her life experiences related to her identities. Conversations were quoted to present the stories in her own words so as to better show Helen's subjective experiences. Interview data were presented under a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

To promote validity, my data analysis results showed that Helen perceived and defined her family roles in a consistent manner. I also looked at how the particular case was used to test my propositions. Open-ended questions, friendliness and flexibility helped me to authentically probe into the subjective experiences of my interviewee and that also improved the research validity. The method of life-story interview allowed me to have enough time to probe into Helen's stories from different angles and that promoted reliability. Discussions that revealed how the interviews were conducted were presented in the findings and that further improved the

research   reliability.   Regarding   ethical   issues,   informed   consent,

confidentiality, the wellbeing of the interviewee, and her right to withdraw

from the research were discussed.

In the following chapter, I will present results that relate Helen's stories to the

four dimensions, including domestic work and childcare, oral communication,

marital sex and looking after in-laws, as well as her perceptions and

identities in relation to her family roles.

CHAPTER SIX NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS: FAMILY ROLE IDENTITIES

This narrative analysis is done based on the case that has been purposely selected for this study. Narrative interviews were adopted to collect the data that present the stories of case H (Helen). Helen is in her late 40s and has been married for 15 years. She has two girls aged 8 and 12. Her husband has been working abroad for around 10 years and visits Helen and her children on average every two months. Helen's employment history includes working for a counselling organization as a counsellor and for a women's self-help group as a manager. In her stories Helen repeatedly stated that her experiences of meeting service users and working with colleagues in the two organizations had an impact on how she perceived herself. Helen is now working full time in a management company as a manager and is studying for a Masters degree at a state university in Taiwan.

In this chapter, Helen's narratives are divided into four parts: domestic work and childcare, verbal communication, marital sex and looking after in-laws. In each section, I will reveal Helen's perceptions and identities of her family roles and how they are related to Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses. However, despite the original focus, in the next chapter, I also present data that do not fall into the above four dimensions. The reason for including this data is because I encouraged Helen to tell any stories which

she considered meaningful for her so that she might reveal her subjective experiences. This helps to probe for data that is originally not anticipated but contains information that presents the "significant ways individuals construct and express meaning" (Mishler 1986:67).

This narrative analysis also investigates "events", meaning life-marking events, such as births, anniversaries, new jobs etc, and their influences on Helen. The "events" reveal stories about Helen's interactions with different social institutions, such as her family and workplace and how these experiences are related to her perceptions of her family roles and identities as a wife, mother and in-law.

With narrative analysis, "time" is also an important element. The "time" is linked to Helen's past and present life experiences and from these I am able to understand how particular events have influenced Helen during different periods of her life. Incorporating a time element into narratives enables this study to understand how Helen's past life experiences intertwine with her current perceptions and identities. In the following sections, therefore, I will present stories that reveal Helen's past and present life experiences, including her childhood, study, employment and marital life. Stories about how Helen interacts with different social institutions, such as counselling services, the women's self-help group and her native and procreative families, at different life cycles will be presented. This is aimed at understanding how past and present life events contribute to Helen's current perceptions of her family roles and her identities.

Since this study considers Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses as important elements (please see Chapter Two Taiwanese Society of the 21 Century and its Features) that influence Helen's perceptions and identities, I outline in brief their attributes. The relation-based Taiwanese Confucian family tradition transmits *Confucian gender discourses.* Under the tradition, family members are valued in terms of their relationships with each other and each family member's roles are rigidly defined in terms of seniority and gender. In the family a woman is expected to be a "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother", which reinforces that a man should perform as the breadwinner in the household, whereas a woman is expected to be domestically oriented and family centred. The emphasis of family relations in general reinforces family hierarchy that determines that male members, especially husbands, are superior to women (wives). The family hierarchy values seniority that transmits ideas that junior members are subject to the authority of senior members. In this sense, younger family members should fulfil "Filial Obligation", that is, showing respect for and looking after senior family members. The Confucian family hierarchy also transmits ideas that a woman is inferior to a male family member. According to Confucian womanly moral standards imbued in the principles of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues", wives should be dependent and submissive to male members, especially their husbands and senior figures, and put the family first and sacrifice themselves for others.

Non-Confucian gender discourses refer to gender discourses that transmit conflicting ideas that challenge or disagree with the Taiwanese Confucian family hierarchy tradition. For example, ideas, such as self-fluffiness, the wellbeing of an individual and independence, are defined as non-Confucian gender discourses because they might encourage a female family member to pay attention to their thoughts, feelings and aspirations, rather than putting other family or their own domestic responsibilities first.

6.1 Domestic work and childcare

In this section, I will first present stories about cooking, which Helen considers as one of the domestic tasks that needs to be completed as a daily routine in her family life. The stories reveal how the Confucian family tradition affects Helen's perception of her family role as a wife.

6.1-1 Cooking

Helen talks about her cooking experience in her early marital life. Helen tried to cook when her husband worked for a company in Taiwan and her daughters were young children:

Helen: *At the time, I felt a couple should live like that (doing everything together). Then we had kids... He picked me up every day after work... You (Helen often refers to herself in these passages in the second person) did not enjoy cooking, but it was not nice to eat out every day…because I*

had to (cook)... He tends to blame me because...he has some expectation

of me as a wife and a mother... In his family, men are superior to women.

Whenever he is with his family, his sister always cooks for him.

The above quotation indicates that at an early stage of her marital life,

Helen's perceptions of her family role as a wife was under the influences of

Confucian gender discourses. A "dutiful wife and loving mother" was a

standard that was used to judge her roles as a wife and mother. Both Helen

and her husband lived with the expectation that Helen should stay home

and cook for the family. What is more, domestic work was not just

considered as a task, it was associated with the idea of "togetherness".

Within a Confucian context, togetherness represents a collective effort that

states that family members should live and work together as one for sake of

family welfare. The togetherness in turn reinforces the idea of family

relations, where a married woman should put the family first and is

expected not to pay attention to her needs and wishes. Under the influence

of the tradition, Helen perceived herself as a "dutiful" wife and took on the

responsibility for cooking whilst her husband devoted himself to work as a

breadwinner in the household. After trying to conform to the Confucian

tradition for a year, however, Helen felt she disagreed with the obligation of

cooking:

Helen: *I do not think domestic work is stimulating. It is quite a chore and it is*

a waste of time... I was not interested in doing any kind of domestic work... I

became short-tempered. You could not bear to see your man sitting there

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and watching television. When you were suffering from something, you

could not bear to see people happy. So you criticized him and we often had

quarrels.

Relevant research has shown that educated and employed married women who consider domestic work and childcare as "unequal" or "problematic" are likely to experience marital breakdown or engage in marital conflicts (Kluwer, Heesink and Vliert 1997, Greenstein 1995). Helen's account suggests that within a Confucian context, it is possible that a married woman who embraces Confucian gender discourses but is nevertheless unhappy with her family role as a "dutiful" housewife with its obligation to cook for the family, might feel distressed. Despite that, however, at an early stage of her marital life, Helen defined her family role as a wife in terms of "dutiful wife and loving mother". She said that:

Helen: *I was not an ideal wife (to my husband)... With my role as a wife, I feel he has adjusted and has lowered his expectation for me as much as he could…*

The above quotations evidence that despite her awareness of disagreement and unhappiness with cooking, Helen at an early stage of her marital life was under the influence of the Confucian family tradition. She integrated Confucian gender discourses into her identities and defined herself as a wife who was not "dutiful" within a Confucian context.

6.1-2 Childcare

Helen tells stories about looking after her two daughters, which reveals how she perceives and defines her family role as a mother:

Helen: *Once my kids wanted to eat a watermelon. I said no to them because it was not sliced. It is their father's or my domestic worker's job to prepare a watermelon. My kids did not complain about it. They accepted and said that yes mom is lazy. They said that mom does not do such a thing (slicing a watermelon)…I have a short temper. So they (Helen's kids) called me witch mom.*

Helen perceives herself as a mother in conflict with the Confucian family tradition of a "Loving Mother":

Helen: *I admit that I am selfish at some points…when they disturb me, I have authority over them and they have to obey orders. I need sometime for myself (a break during the weekends). I would try to arrange meetings or social events for a Friday evening or Saturday, like, when I give a speech or lecture. In that case, I cannot be with you. I do not care whether you like it or not, you have to go to granny. There is no room for negotiation. That is it. They have to accept the arrangement. So, sometimes I am quick-tempered and I admit. I admit that it is not nice (laugh). I allow them to criticize me because it is a fact.*

Helen uses the concept of a "Loving Mother", which reinforces ideas that a woman should put her family first and sacrifice herself for the family, as a reference and perceives and defines her performance of family role accordingly. However, Helen also talks about her needs as a person in relation to her family role as a wife:

Helen: *With my role as a mother, he (Helen's husband) (still) expects me to give everything and look after the kids and stay with them all the time. At times, he keeps an eye on me to make sure I stay home with the kids...he wonders where I am, whether I leave the kids alone….He does care. He pays attention to this (childcare) and you can clearly feel his expectation and, and needs. But I cannot do anything about it. I feel I need to have a life.*

The above statement reveals that despite her awareness of the Confucian family tradition of a "Loving Mother", Helen does not conform to it. The reason for that is because Helen somehow embraces the idea that she needs to pay attention to her needs as a person. The way that Helen defines her family role is influenced by the non-Confucian idea that she should "focus on herself", and it challenges the "Loving Mother" Confucian tradition. The focus of self in turn enables Helen to pay attention to and value individual qualities:

(1) Helen: *At least the kids are healthy and happy, there is nothing to be blamed for, and, it cannot be denied that if I were not stable, your kids*

would not have grown up happily…My stability has much to offer for my

kids, that, he (Helen's husband) admits that, it is an important reason... I

am a secure person. Since I was a child, I have been like this. I feel

thankful for that. I am also confident…I have got everything. I think it is my

greatest capital…My two kids feel very secure.

(2) **Helen**: *I feel actually the core of my life is fairness and justice. Like many*

people say that it is not good for the kids to play video games or watch

television. I told them that playing computer games hurt their eyes and that

they cannot watch too much television because they need to go to bed

early. Otherwise, they will be late for school the next day. This is the only

reason that I consider justified. So, during the weekend, they can go to bed

late or watch television as much as they like. I cannot say no.

The above narratives suggest that on the one hand, Helen defines herself in terms of the value of the Confucian family tradition of the "Loving Mother". On the other hand, Helen is able to pay attention to herself and define herself as a mother in favour of individual qualities. Despite her awareness of Confucian gender discourses, Helen is able to assert her sense of being as an individual and values her needs when considering her family roles as a mother and that shows that she can also be non-Confucianism orientated.

As a whole, Helen's past experience of cooking and her current experience of looking after the children reveal coherent storylines. The narratives show

that Helen has always been aware of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition of the "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother". However, Helen's statement about "focusing on herself" indicates that somehow Helen also defines her family roles as a wife and mother in a non-Confucian manner. She defines her family roles in terms of her individual qualities, but those qualities are devalued within the context of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition because of its emphasis on family relations.

6.1-3 Domestic work, childcare and social institutions

The women's self-help group

Despite the influence of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition of the "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother", Helen is able to perceive her family role as a wife and mother in non-Confucian ways by paying attention to her needs and recognizing her qualities, which value personal strengths as an individual. The following statements show that Helen's work experiences with the women's self-help group at a later stage of her career enables her to embrace non-Confucian gender discourses that affect her perceptions of family roles as a wife and mother. Helen tells stories about her work experiences as a manager when working for the women's self-help group. Helen no longer works for this organization but has continued being involved in their training courses.

The work experience with the women's group enables Helen to think for herself as an individual in her marriage:

Helen: Having seen many examples (of marital breakdown), I have finally started to pay attention to myself. In those years, the sisters (female members of the women's self-help group) taught me a lesson…I would prefer to focus on myself. What I am, what I can do to make myself happy, what the purpose of my life is...

This experience of working with women with marital problems enables Helen to define herself in a non-Confucian way by paying attention to her needs as a person in the marriage. The work experience also inspires Helen to value women's independence:

Helen: Actually, what the women's self-help group wants women to learn is an ability to survive. Fighting for money or property is only a method or strategy. To me, the basic is being able to survive…I have seen what happened to those sisters. They were betrayed, abandoned, thrown out of the marriage, they did not have money and they lost their kids. I have spent so much time and energy trying to figure out the values and meanings that lie behind their problems. That really helps me.

The idea of "survival" from Helen's point of view is all about a woman's capability to earn her own living:

Helen: I am a capable person and this is my greatest social capital. I am the greatest capital for myself… I would not want anything else and would not take anything with me if my husband and I divorce.

Working with the women's group, which provides an opportunity for Helen to witness how other women experience marital breakdown, inspires Helen to recognize the importance of women's independence. This in turn enables Helen to perceive her family role as a wife in terms of her capability as an individual instead of her relationship with her husband. This might help to explain why, despite living under the influence of "Dutiful Wife and Loving mother", Helen, when telling stories about her later marital life, perceives her family roles as a wife and mother in a non-Confucian way. Helen is able to value her family roles as a wife in terms of personal qualities as an individual instead of through her contributions to domestic work and childcare.

However, Helen's stories about her interactions with the women's group also reveal that Helen does not necessarily always identify with non-Confucian gender discourses. For example, Helen criticises the "doctrine" of gender equality:

Helen:…You cannot deny that at some points we devalue it (domestic work) by saying that you are good-for-nothing, wondering whether you should worry about your future (due to no sense of gender equality). Actually I feel

that if that is something that a woman wants and is willing to do, there is no

reason to say that she cannot make that decision.

Some research has treated "gender equality" as an important theme in relation to domestic work (see Kaufman 2000, Rogers and Amato 2000, Gersick and Kram 2002, Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish and Kim 2002, Joshi 2002). Earlier research often examined how a married woman shared domestic work with her husband in terms of her sense of "gender equality", meaning an "equitable" division of domestic work (in terms of quantity) between the couple. For example, a married woman was defined as "egalitarian" or "traditional" based on her attitudes towards gender equality (Doucet 1995).

However, Helen's perception of domestic work does not seem to conform with such research viewpoints. For instance, Helen does not define herself as an "egalitarian" wife or mother, despite refusing to do domestic work. Helen's disagreement with the "doctrine" of gender equality shows that domestic work can be perceived by a working mother as merely a "personal choice", instead of an obligation, especially when she feels free to ask others, such as her husband and domestic worker, to do the work for her.

Perhaps Helen's stories indicate that despite living in an intricate Taiwanese society where different social institutions are likely to transmit different and often conflicting ideas about what women are, a working Taiwanese mother is able to perceive those Confucian and non-Confucian

gender discourses by imposing her own thoughts. One should bear in mind that defining the identities of a working mother in terms of predetermined categories, such as "gender equality", might overlook her subjective views about family roles (Doucet 1995).

Native family

Helen's interactions with her native family, neighbours and friends in her childhood also play an important role in enabling her to embrace non-Confucian gender discourses by recognizing individual qualities and that affects how Helen perceives her family role as a mother.

Helen: I am like my father. He values fairness and justice so much. I think this quality is already in my blood…I feel secure and confident because I have been well looked after… The confidence that I have is because everybody (Helen's native family) made me feel I was excellent. That is a good experience. In the village where I used to live when I was a child, and in my family, I always thought I was the best and the most excellent one. Later on I realized that I was not (laugh). I want them (Helen's daughters) to feel that at every moment, no matter what people say about them, they are the best and the most excellent persons in my heart.

Helen's stories about her childhood reveal that this past experience enables her to value individual qualities and that in turn makes it possible for her to define herself in terms of what she is as an individual in her perceptions of family roles. The native family influences her identities as a

mother in a non-Confucian way. Within a Confucian context, fairness and justice, security and confidence traditionally are not characterized as desirable qualities for married women. Family hierarchy determines that family members interact with each other by their predefined family roles. Senior members have authority over younger generations and this is especially important in a parental relationship. However, as a mother, Helen's native family inspires her to value what she is as an individual against this relation-based Taiwanese Confucian family tradition.

Counselling

Helen's past work experience as a counsellor also plays an important role in enabling her to identify with non-Confucian gender discourses, such as individual qualities. She has not particularly addressed the influence of counselling in the above narratives. However, the individual qualities, such as independence, security and confidence, that Helen considers important are often seen as fundamental elements in counselling services (Giddens 1991, Schnarch 1997). I will present stories about Helen's perceptions of premarital sex that further evidence the influence of counselling on Helen's identification with individual qualities:

Helen: …I do not think you can forbid such thing (premarital sex). It depends, it depends on the circumstances. I think their father probably will have a problem with it. I think I am OK with it (premarital sex). Anyway, what is important is something fundamental.

Liu: What is fundamental?

Helen: I feel what is (more) important is personal development, growth, fulfilment and a sense of achievement. With other things, I do not feel it matters. I do not really care or pay attention because they do not have much influence on you.

Premarital sex for women in the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition is considered as a "moral" issue because of the emphasis of virginity reinforced by the womanly standards of "Three Obedients and Four Virtures". However, Helen perceives individual qualities as "fundamental" against the moral standards in her perceptions of premarital sex and she does not value her daughters in terms of the tradition. It is correct to say that with the influence of her counselling experience, as a mother Helen considers individual qualities as more important than the womanly moral standards.

6.2 Verbal communication

The development of counselling culture in 21st century Taiwan might have encouraged married women to engage in verbal communication, such as expressing thoughts about matters that are of concern to them or sharing feelings with their husbands. Helen's stories show that because of her past working experience as a counsellor, she identifies with the idea of verbal communication:

Helen: We (Helen and her husband) cannot communicate well. We are not good at talking and there is a big lesson that we have to learn. As a counsellor and working as a helping professional, communication is the principle of everything. Everything has to be talked through…

Helen exercises the skills of communication through "sweet talk" to her husband. For example, she tells her husband that she feels so "blissful" because her husband "provides them with the best living standard". Current research has shown that women who are engaged in verbal communication are likely to request feedback from their husbands (see Wilkie, Ferree and Ratcliff 1998; Erickson 1993; Coltrane 2000; Hawkins, Marshall and Meiners 1995). Since Helen shares her feelings with her husband, I asked Helen whether she expects her husband to say nice words to her in return. The following stories confirm that once a married woman becomes expressive, she expects her husband to be expressive too:

Helen: Of course I do, but you know his limitation. He is getting better after some training.

Liu: Training?

Helen: Yes, I sometimes ask him who his beloved is and he would say it is his wife (laugh)...after many years... I sometime tell people that you know what, he was not born to be this brilliant. I have trained him for so long.

Helen expects her husband to be expressive in return for her effort to be engaging in communication. However, Helen feels disappointed about the inexpressiveness of her husband:

Helen: *No, he is not the kind. He has never done something like that (sweet talk). Eventually, I thought, never mind. It is like the other day, he called me on a Thursday. He said that he bet I did not buy lottery tickets on Tuesday. You know he is that kind of person...I said, why did you say I did not? You do not have faith in me (laugh)...and, you can decide to get angry or let it go. For me, I am used to it. That is how he expresses himself. He did not mean it. He has to be critical because of his job. He is a manager. You know it is hard to be a manager. Your workers can be very difficult to deal with. If you want to ask him to...I do not think it is possible. I am not saying that it is impossible. But it would be very challenging.*

Helen eventually accepts that her husband will probably never be as an expressive person as she has wanted him to be. In the past, Helen invited her husband to meet with her friends so that her husband could "appreciate" what she considered important in her life. But once again Helen was disappointed because "the truth is that he (Helen's husband) could only respond to you with a yes or no answer".

Current research has reported that women become distressed or experience marital difficulties if they engage in communication but are unable to receive feedback in return from their husbands (see Erickson

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1993, Duncombe and Marsden 1993). However, despite feeling "frustrated", Helen has not particularly mentioned that she feels distressed or experiences marital conflict. Being able to "focus on herself" might be the reason why Helen is able to cope with the disappointment. Helen's identity as a wife confirms this point:

Helen: It depends on what your focus is in your life...and, I have decided not to take such a challenge. I would rather invest my time and energy in something else. So, you ask me if I have an expectation, of course I have. But it depends on whether or not you want to carry on a difficult mission. I have my list of priorities. I invest my time and energy in matters that deserve my prior attention so I do not get mad at him. I am not angry but I would tell him that I have done my part…I tease him a bit.

Helen defines herself as a wife who "has her list of priorities", such as a job and her emotional wellbeing, and she is not distressed by trying to change her husband. This in turn indicates that by paying attention to matters that she considers important for her, Helen avoids disappointments with her 'inexpressive' husband. This suggests that Helen perceives her family role as a wife in a way that is in conflict with the relation-based Taiwanese Confucian family tradition that considers family hierarchy and welfare more important than communication between family members, and disregards the needs of individuals, especially female members, to express themselves.

6.2-1 Verbal communication and "intimacy"

In the modern era, women, including those who are married, are likely to commit themselves to communication (Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Jamieson 1999). However, for these women communication is likely to be associated with "intimacy". Intimacy "is often a very specific sort of knowing and loving" (Jamieson 1999:1). "Being close to another person" (Jamieson 1999:1) often refers to physical contact that creates the feeling of closeness. However, Helen's stories show that for her communication is associated with the emotional feeling of "love":

Helen: What is important is the intimacy, the feeling and the quality of marriage. I feel it would be dreadful if two persons, who do not like each other, feel very unhappy and do not love each other, to stay married forever. A marriage with no intimacy (love)...does not mean anything to me.

The love and happiness is what Jamieson calls "disclosing intimacy", or what is called by Hochschild (1989) "emotion work". Other scholars, such as Duncombe and Marsden (1993) and Erickson (1993) describe intimacy as a status that involves "the ability to communicate" (Duncombe and Marsden 1993:221). Helen's account confirms that she associates communication with love and intimacy that is related to how she feels as an individual in her marriage:

Helen: Sometimes my colleague and I joke about it by saying that we feel so depressed. That is, we are the kind who are assertive, and, we work hard

and we have great passion for our jobs. Unfortunately, our other half has no interest in our jobs and absolutely has no idea about what we are doing… you start to complain about your job, he asks you to quit. He says that he will look after me…not like others, with whom perhaps you can talk. They (husbands) have no interest in your jobs at all. They can only respond to the conversation with yes or no.

Helen's above account reveals that she expects her husband to understand her passion for her job. It is the "intimacy of the (two) self" that matters as it emphasizes the ability to communicate with each other. This includes "mutual disclosure, constantly revealing your inner thoughts and feelings to each other" (Jamieson 1999:1). In this sense, for Helen, the purpose of communication is to "understand" each other (Duncombe and Marsden 1993:227) in order to feel love.

6.2-2 Verbal communication and social institutions

Counselling

In the following sections, I will present stories on how Helen's experience of working in a counselling organisation at an early stage of her career affects her perceptions of her family role as a wife. Counselling services have played an important role in enabling Helen to embrace non-Confucian gender discourses, such as valuing communication, including expressing thoughts and sharing feelings with her husband. Despite that, however,

Helen does not necessarily agree with the "principle" of verbal communication:

Helen: *I do not force him (to be expressive) because every individual is independent. He has his own interest and life style. There is something that I still cannot figure out in my life. That is, communication. What is the meaning of communication? Forcing my idea upon him, or forcing his idea upon me? Yes, because, he is what he is. He could have asked you (me) to make compromises. I do not want to make compromises and therefore I am hesitant to ask him to make compromises. Because I am not sure what is the right thing to do...*

Despite being committed to communication, Helen does not reinforce her idea of expressiveness on her marital relationship. Instead, she questions the meaning of verbal communication for her marriage. This indicates that Helen is able to employ her thoughts on non-Confucian gender discourses and interpret them in her own ways. Her critical manner confirms the viewpoint of this study that argues that a woman, especially if she is educated and employed, is able to interpret gender discourses by employing her thoughts and does not necessarily develop identities that fit in with any pre-determined categories.

When Helen tells stories about her "inexpressive" husband, she stresses that it is "natural" of her husband to not be "perfect" (not expressive). The usage of the term "natural" might contain meanings related to Confucian

philosophy. Within a Confucian context, "nature" in general explains relationships between human beings and "mother earth" that emphasize harmony. It might be correct to state that Helen uses "natural" to stress that she accepts things as the way they are and therefore does not impose her idea of expressiveness onto her husband. However, it is not clear whether Helen uses "nature" to define her identities as a wife that can imply any meaning of harmony.

6.3 Marital sex

Traditionally, Taiwanese women were less likely to pay attention to their own sexual needs or become aware of sexual satisfaction due to the emphasis on women's virginity which determines that a "virtuous" woman is not "sexual". To explore how the Taiwanese Confucian womanly moral standard affects Helen's perceptions of her marital sex and how the tradition influences her identities, I asked Helen how she meets her sexual needs when her husband is away. Helen's views appear to fit in with the category of a "virtuous" woman because she defines herself as "not sexual":

Helen: people might wonder how I deal with sex, especially when my husband is away for a long time (Helen's husband visits her and the children on average every two months). Interestingly, a friend of mine is the kind of person who feels annoyed that she cannot have sex because of her period. It is only 5 days but it is already too long for her. She is very sexual.

She cannot understand why I am like this. She thought I am unbelievable. But to me... my friend and I are the extremes of being sexual and not sexual.

Despite being "un-sexual", however, Helen's views about how she perceives the meaning of marital sex shows that she is able to employ her thoughts and perceive the Confucian gender discourses of "virtuous" women in her ways. For Helen, her sex life is "not important":

Helen: *Well, perhaps what is more important is the quality...yes, frequency is not an issue. I am not interested in such a thing. So, what on earth why I am like this? I have not paid much attention...So, you know, not everything has to be figured out. To me, if it is something that I care, I figure it out. Otherwise, it does not matter. It is ok. So I am not concerned about whether you (Helen's husband) need sex when I am not with you, and if yes, how you deal with your sexual needs. This part does not concern me or affect me.*

This study does not consider Helen's "being un-sexual" as her conforming to the Taiwanese Confucian womanly moral standards. Perhaps Helen rejects the standards by paying attention to matters that she considers important and that does not include marital sex.

Relevant literature has suggested that married women in 21st century Taiwanese society have been more likely to engage in extra-marital affairs

than women of previous eras (Lin 2005). With this, Helen's account helps to explain that perhaps these women have not considered faithfulness as "important" for their marriage:

Liu: Do you have any standard such as you cannot sleep with anyone else because you are married?

Helen: No, we have never thought that we should not do anything just because we are married. Otherwise, it would not be natural. I have never thought I cannot get a divorce, or I cannot do anything just because I am married. You see, I do not even care about faithfulness (laugh)...because I feel what matters is not rules or what you can ask for, but what is important for you... Rules or restrictions are not important...I do not think you should stop yourself from doing things just because you are married...So, I have my own standard. Everybody has different standards.

The above quotation provides some insight into how a married Taiwanese woman perceives marital sex. This suggests that it is possible that in 21st century Taiwan, a married woman's extra-marital affairs might be related to her views towards faithfulness. Faithfulness was not mentioned in the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues". However, under the tradition, an unfaithful Taiwanese married woman was more likely to be criticized than a Taiwanese married man. This is because the Confucian gendered binary determined that a dutiful and loving mother and wife should put her family first and thus devote herself to her family roles. For example, she is likely to be condemned as a "bad mother" and an "immoral wife" if engaging in

extramarital affairs, while a married man is likely to be seen as simply "too romantic towards other women" in a Confucian context. In this sense, it is correct to say that Helen's identity as a wife who does not care about faithfulness, contains a non-Confucian feature. Helen's stories show that a married Taiwanese woman who is able to focus on herself by paying attention to what she considers important is likely to think differently from the Confucian gendered binary.

6.3-1 Marital sex and the "mistress"

Helen's perception of marital sex also reveals that she defines herself as a "mistress":

Helen: I often joke about my position. I am taking a position as a wife but performing as a mistress (laugh). I mean, I enjoy all the benefits that a wife should get. I have everything. But I only need to perform like a mistress because he is not here most of the time. But when he comes home, I dress up for him (laugh), and make him happy. The feeling is like a mistress. Your sponsor comes to see you occasionally and you serve him. When he is not here, you make yourself happy.

"Mistress" generally refers to a woman who is financially and sexually subservient to a man to whom she is not legally married (see Oxford Dictionary). The usage of "mistress" originally implies that a woman is "inferior" to her man because she is financially dependent on him and has

to offer sex to please her man (sponsor), who has power over her through sex.

Helen's account of a mistress indicates that she is aware of the great earning power of her husband:

Helen: …He has provided us with exclusive and continuing financial support. He provides us with the best living standard…I have adjusted by considering myself as a mistress. I thought…because he hardly spends time being with us, we should treat him. I do things that can please him and make him feel that everything, his sacrifice and his effort, is worthwhile. When he is back staying with us for a few days, I would do things to fulfil his expectations and satisfy his needs. Do you not think I behave like a mistress? (Laugh) Of course I do not really behave like a real flatterer, but I think it (my position) means something like that to some points…I feel that is something that I can give in return for his care of us.

Within a Confucian context, it is (morally) right for a married woman to be financially dependent, while her husband is to be the breadwinner in the family. Helen herself is aware that her husband fits in with this gendered binary opposition:

Helen: I feel because as a man, he feels he needs to provide the family with financial support and he has to be successful, and enjoy great achievement.

Helen is aware that her husband enjoys greater earning power. Taking the Confucian gendered binary as a reference, she defines herself as a "mistress", which reveals her value of putting her husband first and satisfying his need in return for his financial support. Helen seems to appreciate and subscribe to the concept of a mistress who is aware that she benefits from her husband's financial support and that in a way suggests that Helen might define her family role as a wife within the framework of the Confucian gendered binary.

6.3-2 Marital sex and social institutions

The women's self-help group

The above stories have shown that non-Confucian gender discourses have an influence on Helen's perceptions of her family roles and her identities as a wife. Helen's past working experience as a manager in the women's self-help group has provided opportunities for her to become familiar with the idea that marital sex is important:

Helen: When I worked in the women's self-help group, we had seminars and advanced courses that focused on sexual needs. The issue of sex was discussed from different perspectives and from there I realized that sex was an important issue for women.

However, Helen appears to disagree with the idea that marital sex is important:

Helen: No, no. Actually I do not have a great understanding of the issue of sex...I designed the courses. But I did not go to the classes. I was not interested (in the issue of sex). I did not pay much attention to it. The courses are there, but not everybody thinks this thing (the issue of sex) is meaningful or valuable.

The reason why Helen is able to perceive marital sex differently is because she asserts that sexual life is not important for her. She thinks differently from the teaching of non-Confucian gender discourses that sex is important and disagrees with the ideas that are reinforced by marriage experts. The following stories further prove this point:

Liu: Have you and your husband ever talked about how and when you want to have sex at some points?

Helen: When you ask such question, you assume that marital sex should be important for us and thus we ought to pay attention to it. But to me...it happens naturally. So far, there is nothing that particularly attracts our attention regarding this matter, or any difficulty that needs to be dealt with.

Helen affirms that she does not feel marital sex is an issue that requires much attention in her marriage. Helen's response to the interview question confirms my research method that argues that to comprehend the subjective experiences of women, their stories should be investigated by allowing them to tell stories in their own words (Mishler 1986). In this

current context, Helen spontaneously makes it clear that marital sex is not an important issue for her. However, I am aware that Helen has provided limited information about how she interacts with her husband in relation to marital sex. Researchers should clarify with their interviewees any information that contains unclear or ambiguous message (Olesen 2000). For that reason, I ask Helen about her views of marital sex:

Liu: Do you talk about marital sex with friends?

Helen: No, because I am not interested in that subject.

Liu: Do you feel it is private to you?

Helen: No. I am just not interested...

Perhaps the teaching of sex in the women's self-help group, although rejected by Helen at the time, over the years has nevertheless inspired Helen to think about her sex life and thus enabled her to become aware that "physical contact" is more important for her than "intercourse":

Helen: It is like...I like physical contact with him. It is intimate. Just with him. It is like...I told him to hold my hand when we go for a walk. So, now he remembers and often holds my hand, and...Very often he watches television. I do not like television programmes. I do not watch television. But I stay with him from beginning to the end. Some feeling of intimacy is more important to me. It does not have to be intercourse….

6.4 Looking after mother-, sister- and brother-in-law

I present Helen's stories about looking after mother-, sister- and brother-in-law, because these aspects of family life were traditionally considered as important for married women in the Taiwanese Confucian society. I will explore how Helen perceives and defines her family role as in-law to understand how she negotiates Confucian gender discourses. More information will be provided in the following sections.

6.4-1 Looking after mother-in-law

Traditionally, the family role of daughter-in-law played an important part in married women's lives. Living under the influence of "Filial Obligation", married women tended to be "dutiful" in a sense that they felt obligated to take on the primary responsibility of looking after their parents-in-law, especially when they were ill, and thus defined themselves as (informal) carers (see Wang Ling-yi 1998). Helen's stories about how she looks after her mother-in-law seems to conform to this aspect of tradition. Helen's mother-in-law passed away a few years ago. However, when Helen's mother-in-law was ill, Helen visited her in the hospital and at the nursing home on a regular basis. When her condition was deteriorating, Helen stayed in the hospital overnight:

Helen: *When she was in the hospital, she expected that I would go and visit her. She would tell me what she wanted to eat. I always got whatever she wanted...Then she was put in a nursing home. She was in coma.*

Sometimes her situation got worse. The hospital informed me. It was convenient for me to go and stay overnight so that I could keep an eye on her in case her condition deteriorated.

At the time, Helen worked as a full-time wedding planner. She had to go to work during the day. Despite that, Helen took on the main responsibility of visiting her mother-in-law if need be. I clarified with Helen whether she made the effort in order to fulfil "Filial Obligation":

Liu: Do you think you were fulfilling filial duty?

Helen: No. It was because we happened to get along with each other. She was not demanding…It was easier for me to go (to hospital and look after Helen's mother-in-law)…My husband's brother looked after her as well. I did not feel I had to look after her as a daughter-in-law. I just thought it was convenient for me and also because I was resourceful. My mother looked after the kids for me. I did not have to worry about them. My sister-in-law had to stay home looking after her children and she did not know how to drive. She was not very independent. I was the most independent person. I did not expect my other sister-in-law to come because she had to come on a mo-ped…You did not have to do anything in the hospital. You just stayed.

Despite taking on the main caring responsibility, Helen did not perceive herself as a dutiful daughter-in-law. Helen did not feel she had to take on the responsibility of looking after her mother-in-law. Rather, she paid attention to herself by taking into account her personal circumstances, such

as her resources, independence and her companionship with her mother-in-law. Helen's perceptions of looking after her mother-in-law show that she does not necessarily conform to the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition of "Filial Obligation".

Research has shown that married Taiwanese women in the 21st century are more likely than in the past to adopt non-Confucian ways when looking after their parents-in-law, such as placing them in a nursing or residential home (see Kao and Stuifbergen 1999; Statistical Units of Government Agencies 1998). Helen's stories help to explain that as an educated, married woman is able to think for herself, she is less likely to feel obligated to conform to "Filial Obligation" that in tradition often determined that married women should physically look after parents-in-law and that it was "immoral" to send parents-in-law away. However, she may still undertake some of the same caring or censorship work as that of women of the previous historical era, but it cannot be denied that she is able to perceive her family contributions or define her family roles by employing her thoughts.

6.4-2 Looking after sister- and brother-in-law

This study also found that the family role of sister-in-law is significant in Helen's marital life. Available literature has not shown that in the modern era, married women take on the responsibility of looking after their husbands' sisters and brothers. However, Helen's stories show that she

takes care of her sister- and brother-in-law. She used to look after her younger brother-in-law and sister-in-law by providing meals for them, such as ordering takeaways for them almost every day. Her younger brother-in-law has been working abroad for a few years, but her sister-in-law still lives nearby and continues to dine with Helen and her family. Once again, Helen does not perceive looking after them as a "duty":

Liu: Do you feel it is your responsibility to look after them (sister- and brother-in-law)?

Helen: No, they do not need to be looked after. They are adults. They do not expect anyone to look after them.

Liu: Any reason that makes you invite them to dine with you?

Helen: Nothing particular. I just think of them. They live close by. If we have food, you just come and eat…I do not feel it is my duty to feed them… I do not feel just because I am a sister-in-law I have to do certain things. I just thought I do what I can do. But if I cannot, then I cannot. I do not feel I am doing anything special. I am not doing it for my husband…

Similar to her views about looking after her mother-in-law, Helen defines her family role as a sister-in-law in a non-Confucian manner. As a sister-in-law Helen differentiates herself from any family obligation and asserts that she is herself. Helen perceives her past experiences of looking after her mother-in-law and her current experiences of looking after her sister- and brother-in-law in a consistent manner. She is able to differentiate her actions from those expected of "Filial Obligation" or family obligation and

thus does not perceive herself as a dutiful daughter- or sister-in-law. Her perceptions and identities are greatly influenced by her past working experiences as a manager in the women's self-help group. I will explain this point in the following section.

6.4-3 Looking after in-laws and social institutions

The women's self-help group

The following stories show that over the years Helen's past working experience has provided her with opportunities to hear and witness other women's marital problems, and have enabled her to think for herself in her own marriage:

Helen: In the women's self-help group, the inspiration is that a marital difficulty results from how we identify with gendered roles. You feel because you are a gender (women or men) you have to take on certain roles. You do what you think you should do but those might not be what you really want to do, or perhaps you do not enjoy doing them. You feel bitter and upset. Despite that, you cannot say anything. Because you identify with them (gendered roles) in the first place, it would be wrong at some points if you complain about them. As time goes by, eventually your marriage is damaged. You do not get back to the basics. Who you are as a person is disregarded. What you like, what you want or what you are willing to do. What you do not like, what you cannot do or you are not willing to do…I have learned a lot from the women's self-help group. It helps me.

The women's self-help group inspires Helen to differentiate her thoughts and actions from family obligation or duty. She has become aware that her interactions with her in-laws should not be determined by a sense of duty and that she should pay attention to what she wants to do. It is therefore correct to say that the women's self-help group represents the influence of non-Confucian gender discourses on Helen.

The above sections are about Helen's perceptions of her family roles and her identities as a wife, mother and in-law. To explore her perceptions and family role identities, this study originally set out to probe into stories about the dimensions of domestic work and childcare, verbal communication, marital sex and looking after parents-in-law. This focus was necessary in order to understand how Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses have an influence on a married Taiwanese woman's perceptions and family role identities in a changing Taiwanese society in the 21st century. Despite the original settings, however, as the interviews went on, I found that the narrative contexts of Helen's stories were more complex and richer than was originally anticipated. Since the primary interest of this study is to explore the subjective experiences of a woman cultivating her sense of self, the findings should authentically include the material that was not originally the main focus but that nevertheless reveals relevant depths about her sense of self. For that reason, in the following sections, I include the dimension of interactions with her husband in order to further understand Helen's perceptions and identities as a wife.

6.5 Other dimensions: Interactions with the husband

6.5-1 Watching TV and "gender equality"

Helen tells stories about watching TV with her husband which shows that despite valuing the women's self-help group, Helen disapproves of some of its teachings on "gender":

Helen: Once I was with my husband. We were watching a film on the television. A colleague (from the women's self-help group) called me to discuss some work stuff. She asked what I was watching. I said I don't know. I said that I am not interested and that it is probably some kind of action film, lots of killing going on. I was criticized. I was told that I do not have a sense of gender (equality) and that I am not independent as such…Some fundamentalists who are involved in social movements (including some colleagues from the women's self-help group) are like that. They have to criticize everything…

The "fundamentalists", from Helen's viewpoint, refer to those who take part in social movements, including her colleagues, who campaign for women's rights. In the above stories, the meaning of "gender equality", which was reinforced by the women's group, from Helen's point of view means that a married woman should always assert what she wants and fight for it. This view was confirmed by current research on "feminist" women.

I will take the research by Blaisure and Allen (1995) on twenty "feminist" Western women as an example. This research studied those who reported

that they identified with "feminist" views, such as ideas about "equal" relationships where women have the right to voice themselves as much as that of men. This same study looked at how "feminist" views were practised by women in their marital lives. It concluded that a "feminist" woman was a woman who identified with "gender equality", meaning her being able to express what she wanted. This "gender equality" was used to describe wives who should enjoy a "[marriage] relationship…where they could voice their own thoughts" (Blaisure and Allen 1995:12); and that it was important to own "themselves" in marital life. For example, one of the interviewees reported that she did not want to take the name of her husband because she was herself and not his "possession".

The following statements indicate that Helen perceives "gender equality" in a similar way. She thinks it transmits the idea that a (married) woman has right to think for herself as much as her man (husband):

Helen: *A person's (a woman's) life should have been treated fairly. But under some conditions this person (woman) is not treated fairly. We emphasize that you should find the value of yourself and we look at this issue from the perspective of gender….She can have a different life. Before (when a woman was still married) it (everything she did) was all for the kids and husband. Of course you still can, but it is because I want to, not because I am expected to do so. Life is hard if living by expectations, if it (life) is for others.*

Despite her awareness, however, Helen does not commit herself to the idea of "gender equality":

Helen: I feel it (gender equality) is irrelevant…With some matters (such as watching TV) it is simply out of affection, it is reciprocal.

The above quotations show that it is possible that an employed and educated, married Taiwanese woman can reject non-Confucian gender discourses by employing her thoughts. Helen explains the reasons why she disagrees with the teaching of "gender equality" as reinforced by the women's self-help group:

Helen: I do whatever I want to do, and as long as I do not disturb people, you have no right to judge me…I feel when it comes to the basic needs of human being, everybody has right to make decisions for themselves.

The above statements show that as a wife Helen identifies with individual qualities, such as independence (this point was highlighted earlier in her stories about verbal communication). This identification enables her to focus on herself and thus differentiate herself from the non-Confucian gender discourses of "gender quality":

Helen: I feel what matters is what makes you feel good… The focus is you, not new values, not using new values to reject your own…the point is the basic needs, a person, the right to be independent…my beliefs belong to

myself. You have your own faith and that is for you. But you cannot judge people by what you consider right or wrong.

6.5-2 The thought of divorce

Helen tells stories about how she perceives divorce when considering the differences between her and her husband. I present the stories as they show Helen's perceptions as a wife.

Helen expects to have an intimate relationship with her husband, but at the same time questions whether it is possible to have one:

Helen: *Sometimes, you see people, those couples who are so intimate and they understand each other. You feel you envy them. But you cannot deny that that kind of understanding and intimacy requires the exchange of other things. I wonder if we can make that kind of exchange. Like my personality, it is suitable for me to be a mistress (laugh). But if we live together for a long time, stick together all the time, I wonder how we can understand each other or become intimate, or maybe we are more likely to encounter serious conflicts. It is hard to say.*

Helen perceives divorce as "not unacceptable" or "unthinkable":

Helen: *I have never thought I cannot get a divorce or I cannot do anything just because I am married… I do not feel it is unacceptable to have a marriage which is not good. It (A good marriage) is a desirable outcome.*

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But if you know that there is no guarantee that you will get the desirable outcome, you do not feel that disappointed. Yes, because there are things that you cannot get by force.

The reason why Helen considers a divorce as an option for an unhappy marriage is because she "focuses on herself" by paying attention to what she wants or what she can do:

Helen*: You cannot press that person by saying that you have ruined my entire life. It is your own fault. You allow other people to decide your own happiness that is out of your control. I would never place my hope on anyone. I think of what I can do, to what extent and what I am willing to do, otherwise, I do not want to do it.*

Helen considers a divorce as "nothing to fear for" is because she is able to make use of "resources":

Helen*: I will be fine. I will not be afraid of anything once I have 26 signed documents from 26 friends. I will stay with each friend for two weeks (if I am divorced and no where to go). All I am asking for is each friend feeding me with two bowls of rice and sparing a room for me to live. I am easy to please and I can be very entertaining. I talk about divorce with my husband sometimes. He thinks I am being silly. He says it (divorce) is not going to happen, But I think there is a possibility that it can happen. Because when*

my sister got a divorce (out of sudden). we were having dinner and then we

talked about divorce…

The above sections have selected stories about Helen interacting with her husband, such as watching TV and her thoughts on divorce. The stories further reveal how Helen perceives and defines her family role as a wife and show that she is able to differentiate herself from non-Confucian and Confucian gender discourses by paying attention to what she wants or what she considers important in her marriage. Her views about divorce shows that her ability of survival includes her thinking of making use of available social resources, such as informal support from friends, and that enables her to further differentiate herself from the Confucian gender discourses that value a woman in terms of her family roles and family contributions. In the next section, I will explain how social institutions, such as the women's self-help group and counselling organizations, have an influence on her perceptions and identities as a wife.

6.5-3 Social institutions

The women's self-help group

Despite Helen's challenge of the idea of "gender equality", the non-Confucian discourses have an impact on Helen by inspiring her to think about herself as a woman (wife):

Helen: I feel for me it releases me from, when I was in the women's self-help group, I became very aware of, me, as a woman, what was important

for me and what I wanted. That thinking becomes very distinctive and different.

Focusing on herself enables Helen to decide not to conform to what other people say about her marriage:

Helen: *It does not matter whether I think differently from people or not. I am who I am. Many people wonder whether I worry about my husband. He has been working abroad for more than 10 years. People say why do you not go with him? You know people make various strange conjectures about it, but at the same time, they (the conjectures) are very consistent. They (the conjectures) are all very much socialised.*

The quotation below further explains the reason why Helen is able to think differently from other people:

Helen: *I feel, me, as a person, I wonder whether or not I should give up my life for a marriage. Because of my work, and many other things, if I go with him, I wonder what I can do there. I wonder whether or not I should give up my life and forget about my passion for work in order to keep my marriage going.*

Helen's experience of working as a manager in the women's self-help group inspires her to focus on herself, such as thinking for herself and differentiating herself from other people's expectations. This indicates that

despite living under the influence of (non-Confucian) gender discourses, a married woman is able to become aware of and thus reject the influence and perceive her family role as a wife in her own ways (Tichenor 1999).

The women's self-help group also inspires Helen to perceive marital breakdown (divorce) in a positive manner:

Helen: Many people feel that an affair is horrifying, but those women in the women's self-help group free themselves from the restriction of marriage because of the affair. If it was not because of her husband having an affair, she would not have realized that through her entire marital life she has lived for others. When she, when she is betrayed, she, she finally finds that she as a person through her entire life has no value to herself. Because she has never lived for herself...she can restart, start to see that she actually can do something for herself, or have a life.

The women's self-help group provides opportunities for Helen to see other women's marital problems and this experience in turn inspires her to think independently from the teaching of "gender equality" and perceive divorce as a positive outcome. The same non-Confucian gender discourses transmit the idea that a woman should think for herself and that enables Helen to think for herself as an individual in her marriage. The women's self-help group can thus be seen as a social institution that transmits non-Confucian gender discourses and enables Helen to define herself as a wife in a non-Confucian manner.

Counselling

Helen identifies with independence and defines herself as an individual and that enables her to think for herself and perceive gender discourses by employing her thoughts. I found that Helen's previous work experience in a counselling organization had an influence on her identity. For example, Helen tells stories about how the counselling training enabled her to quickly agree with her husband's decision to work abroad:

Liu: Did your husband discuss with you about working abroad?

Helen: He told me ten days before he left. We actually did not have time to talk it over. Only ten days before his flight. He told you that there was a job opportunity. If he wanted it, he had to leave within ten days, otherwise, the opportunity was gone. He said he wanted to go. Then I thought, yes, you should go…So, at the time, because of my training as a counsellor…I feel, at the time I did not stop him going. I feel that I learnt from counselling and that taught me to show respect for people. I feel as long as one can take responsibility for their own behaviour, they deserve respect. Nobody has right to make any decisions for him.

Helen's previous work experience as a counsellor at an early stage of her career inspired Helen to see her husband as an independent individual. Since then her counselling experience has continued to be an influence on her perceptions of her family role as a wife. How Helen perceives her husband's views of her going to the pub is another example that indicates the influence of her counselling experience on her:

Helen: *Occasionally, we, a group of women, like to go down to the pub to fool around. But he feels it is only drinking, smoking and very noisy. He cannot understand what we do in the pub. But for us, it is very relaxing and comfortable. We can listen to music, speak loudly and drink… Yes, I found it difficult to…because you know he does not like it (pub) and you become hesitant to go, or you go and leave early, very upsetting. With things like that, you can make a big deal, or forget about it. I mean, it depends on how you see it. I simply do not want to be fussy. I feel everybody is different, different attitudes toward life.*

Helen describes her husband's disapproval of her going to the pub as his individual opinion about certain life styles. Her perceptions suggest that she uses the counselling concept of individuality to interpret her husband's views about the pub.

6.6 Summary

This chapter presents interview data that reveal Helen's perceptions and identities of her family roles in relation to four dimensions: 1. Domestic work and childcare; 2. Marital sex; 3. Oral communication; 4. Looking after mother-, sister- and brother-in-law. However, to present her subjective experiences authentically and capture her life stories, the dimension of Helen's interaction with her husband is included to provide further

information about how Helen perceives and defines her family roles as a wife.

Helen's narratives, which contain stories about various life events at different times of her life, present coherent storylines.

Regarding her identities as a wife and in-law, Helen "focuses on herself". She thinks for herself, pays attention to what is important for her and identifies with individual qualities, such as fairness, justice and independence, and defines herself as an individual who is able to express her needs in her marriage. Helen differentiates herself from Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses, such as family duties, filial obligations, the teaching of marital sex and the idea of "gender equality". Helen pays attention to her emotional well-being and matters that she considers important and that prevent her from feeling distressed about disagreements between her and her husband on childcare, cooking, work commitment and going to the pub. What is more, Helen is able to perceive divorce in a positive manner because of her thinking of using friends as an informal social support and her perception that being herself or looking after her needs is essential and is more important than staying in a marriage where she is losing her sense of who she is.

Helen takes on non-Confucian gender discourses through her interaction with social institutions, such as her native family, counselling organizations and a women's self-help group. The counselling sensitizes Helen to value

individual qualities. The women's self-help group, which provides opportunities for Helen to see other women's marital problems, transmits non-Confucian gender discourses such as the idea of "gender equality", and that enables Helen to think for herself as a wife, mother and in-law. However, Helen is capable of challenging the non-Confucian gender discourses of "gender equality" and "marital sex" by imposing her thoughts. This shows that despite the influence, Helen is able to disagree with the non-Confucian gender discourses and perceive them in a critical manner by paying attention to what is important for her resulting from her reflections on life experiences of interacting with work colleagues and family members.

Helen's narratives provide evidence that challenges some of the available research results on Western women. For example, despite valuing "gender equality", which often transmits ideas that a woman should affirm what she wants, it is possible that an educated working mother will refuse to commit herself to the idea or relate the idea to her identities. It is possible that domestic work is perceived by a working mother as a "personal choice" and that she may not relate domestic work to "gender", which is a term used in much research on Western women to evaluate a woman's sense of self in terms of her views about the equal division of domestic labour with her husband.

However, Helen's stories also reveal that she takes Taiwanese Confucian family tradition as a reference and perceives and defines her family roles within a Confucian gender binary. Evidence includes her using the terms

"selfish" and "mistress" to describe or define herself, which implies her awareness that she does not fit in with the category of "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother". She also reveals that she is aware of her inferior financial position to her breadwinner husband. Despite her awareness of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition, Helen does not necessarily agree with the Confucian gender discourses. The reason for that is because she decides to pay attention to and commit to gender discourses that she identifies with and thus might not perform her family roles according to the Confucian tradition or define herself in terms of the tradition without employing her thoughts.

Helen uses the term 'natural' to stress that she is herself and that she accepts things as the way they are and therefore does not judge anyone by her own value.

In the next chapter, I will present results of Helen's narratives about personal and work identities. They are important data because Helen's perceptions and identities as a person and worker represent the life experiences that she consider as significant to her.

CHAPTER SEVEN NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS: PERSONAL AND WORK IDENTITIES

Despite the original focus of this research, I encouraged Helen to tell stories that reveal her life experiences. This helps to probe for extra data which this study did not anticipate originally but which contains information that presents "significant ways individuals construct and express meaning" (Mishler 1986:67). For this reason, I include data that do not fall into the categories of the four dimensions or family role identities, but reveal how Helen perceives and defines herself in her marital life. More details will be discussed as follows.

This study found that in Helen's marital life, in addition to perceiving and defining herself as a wife, mother and daughter/sister-in-law, she also sees herself as an individual and employee and develops a sense of self as a person and a worker. In the following sections, I will show aspects of these perceptions and identities of Helen and present stories about how she takes on gender discourses through her interactions with social institutions that affect her perceptions and identities.

7.1 The identity of a person

7.1-1 Interaction with the native family

Helen tells stories about how she became aware of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition and its emphasis on the importance of family relations through her interactions with her native family:

Helen: They feel what matters is relationships. How you do things depends on who you are dealing with. Kinship means everything… It lacks a sense of judgement. I cannot bear them. Any relation, they think relation is everything...My mom did not understand why I did not help my sister (with her financial problems). But I feel I cannot help the kind of person like you (her sister). I myself do not spend much. My husband works very hard. My kids study in a public school. Your (Helen's sister) kids study in a private school. You spend your money like that and you want me to get you a mortgage on my house, just because you are my sister. I am not relation-oriented.

However, identifying with individual qualities enables Helen to define herself as a person who decides to differentiate herself from the relation-based Taiwanese Confucian family tradition:

Helen: Fairness and justice is important for me…I know clearly that it is the core of my value…fairness and justice enables me to behave very

differently from my mother, sister and brother. I do not care about relations.

What is more important is whether it is right or wrong.

Helen values the individual qualities of fairness and justice and that enables her to focus on matters that she considers important as a person and thus think differently from the relation-based Taiwanese Confucian family tradition. This indicates that the ideas of individual qualities are a form of non-Confucian gender discourse that enables Helen to reject the Confucian gendered binary, which determines that a married woman should give up herself (and her own opinions and preferences) and put her family (others) first.

7.1-2 The identity of person and social institutions

In this section, I will look at social institutions that have influences on Helen's identities as a person. I illustrate how she takes on gender discourses through her interactions with social institutions that affect her perceptions and identities.

Native family

Helen identifies with individual qualities, such as fairness and justice. She expresses how her father had an impact on her identities as a person:

Helen: *I am like my father. He values fairness and justice so much. I think this quality is already in my blood…*

Helen tells stories about how her interactions with parents and siblings affect her sense of self as an independent person:

Helen: *At the time (when Helen was a little girl) you did not know what to expect from people. You felt you needed to deal with everything all by yourself...My father was hardly home. My mom played mah-jong[3] all the time. My brothers and sisters were never around. I felt I had to deal with everything all by myself. Many things happened, but you were used to keeping things to yourself. It has become a habit. You (I) deal with things all by yourself (myself).*

Counselling

Not only does Helen's father enable her to identify with individual qualities, but also her working experiences in counselling organizations at an early stage of her career inspire Helen to think about herself as a person:

Helen: *When I worked as a counsellor, I spent lots of time trying to figure out what I was good at and it kept coming to me that fairness and justice was an important value in my life…*

Her counselling experience, including seeking advice from psychiatrists, enables Helen to identify with individual qualities, such as independence:

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[3]A game of Chinese origin usually played by four persons with 144 domino-like pieces or tiles marked in suits, counters, and dice, the object being to build a winning combination of pieces.

Helen: My counselling training in the past emphasized that everybody is an independent individual. This is the core and the basic. It is not incompatible with anything...He (a counsellor) used to say that I was like Ching Ko[4]. What the story tells you is that you…live for others. You help others to make their dreams come true. He (the tutor) thought I was like Ching Ko. Ching Ko had dreams and he was passionate. But he tried to assassinate the King of Chin Dynasty for the prince and he forgot that he had his own aspirations. The meeting with him (the counsellor) had a great influence on me. It is about me. I had dreams but expected that I could meet someone who I could work with to make my dreams come true. At the time, I was upset. I worked for the government. Many of my colleagues were hypocritical in order to survive in our department. I was the only person who criticized the whole system all the time. It made my life difficult. Then I decided to go to see him (the counsellor) because I did not feel I was in a good condition.

The counselling sessions originally were not set out to teach Helen about her independence. However, the process of counselling somehow helped Helen to clarify that she was "other-centred". The inspiration enables Helen to differentiate herself from the Taiwanese Confucian gender binary in the sense that it enables Helen to question her intention of "living for others" (sacrificing herself for others) and as a result, encourages her to become an independent individual (self-reliant):

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[4] Ching Ko was a brave man of the State of Wei in the Epoch of Warring States, who was asked by the prince of Yen to assassinate the King of Chin Dynasty but failed.

Helen: The influence is that it (the story of Ching Ko) has enabled me to see, to feel, start to feel that there must be something that you can do. It is easier to be self-reliant. It is hard to ask for things from others. I wonder whether you want to live for others and place your hope on people. After that counselling, I felt I was different…I feel self-help is important before you ask people to help you (laugh).

The above section has shown that Helen's interactions with social institutions, such as her native family and counselling organizations, have enabled Helen to focus on herself by identifying with individual qualities, such as fairness, justice and independence. These social institutions transmit non-Confucian gender discourses that are in conflict with the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition which values family relations. They inspire Helen to perceive herself as an independent person who is able to pay attention to her needs and focus on what is important for her in marital life.

7.2 The identity of a worker

7.2-1 Interaction with the husband

Helen tells stories of how she perceives herself as a worker when she thinks of her family role as a wife:

Helen:...I am the person who is very tough and organized (when Helen is in the work place)…With other things in everyday life I am "idiotic"…I remember once a journalist interviewed my husband. He (the journalist)

asked my husband what worried him most about working abroad and he (Helen's husband) said that he worried about you (Helen) because you (Helen) did not know how to look after yourself.

Helen's statements raise the issue of "the fear of success". She seems to feel fine with impressing her husband as a woman who is not good at managing every day life. Research shows that living under the relation-based Taiwanese Confucian family tradition, a married Taiwanese working woman might have a fear of success because a good wife should not hurt her husband's pride and that a married woman's career should not be a threat to her husband's position as the main breadwinner in the household (Chuang Shu-fang and Chen Chang-I 1994). With this, I ask Helen whether her husband's views about her being a wife who 'needs to be looked after' are related to any worry of her being a successful career woman in competition with her husband:

Liu: *Do you not want your husband to see what you are like in the work place?*

Helen: *The truth is…If it is something that I care about, I am committed and very competent. But if it is something that I do not mind…What I understand and what I am good at mostly is related to my work. With other things in everyday life…I rely on him a lot.*

Helen does not relate the fear of success to the fact that her husband does not seem to be aware that she is 'tough' at work. She explains that how she presents herself as a wife at home is related to her identity as a worker:

Helen: How can I be assertive if I do not know things? My focus is only on certain areas (her job). With those, I am very precise and I pay attention to detail. Apart from that, I know nothing, like an "idiot". So I agree with whatever he says. In the household, with things like buying a car, buying a house or refurbishing the house, I agree with his decisions. Like, the other day he said we should visit a place. I took it seriously and searched for relevant information…

Helen's stories suggest that research on how working mothers perceive their career in relation to their family roles should also investigate other identities, such as work-related identities, which women may consider important for them as wives. Married working mothers' perceptions of family roles might be related to their personal commitments at work. In her stories, Helen uses the word, "nature", to stress that she does not restrict herself to any predefined (family) responsibilities as a worker (wife) because she is able to focus on what she wants and chooses to pay attention to what is important for her. The following quotations evidence this point:

Helen: I insist that I have my own standards of dealing with work and colleagues…It is because I care about myself and things that are relevant

to me, every minute. I try hard to keep myself in a good condition. I do not force myself to… If I am not in a good condition, I would, I know it, I would go and get some sleep, or go on a holiday as such. I spend every minute to keep myself in a good condition. I feel, I always care about how I feel. And, my needs have always been my focus. If I do not feel well, I deal with it.

However, Helen perceives herself as 'selfish' because she pays attention to her needs and looks after her well being:

Helen: *I do not deny that I am a selfish person…I do things that are good for me and interest me…I do things that make me happy. Like, I run courses in the women's self-help group. I did it before and our members thought it was great. They keep saying to me that I should do more…But I feel I do it because it interested me and that helped them. I was happy…Now they want me to run another session, but I will not do it just because they need it or they like me, or because they admire me making me feel it is an honour to do it. No, if I agree to do it, it is because I want to do it and I feel it helps.*

Helen's account of selfishness implies that she takes the Confucian womanly moral standards as a reference. The standard determines that a married woman should put others, especially family, first and sacrifice herself for others (the family). Despite the influence of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition on her, Helen is able to challenge the idea of sacrificing herself for the family:

Helen: I do not like the emphasis of family relations...I insist that things should be done in certain ways…I do not feel that things can be done in your ways just because you are my family and you are not happy. No, you still have to deal with problems by yourself, but I can give you whatever you need to help you.

Helen explains that the reason why she is capable of rejecting the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition, which values relationships more than individuals, is because she identifies with independence:

Helen: If what you talk about is rights (women's rights), then it is about independence…My beliefs belong to myself. You have your own faith and that is for you. But you cannot judge people by saying to them what is right, or what is wrong. As long as you have a good life and you do not disturb people, I feel your values are good…but I feel many of us (the members from the women's self-help group) feel only I (Helen's colleagues) have the right answers…

Helen's focus of herself enables her to be "self-reliant" as a wife and worker:

Helen: When I consider things, I only see what will happen if I do it all by myself. What the worst situation is… Then you do not feel your expectations for people are high. Otherwise, when facing some (bad) results, you feel it is other people's fault. I am capable of seeing things from

that angle. So, any help from others is an extra help...You cannot blame

people by saying that you have ruined my life. It is your own fault. You

place your own happiness on things that are out of your control. I would

never place my hope on anyone. I think of what I can do, to what extent

and what I am willing to do, otherwise, I do not want to do it.

The above section has shown that despite living under the influence of the

Taiwanese Confucian family tradition that values family relations, Helen is

capable of challenging the tradition by focusing on what she wants and

what she considers as important. By asserting that she focuses on herself,

Helen is able to positively define herself in terms of her work performance

and identify with personal qualities, such as independence and self-

reliance, when perceiving her family role as a wife.

Helen uses the term, "nature", to describe how she perceives challenges

and difficulties in the work place:

Helen: *I do not think of the worst situation (at work). But it comes naturally.*

It is a mechanism. I do not do it purposely. I feel it is naturally a principle of

surviving… What is the worst situation, and you do not, I do not expect

what people can give you.

"Nature" in this context is used to stress that Helen does not purposely

intend to do things, such as preparing for the worst. The term "natural" is

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also used to refer to "mechanism" and that indicates that Helen believes that things should be done by simply following the ways they are.

7.2-2 The identity of the worker and social institutions

In this section, I will explain how Helen's identities as a worker are influenced by her interactions with social institutions, such as the women's self-help group.

The women's self-help group

Helen's stories show that her perceptions and identities as a worker are influenced by the women's self-help group that has inspired her to "focus on herself":

Helen: *It was many years ago. At the time, people had expectations for counsellors, with high moral standards. Like, you could not do many things. You could not be quick-tempered and your manners towards people could not be hostile as such. I was unhappy. I faced some conflicts. But because you thought you had to learn to behave like that (being "moral"), the conflicts were very big. The women's self-help group made me happy because it has enabled me to understand that what a person is does not have to be related to her/his social roles. Because of this thinking, I do not feel I have to fit in with social expectations and I feel it is a great relief…After this turning point, I thought, well, it does not matter what the society is like, I am who I am… I can be myself.*

The "social roles" mentioned in Helen's stories represent social expectations that are "attached to (work) positions occupied in networks of (work) relationships" (Stryker and Burke 2000:286). Helen used to feel that she had to comply with the moral standards from the counselling organizations. However, the women's self-help group inspired Helen to focus on herself and helped her to assert that she can be herself without conforming to expectations or moral standards that reinforce ideas of how she should behave or conduct herself as a worker. Because of the inspiration, Helen is able to isolate herself from the moral standards attached to her "social roles" in the work place and is empowered to pay attention to what she wants to be.

7.3 Summary

The above sections show that in relation to Helen's perceptions of her family role as a wife, she defines herself as a person and a worker. Helen "focuses on herself" and that enables her to define herself as an independent person who is able to identify with personal qualities, such as fairness, justice and self-reliance, in her perceptions of her marital life. Because of her capability to pay attention to who she is, Helen is able to isolate herself from "social roles", such as people's expectations for her as a wife and an employee, as well as challenge the Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary which determines that a (married) woman should be other-centred, putting her family (others) first at home and in the work place.

Helen's interactions with her native family during childhood and her working experiences in counselling organizations, including seeking advice from psychiatrists, enable her to identify with personal qualities, including independence, fairness, justice and self-reliance that transmit the ideas that one should pay attention to one's own strength as an individual. Under the influence of the women's self-help group, Helen decides to pay attention to herself and is empowered to stand against the expectations from others, including work colleagues and family members. She refuses to fit in with the 'social roles' attached to her family role as a wife and as an employee in her work life.

Helen considers her career as a personal commitment. This presents different results when compared to research on the fear of success that suggests that working women are hesitant to show that they have been successful in their career because they do not want to be a threat to their husbands' position as the main breadwinner in the household (Chuang Shu-fang and Chen Chang-I 1994).

Helen uses the term "natural" in her narratives about personal and work identities. The usage of this term is mainly to stress that she accepts matters as the way they are and that it is not necessary to change people because they have the right to be themselves.

In the following chapter, I will summarize the results that show Helen's perceptions and identities as a wife, mother, in-law, person and worker. I

will also discuss how the results are related to current literature and theories.

CHAPTER EIGHT DISCUSSION

This chapter will be divided into three main sections: Firstly, I will explain how the findings answer the research question. I will summarise the finds of how a Taiwanese working mother perceives her family roles and how she develops identities in the 21st century. I will then illustrate the influences of gender discourses on her perceptions and identities. The findings will be discussed in relation to the four dimensions of domestic work and childcare, verbal communication, looking after in-laws and marital sex. Social institutions that influence her perceptions and identities will also be discussed. In the second part, I will show how the findings are related to theoretical perspectives. Concepts that help to identify and conceptualize important issues that are related to the identities of a working mother will also be mentioned. Finally, I will reflect on the methods that I have used to collect and analyze the data.

8.1 Perceptions, identities and gender discourses

The literature review showed that the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition does not necessarily determine the ways that educated Taiwanese working mothers perceive their family responsibilities, such as childcare (Gates 1991). For example, educated married women are less likely to define their family roles for the purpose of marital obligations than uneducated married women (Kane and Schippers 1996; Christopher and Sprecher 2000). My research findings support this statement. Helen's perceptions indicate that it is possible for an educated working mother to reject or disagree with the

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Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary which reinforces Confucian gender discourses such as "Dutiful wife and Loving Mother" and "Three Obediences and Four Virtues". Because of her capability to challenge the tradition, she is also able to decide to not take on the family duty in a traditional way. For example, despite being aware of the Taiwanese Confucian womanly moral standards, Helen "focuses on herself" by paying attention to her physical and emotional wellbeing and becoming aware of what is important to her, she feels free to value individual qualities, such as fairness and justice, and thus is able to define herself as an independent individual in her marital relationship. However, in the case of Helen "education" includes not only university degrees, but also the training that she received when she worked in a counselling organization and a women's self-help group. My study suggests that the level of education enables a working mother to pay attention to what she wants and what is important for her and that empowers her to challenge the restriction of a gendered binary, in this case, the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition. This includes her valuing her career ambition and her personal qualities and defining herself in terms of those, rather than merely considering herself as a wife and mother who should be family centred.

Regarding verbal communication, my findings confirm that a working mother who identifies with communication is likely to expect "feedback" from her husband, such as requesting her husband to share thoughts and feelings with her (see Wilkie, Ferree and Ratcliff 1998; Coltrane 2000; Hawkins, Marshall and Meiners 1995; Lin 2005). Helen's perceptions also

reveal that verbal communication is somehow associated with a married woman's expectation for an "intimate" relationship (Duncombe and Marsden 1993:227). A working mother might expect her husband to have a mutual understanding of her thoughts and feelings about her job, for example.

Intimacy is in general "often a very specific sort of knowing and loving" and is associated with the idea of "being close to another person" (Jamieson 1999:1). In Helen's stories, intimacy refers to not only physical contact but also includes what Jamieson calls "disclosing intimacy" or what is identified by Hochschild (1989) as "emotion work". Emotional disclosure requires "the ability to communicate" with each other, meaning engaging in verbal expression (Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Erickson 1993:221). Communication in this context is important because intimacy consists of mutual understanding that involves the "intimacy of the (two) self" (Jamieson 1999:1), which requires "mutual disclosure, constantly revealing your inner thoughts and feelings to each other" (Jamieson 1999:1).

However, Helen does not seem to have an intimate relationship with her husband because of the fact that her husband is not verbally expressive and that he does not understand Helen's passion for her work. Previous research has shown that married women who commit to communication and intimacy become distressed or experience marital difficulties if they do not receive feedback from their husbands (see Erickson 1993; Duncombe and Marsden 1993). However, my research findings show that a working mother who is able to focus on herself, such as paying attention to what

she considers important as an independent person, in her marriage, is less likely to face marital conflict or suffer from distress. For example, Helen's perceptions indicate that she perceives herself and her husband as independent individuals, and believes that she and her husband should be in an 'equal' marital relationship, meaning they have rights to be themselves and make decisions on matters that are close to their hearts. Because of her perceptions, Helen has not suffered overly from distress or experienced major marital conflict despite her disappointment with her inexpressive husband.

Regarding marital sex, Helen's identities and perceptions suggest that despite the influence of the Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary, a married woman in 21st century Taiwan is able to perceive marital sex in ways that do not conform to its restriction within the tradition. For example, Helen appears to be influenced by the Taiwanese Confucian womanly moral standards because she does not perceive herself and define herself as "sexual". However, Helen's perceptions reveal that she does not feel the issue of sex is important for her. Helen challenges the teaching that states that marital sex is important for married couples and reasons with me by stating that she is not interested in the issue of marital sex. Her perceptions of marital sex suggest that it is possible for a married woman in 21st century Taiwan to disagree with Confucian gender discourses by imposing her thoughts. The "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" tradition have historically prevented women from paying attention to their own sexual desire. The restriction in turn transmits Confucian gender discourses that

state that it is morally right for a married woman to be submissive to her husband and thus be faithful to him, meaning that she should not engage in sexual relationships with other men. However, Helen's rejection of the idea of faithfulness suggests that despite being aware of the tradition, it is possible for a working mother to isolate herself from such an influence by focusing on herself. This includes her perceiving faithfulness as a form of meaningless "constraint" for her and her marriage. Perhaps this helps to explain why married women in 21st century Taiwanese society have been more likely to think of or engage in extra-marital affairs than women in previous eras (Lin Helene H. 2005).

With regard to looking after in-laws, despite taking on the responsibility of looking after her mother-in-law at some points of her marital life, Helen does not perceive herself as a dutiful daughter-in-law. The literature review showed that the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition does not necessarily determine the ways that educated Taiwanese working mothers perceive filial obligation (Gates 1991). For example, research shows that Taiwanese married women in the 21st century are more likely to adopt non-Confucian ways in looking after their parents-in-law, such as placing them in a nursing or residential home (see Kao and Stuifbergen 1999; Statistical Units of Government Agencies 1998). Educated married women are less likely to define their family roles for the purpose of marital obligations than uneducated married women (Kane and Schippers 1996; Christopher and Sprecher 2000). My research findings support the above statements. Helen did not feel obligated to fulfil the "Filial Obligation" by physically looking

after her mother-in-law in the care home/hospital when her mother-in-law was ill. Her identification with the idea of focusing on herself enables her to take into account her own circumstances, such as availability of resources, convenience, her independence and companionship with her mother-in-law. Helen's stories provide an example that helps to explain the reason why an educated working woman in 21st century Taiwan perceives the responsibility of looking after in-laws in a non-Confucian manner. Because a married woman is able to think for herself, such as paying attention to what is important to her, she is less likely to feel obligated to conform to "Filial Obligation", which in tradition often determines that it is morally right for married women to put their parents-in-law first by providing physical help and looking after their parents-in-law.

This study found that the family role of sister-in-law is significant in Helen's marital life. Available literature has not shown that in the modern era, married Taiwanese women take on the responsibility of looking after their husbands' sisters and brothers. However, Helen's stories show that she has close relationships with her sister- and brother-in-law and has been taking care of them, such as providing meals for them whenever they are around. But once again, Helen does not perceive looking after them as an obligation. She defines herself as a sister-in-law who is able to think for herself. She makes decisions to look after them because it does not affect her identity as an independent individual or interfere with her intention of being herself.

However, previous research has shown that Taiwanese women in the 21st century are influenced by Confucian values (Wu and Minor 1997). Some of my research findings present similar results. On a few different occasions during the course of interviews, Helen defines herself as a "selfish" mother and "not an ideal wife and mother" to her husband. These are examples that show that a working mother in 21st century Taiwan continues to live under the influence of the Taiwanese Confucian tradition of "Dutiful wife and Loving Mother". The tradition that defines (married) women within a gendered binary framework transmits Confucian gender discourses that decide that a married woman should put her family first and sacrifice herself for the family. Helen is aware of this tradition and uses it as a reference in her perceptions of her family roles as a wife and mother. She does not think she meets the standard because she decides that she needs to look after her own social needs, such as meeting with friends, and satisfying her career ambition by ensuring that she is able to attend meetings. Helen does not feel she is a "loving mother" because she is not willing to always put her children first by staying home with her children. Her usage of the term "mistress" provides another example that shows the influence of the tradition on Helen. Helen uses the term "mistress" to describe how she feels when she has to put her husband first whenever he is around, because for her, her husband is the main breadwinner. "Mistress" often refers to a woman who is financially and sexually subservient to a man to whom she is not legally married. By addressing herself in that way, Helen might have perceived herself as being in an inferior position to her husband because of his greater financial contributions. Nevertheless, she seems to

appreciate the fact they her husband provides her and her children with good living standards. However, I interpret that Helen, who perceives her family roles as "selfish" and as "not an ideal wife and mother" as well as "mistress", does not necessarily identify with Confucian gender discourses. The identities of married women are influenced by their commitment to gender discourses (Kessler and Mckenna 1978:8). Although taking the tradition as a reference, Helen does not seem to commit to or identify with the Confucian gender discourses. Evidence includes the fact that the idea of "selfishness" has not influenced how she perceives and performs domestic work and childcare. Helen does not perceive domestic chores, such as cooking, which she has repeatedly stated she is not interested in, as a priority or a primary responsibility of her marital life. The findings suggest that a working mother is able to reject or disregard the influence of the tradition in a Confucian gendered binary society and develop her identities as a wife and mother against that tradition, if she is able to focus on herself by asserting what is important to her and paying attention to what is of interest to her.

Marital breakdown/divorce

Helen's narratives show that an intimate relationship is important for her, but yet she questions whether it is possible to have mutual understanding with her husband. As a result, Helen perceives divorce as "not unacceptable" or not "unthinkable". This finding suggests that when a married woman values her own happiness, a divorce becomes a "positive outcome" for her. This is especially true when she becomes financially

independent and is confident of her capability to survive from a marital breakdown because of her earning power and her capability of making use of recourses available, such as informal social network, to support her when need be. Research has indicated that although employment itself does not increase the divorce rate, an employed married woman is more likely to end her marriage than a non-employed one under circumstances when she and her husband are not happy with the marriage (Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish and Kim 2002). With this, Helen's perceptions explain that the reasons why a working woman is likely to end her marriage might be because she perceives divorce in a positive manner because of her (financial) independence and her confidence of self-reliance and the support available for her. Empowered by these, a divorce is considered by her as an acceptable solution when she feels unhappy with her marital relationship. When married women see themselves as "autonomous people with wishes of their own they are less ready to accept the solutions… (such as)… adjusting (and) …sacrificing…(Because they are) becoming tired of being the peace-makers… (and) want to be the recipients of such feelings" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995:88). As a result, "it is better to end the marriage than put up with shortcomings" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995:94). In the case of Helen, she defines herself as a self-reliant woman (wife) and expects to "place happiness" in her own hand. A divorce is not "unthinkable" or "unacceptable" because she is not willing to comply with her husband's expectation and become a "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother" by losing herself and her own happiness as an individual. A working woman, especially when she is educated and employed and thus

is (financially) independent, might potentially perceive divorce as a "positive" marital outcome because "it is possible for her to conceive of being alone rather than living unhappily in a couple…a new life begins with the divorce-a life of their own" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:72).

Identities and social institutions

Helen's narratives show that her interactions with her native family, especially in her youth, and work experience in counselling organizations, including seeking advice from psychiatrists, have played important roles in influencing how she perceives and develops her identities. In a Confucian context, these social institutions reinforce non-Confucian gender discourses that enable Helen to identify with individual qualities, such as fairness, justice, confidence and independence, and help her to assert her identities as an independent person in her marriage.

The women's self-help group is also an important social institution that inspires Helen to challenge the relation-based Taiwanese Confucian society, as it transmits non-Confucian gender discourses that have influenced Helen's identities. The women's group has enabled Helen to decide to be herself in her marriage and in the work place, although living and working under the moral pressures that reinforce the idea that she should conform to the (family) relation-based tradition and fit in with "social (family) roles" can be strong. What is more, the women's self-help group provides opportunities for Helen to see other women's marital problems. This inspires her to focus on herself, such as becoming aware of her

happiness and be herself by paying attention to what is important for her as a wife, mother and in-law. The women's self-help group transmits non-Confucian gender discourses through the education of "gender equality" and by providing courses that teach women about the importance of "marital sex". Despite her disagreement with some of the "teaching", these non-Confucian gender discourses inspire Helen to constantly examine her marital relationship by thinking for herself and of herself.

My study suggests that within a Confucian context, social institutions including the native family, counselling organizations and the women's self-help group play an important role in transmitting non-Confucian gender discourses and inspire/empower a working mother to develop identities as a wife, mother, in-law, worker and person in non-Confucian ways.

8.2 How the findings are related

In the following sections, I will first discuss how my findings are related to theoretical perspectives. This study is a case study that is aimed at testing my proposition that it is possible for an educated working mother in an intricate, 21st century Taiwanese society to develop identities by employing or imposing her thoughts, thereby challenging the restrictions of a Confucian gendered binary. In the sections I will explain how my findings have provided evidence to support my proposition. I will look at concepts, including "nature", "reflection" and "reflexivity" and "differentiation", to illustrate how the findings are related to current research and theories.

8.2-1 Research findings and theoretical perspectives

Informed by Derrida's view of "Differance", I have used themes, including "revise", "reverse" and "deferral" to form my theoretical perspectives on identities (see chapter four Theoretical Perspective and Conceptual Framework). "*Revising*" is used to explain that I reject the methods that examine identities within a gendered binary framework. The binary often defines what women are in terms of a predetermined hierarchy and patriarchy, which decides that women (femininity) are inferior to men (masculinity) and passively and restrictively categorizes women as domestically-oriented, emotional, dependent and inefficient. "*Reversing*" is used by this study to assert that the way that a woman perceives her family roles and develops identities should not be examined by predetermined categories that reinforce the meanings of binary oppositions. Another important concept is "*deferral*" which is used to explain that the influence of gendered binary oppositions should not be ignored when investigating a woman's perceptions and identities. That is, the "sameness" should be "deferred", meaning that one should question any approach that sees women as universally submissive to masculinity in a gendered binary society. Every woman's identities might be different, depending on their cultural, social and historical backgrounds. For my study, by using the concept of "deferral", how a woman perceives her family roles and defines her identities is investigated by encouraging my interviewee to tell stories in her own words in order to explore her subjective views. I looked into her narratives and found that she was able to challenge the Confucian

gendered binary and decide who she was by employing or imposing her thoughts that resulted from her interactions with different social institutions which transmitted Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses, such as her native family, counselling organizations and a women's self-help group.

Regarding my theoretical framework, I propose that because of Taiwanese working mothers' increasing contact with social institutions, it is possible for them to challenge the Confucian gendered binary. This is because the development of different social institutions resulting from political, economic and social changes often transmits contrasting or different gender discourses that are in conflict with the Taiwanese Confucian tradition. My research findings showed that Helen's life experiences with different social institutions enabled her to take on Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses during different time periods and these have gradually affected how she has perceived her family roles and defined who she is as a wife, mother and in-law. The findings suggest that my theoretical framework is useful in conceptualizing how gender discourses influence a Taiwanese working mother's perceptions and identities in 21st century Taiwanese society. It helps me understand that a woman's identities involve the process of her self-attributions, which result from commitments, thinking, reflections and self-awareness, and through her interactions with social institutions where she is able to take on different gender discourses.

"Nature"

In Helen's narratives, on many occasions she used the term "natural" when telling stories about her relationships with her husband. "Nature" within a Confucian context is associated with the meaning of "harmony" when it is applied to relationships. Because this study set out to explore the subjective experiences of a working mother within a cultural context, it is worth explaining how, within a Confucian context, "nature" is used to describe a (harmonious) relationship.

From the perspective of Confucianism, human beings and "the world (earth)" should form a unity. It is "the world" that imparts to human beings their "nature" (the ways they are) (Cua 1975).

Confucianism views "the world" as a mystery of existence. Rather than trying to categorize or analyze it, Confucian thinkers consider the existence of "the world" as something that is presupposed and transcends man's knowledge. No meaning or concept can be developed to interpret "the world" itself. The existence of "the world" reminds human beings that individuals should be aware that there is something that goes beyond the intellectual pursuits of the human being. This indicates that the Confucian way of perceiving "the world" is a moral view. The transcendence of "the world" lifts up human beings' hearts and minds, so individuals should extend their ability to confront hardship and go beyond their inability to feel the pain of others and learn to be sensible and sympathetic towards others

(Cua 1975). Human beings can learn from "the world" and develop their "nature" by identifying with "central harmony", which is a concept that can be applicable to a relationship. I will use "central harmony" to interpret Helen's perceptions of her marital relationship. When human beings deal with their relationships, it is important to take into account the circumstances of others, so that individuals are able to function in a way that fits in best with the two parties.

Helen uses "natural" to describe her ways of perceiving relationships with people, especially her husband. Within Helen's narrative context, the term "natural" is used to stress that she accepts people as the way they are and that she does not intend to change people or press people for any outcome. From that perspective, it would not be "natural" if Helen forced her way on others that caused conflict between her, her husband or others. For example, Helen stressed that as a wife it was not "natural" for her to tell her husband what to do with his career without considering his circumstances. Because of such a way of thinking, she does not press her husband to make any change or to make any decision against his will and she accepts that her husband has the right to be himself.

8.2-2 "Reflection" and "reflexivity"

This study set out to explore the possibility of a working mother challenging a gendered binary and interpreting gender discourses by employing or imposing her thoughts. Helen's narratives evidence that an educated

working mother is able to "reflect" on gender discourses. To "reflect" is to take on knowledge (gender discourses) and define oneself in terms of the knowledge, because reflections "somehow subsume the object under the subject of knowledge" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:ix). Helen's narratives show that she reflects on Confucian gender discourses, such as "mistress" and "selfishness". Helen's reflections enable her to become aware that she lives on her husband's great earning power, and that she is a mother who is not "loving", or "dutiful" to her children. Helen also reflects on non-Confucian gender discourses. She reflects upon childhood experiences where she spent much time by herself and learned to manage problems on her own, and as a result, defines herself as an independent person and a competent worker. She also reflects on non-Confucian gender discourses transmitted by counselling services that enable her to identify with individual qualities, such as independence and confidence.

Noticeably, Helen's reflections of gender discourses are related to her childhood and counselling experiences at an early stage of her family life. Reflection takes place within a "fixed and predefined" social framework (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:5) in a sense that the native family and counselling services provided gender discourses that clearly and perhaps profoundly showed what was "right" for Helen at the time. The reason for that is because "reflection presumes apodictic knowledge and certainty" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:ix). When Helen looked for material to fulfil her sense of self and develop identities at the early stage of her family life, her experiences of interacting with her native family and counselling

organizations served as references for her to develop identities. Because of her need for identities and asserting a sense of self, she used the knowledge (gender discourses) that was introduced to her and defined herself as a wife and mother accordingly.

Helen's stories of a later stage of her marital life, including working for a women's self-help group and the relationships with her husband, reveal that she is able to assert her sense of self by valuing her interest, paying attention to matters that she considers important, and looking after her wellbeing. On many occasions, Helen described herself as "being herself" and "she is who she is". It is this "I am I" that indicates that Helen can also be "reflexive". Being reflexive is being "indeterminate" because it is about making choices (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:ix). At this later stage of Helen's marital life, she is becoming more educated and knowledgeable and therefore is "interest-constituted", meaning that she is able to think for herself, and is directed by "intentionality", which refers to the fact that Helen is capable of making sense of matters and making decisions and choices that satisfy her needs as an individual in her marriage (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:ix). That is, she is starting to be aware that she has to decide what she wants in order to secure a sense of being true to herself. She has become capable of thinking about matters in a critical manner and paying attention to what is meaningful for her and what can make her happy.

However, Helen also faces "uncertainty". She realizes that in 21st century Taiwan, there are "options" as a result of political, economic and social changes (Giddens 1991). The options result from a transformation in a changing society. With this, Luhmann's concept of "transition" helps this study to illustrate the transformation in relation to *reflexivity* (Luhmann 1986). For example, a 21st century Taiwanese society is a society whereby "one single subsystem of society" (Luhmann 1986:15), such as the Confucian gendered binary system, is no longer a dominant system that determines the ways of life of individuals. As a result, "a greater differentiation of personal and social systems" is formed (Luhmann 1986:15). This transition allows more personal space for individuals to cultivate a "unique" sense of self, instead of conforming to one predetermined social framework. The reason for that is because "less claim is made to specific positions" (Luhmann 1986:15). Within different social institutions, different gender discourses are transmitted and individuals are allowed personal space to negotiate those gender discourses to develop identities. They are involved in different projects at different stages of life cycles and are less likely to feel obligated to live under pressure of any form, due to constantly changing roles and positions in different institutional settings. As a result, instead of following certain rules, every individual attributes their sense of self to "specific social systems" (gender discourses) in different ways, depending on how they perceive and interpret the gender discourses that represent "the level of their respective personality systems" (Luhmann 1986:15-16).

In 21st century Taiwanese society, the roles of an individual (a working mother) are still defined according to her social status. For example, she takes on the role as a worker in the work place and at the same time is a wife to her husband in the household (Luhmann 1986:14-15). However, the changing society cannot firmly place a working mother in a single Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary system because of the developments of other social institutions, such as higher educational institutions and counselling organizations. Each of the social institutions functions in different ways and thus transmits different gender discourses in conflict with the Confucian tradition. The weakening Taiwanese Confucian family tradition has created an intricate society where she has personal space to choose ideas from among Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses that she identifies with. In this sense a Taiwanese working mother's identities become "decidable down to the small print" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:5). From the perspective of "transition", it is correct to say that living in an intricate society, it is possible that a working mother's educational level and employment enable her to become "reflexive". A "reflexive" woman does not necessarily define herself within the framework of a predetermined gendered binary. Instead, she is likely to decide what ideas she is willing to commit to in order to fulfil her sense of self (Giddens 1991). She has to live with the "uncertainty" because she is less likely to believe in the solutions adopted by older generations of women who were prepared to conform to and identify with the gendered binary oppositions that pre-determined women's family roles in terms of femininity.

8.2-3 "Differentiation"

The findings have shown that an employed and educated working mother is capable of rejecting the Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary, which reinforces Confucian gender discourses, such as "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother" and "Filial Obligation". She is also able to disagree with non-Confucian gender discourses by imposing her thoughts. In this section, first of all, I will use the concept of "differentiation" to illustrate an educated working mother's capability to reject or disagree with gender discourses.

"Differentiation of self"

"Differentiation" in psychology refers to a person's ability to "stand up for what you (this person) believe" and it involves "holding on to (oneself) yourself" (Schnarch 1997:14). Informed by Bowen's Family System Theory, the term is often used to categorize "the balance/imbalance of two life forces or instincts: the force for togetherness and the force for individuality" (Titelman 1998:14). Differentiation of self on an "intra-psychic" level refers to an individual's ability to examine circumstances in a thoughtful, rational and intellectual manner and "maintain full awareness of one's emotion" (Skowron, Wester and Azen 2004). On an "interpersonal" level, differentiation of self refers to an individual's ability to "develop an autonomous sense of self while still maintaining close connections with important others" (Skowron, Wester and Azen 2004). Above all, for this study, I particularly look at the concept of differentiation related to an

individual's ability to take on an "I" position in a relationship. It is an important factor that enables an individual to think for themselves in relationships, such as marriage (Tuason and Friedlander 2000). The ability of being able to differentiate oneself from others empowers an individual to "own their thoughts and feelings…(meaning they) do not need to conform to the expectations of others" (Tuason and Friedlander 2000:27). Self-differentiation therefore enables an individual to secure "their sense of self… and (they are able to) maintain well-defined selves" in relationships (Tuason and Friedlander 2000: 27).

The concept of differentiation is applicable to my research findings. Helen's perceptions and identities show that an educated working mother has the ability of self-differentiation.

On an intra-psychic level, Helen identifies with personal qualities, such as independence, and thus perceives every individual as a unique and confident being. Because of her identification, Helen is able to focus on herself and take on gender discourses that she perceives as meaningful to her. This shows that Helen is able to secure her sense of self in a thoughtful manner. By thinking of/for herself, she challenges the Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary and/or rejects non-Confucian gender discourses. Examples include: (1) Helen reflected on unpleasant experiences of cooking for her family and decided that she did not want to conform to the Taiwanese Confucian gendered binary that reinforced the Confucian gender discourses of "Dutiful Wife and Loving Mother". (2) Helen

rejected the Confucian gender discourses of "Filial Obligation" or family obligation. She looked after her mother-, sister- and brother-in-law under circumstances that did not cause her to lose a sense of herself. She refused to define herself as a dutiful daughter- or sister-in-law. (3) Helen asserted that she did not conform to the teaching of "gender equality" and marital sex. She argued that she had the right to see marital sex as a matter that was not of her interest. She criticized the idea of "gender equality" by stating that the division of domestic work between a man and a woman was nothing to do with fairness but that it was merely a married woman's "personal choice" and thus "gender" was irrelevant. (4) Helen criticized an emphasis of family relations which is at the core of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition. She rejected the Confucian tradition of being "other-centred" and thus declined to value herself in terms of her sacrifice for family or colleagues. By securing a sense of self as an independent individual, Helen questioned her intention of "living for others" and decided to become "self-reliant". (5) Helen paid attention to her emotions. She was aware of how she felt and what she needed. Whenever she felt emotionally down or physically unwell, she developed strategies, such as taking few days off work, to look after her needs.

On an interpersonal level, Helen is able to take on an "I" position as well as enjoy "togetherness". For instance, in her marital relationship, Helen is able to develop identities that assert her sense of self as a person when considering her family role as a wife.   She defines herself as an independent individual who is the greatest capital for herself. Despite her

strong sense of individuality, however, Helen also enjoys a sense of "togetherness" when being with her husband. From Helen's perspectives, "togetherness" refers to intimacy that involves physical contact, such as holding hands when her and her husband go for a walk, and cuddling when they watch television together.

Differentiation, personal identity and role identity

Despite focusing on family role identities, Helen's perceptions also reveal that she defines herself as a person and worker in her marital life. In this study, "identity" is defined as a woman's self-attributions of what she is. The ways in which an individual defines her/himself as a person is described as their "person(al) identity" (Parekh 2008; Stets and Burke 2000). It is one's self-meanings (self-attributions) that involve "the set of meanings (attributions) that are tied to and sustain the self as an individual" (Stets and Burke 2000:229), whereas family role identity or work identity is described as a form of "role identity" (Stets and Burke 2000). Similar to "personal identity", "role identity" also involves self-meanings (self-attributions). Individuals are aware of their relations with others that contribute to a different sense of who they are. Role identities are a form of identity that "people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy" (Hogg, Terry and White 1995:256). In other words, individuals cultivate "the meanings attributed to the self while in a role" (Stets 1995:131). Helen's narratives suggest that a working mother is able to develop personal identities and role identities, such as defining her self as a wife, mother, in-law, and worker. However, personal identity and role

identity are "related to one another through a common system of meanings" (Stets 1995:144) and this might involve "self-consistency" that is maintained within one identity and among different identities (Stets 1995). This statement helps to explain the reason why Helen defines herself as a wife, mother, in-law, person and worker in a consistent manner. For example, Helen's perceptions of her family roles as a wife, a worker and a person consistently reveal that it is important for her to have a sense of self no matter in what position she finds herself in. She asserts the right for herself and others to make decisions based on what they want to do, as she perceives herself and others as independent individuals.

Helen's ability of self-differentiation might play an important role in enabling her to develop her role and personal identities. She is capable of developing a sense of 'I am who I am' while managing to have close family relationships with her husband, children and in-laws. Her ability of holding onto an 'I' position in her relationships enables her to distinguish herself from her family role identities by asserting that she is an independent individual in her marriage and that in turn helps her develop personal identities.

Differentiation and social institutions

The findings of this study contribute to research on differentiation by showing how a working mother's interactions with social institutions promote her capability to differentiate herself from her circumstances.

Helen's narratives show that her interactions with a women's self-help group, counselling organizations and her native family enable her to develop the ability of self-differentiation. However, they influence her in different ways. Firstly, working with the women's self-help group inspires her to secure her sense of self. Through Helen's contact with colleagues and service users, a majority of them were women with marital problems; she became aware of the importance of self-reliance and independence. For example, stories of how "selfless" divorced women were abandoned by their husbands inspired Helen to think for herself and value her capability to survive irrespective of what her position was. She did not feel obligated to fulfil any family obligation, or conform to womanly moral standards, such as faithfulness.

Secondly, within a Confucian context, working as a counsellor or seeking advice from counsellors enable a working mother to identify with individual qualities. Because of her identification, she is able to criticize or reject the relation-based Confucian family tradition and that in turn promotes her ability to self-differentiate. Counselling/therapy is likely to enable an individual to engage in "the process of self-formation" in order to "build/rebuild a coherent and rewarding sense of identity" (Giddens 1991:75). Taking the example of differentiation, the self-fulfilment process very often has to be done "privately", that is, it is not about maintaining family or other kind of relationships, but is about fixing the self "alone" (Titelman 1998:18). For instance, inspired by the advice of a counsellor, Helen decided to become self-reliant and thus challenge the relation-based

Taiwanese Confucian family tradition. Through attending the counselling sessions, she realized that being "other-centred" could hinder her self-fulfilment. This awareness enables Helen to differentiate herself from the teaching of Confucian family relations. Helen questioned her intention of "living for others" and as a result, she decided to think for herself and thus rely on her own capability to achieve matters.

Counselling experiences, together with Helen's interactions with the native family, especially in her youth, particularly contributes to her differentiation of self as a mother. For instance, Helen identifies with and perceives self-confidence, security, personal development, growth, self-fulfilment and a sense of achievement as important individual qualities for her. Despite the influence of a relation-based tradition which values married women in terms of their contributions towards families, those experiences have influenced Helen's family role identity by enabling her to define herself as a mother who looks after her children well albeit not devoting herself to childcare as much as is expected by her husband.

8.3 Revisiting the methodological approach

My discussions with Helen about issues such as marital sex and how to define the women's self-help group confirm the research method proposed by this study. In the previous chapters, I stated that to comprehend the subjective experiences of women, their stories should be investigated by allowing them to tell stories in their own words (Mishler 1986). In one of the interview sessions, Helen stated that I should not assume that marital sex

was important for every individual. On another occasion, Helen said that the women's self-help group should not be associated with the women's movement. Encouraging interviewees to tell stories in their own words allows the interviewer to clarify any unclear issues with them (Olesen 2000). For example, to understand the reasons why Helen was not sure about the interview question on marital sex, I asked Helen to clarify her meanings of marital sex. Helen clarified that "physical contact" was more important than "intercourse". I also clarified with Helen her concern over the "wrong" definition of the women's self-help group. By doing so, Helen was offered an opportunity to further elaborate her thoughts and was able to explain to me that the organization meant a lot to her and that she would like to say something for her colleagues in order to avoid any "misunderstanding" about this particular organization.

8.4 Summary

In the first part of this chapter, I presented findings related to the four dimensions of domestic work and childcare, verbal communication, marital sex and looking after in-laws. In the sections I discussed how my findings which revealed a working mother's perceptions and identities as a wife, mother and in-law were related to current research. I also discussed the influences of Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses on a working mother and how she took on different gender discourses through

her interactions with social institutions, such as her native family, counselling organizations and a women's self-help group.

I then discussed how the findings were related to the theoretical perspective of Derrida's "Differance", and "nature", a term that appeared in Helen's narratives. "Reflection" and "reflexivity" were also important concepts that I used to define and conceptualize the ways that Helen perceived gender discourses and developed her identities at different stages of her marital life. I explained how the concept of reflexivity is associated with "uncertainty", because of a transformation in a changing society and how this "transition" allows more personal space for individuals, like Helen, to cultivate a "unique" sense of self, instead of conforming to one predetermined social framework.

I used the concept "differentiation" to define the ways that a working mother challenged or rejected a gendered binary. I looked at "differentiation of self" and how that enabled her to develop personal and role identities. I also illustrated the influences of social institutions on her ability to self-differentiate. In the final part of the chapter, I discussed my methodological approach that asserted the importance of exploring a working mother's subjective experiences in the interview sessions.

CHAPTER NINE CONCLUSION

9.1 Findings

This exploratory study set out to investigate the identities of a working mother in 21st century Taiwan. A case study and life story interview methods were adopted to examine how an educated working mother in 21st century Taiwanese society perceived her family roles and developed identities as a mother, wife and in-law. I used narrative interviews and adopted semi-structured and structured interviewing methods with open-ended questions to probe her stories. I purposely selected an educated working mother, Helen, as my interviewee and expected to use this case study to test my propositions. I argued that because of living in an intricate society in which she was introduced to, inspired by and under the influence of different and often conflicting gender discourses, as a woman she would be able to challenge, reject or disagree with the gendered binary. I set out to find evidence that a working Taiwanese woman was able to commit herself to gender discourses and develop identities through a self-attribution process. I particularly examined how she took on Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses through her contact with social institutions, such as the native family, counselling organizations and women's self-help groups, and thereby developed a sense of self.

I encouraged Helen to tell stories in her own words in order to authentically capture her subjective experiences. I explored Helen's narratives of her interactions with different people and her participation in various activities/events during different times of her life. I examined how she related gender discourses to her sense of self as a wife, mother, in-law, employee and a person and how that affected the ways she managed her relationships with family members, friends, colleagues and family responsibilities.

My findings show how a working Taiwanese mother negotiates different gender discourses in an intricate Taiwanese society where the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition is no longer a dominant system that determines the ways individuals lead their lives. The Taiwanese Confucian family tradition, which has been playing an important role in shaping family relationships for many decades, continues to transmit Confucian gender discourses and reinforce the patriarchal ideas about women's family duties and womanly moral standards. However, because of the changes in politics, economics and society, other social institutions are developed transmitting non-Confucian gender discourses. Because of her working experiences with a women's self-help group and counselling organizations, the level of her education and the way she was brought up by her family, Helen has been introduced to different gender discourses, which often transmit conflicting ideas about what a woman should be compared to the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition.

Helen feels less obligated to conform to the tradition then women of previous historical era. She does not feel she needs to seek protection from her marriage and considers a divorce as a "positive outcome". This is because of her abilities of earning a living, organizing resources in favour of her, her confidence of self-reliance and her strength of self-differentiation, being able to think for and of herself as an individual, instead of putting collective welfare first or being other (family)-centred. As a consequence, she lives with "uncertainty", meaning she is constantly faced with "options" and needs to make decisions. This includes her deciding whether working or staying home, being a dutiful wife and loving mother or fulfilling her career ambition, whether she should change how she behaves as a wife and a mother to live up with the expectation of her husband and how she wants to manage her marital relationship with her husband and what kind of person she wants to be in her marriage.

I argue that an educated and employed Taiwanese working mother's perceptions of family roles and identities are complex. It cannot be denied that the Taiwanese Confucian patriarchal family tradition and womanly moral standards are lingering, but because of the "transition" of the Taiwanese society (Luhmann 1986), which in turn creates "options", it provides more personal space for individuals, including working mothers, to cultivate a unique sense of self, instead of conforming to a single predetermined social framework (Miller 2005, 2011). In the case of Helen, she lives with "uncertainty" (Luhmann 1986), meaning that she does not feel obligated to follow any predetermined rule. How she performs her

social and personal roles in different situations depending on her personal decisions resulting from how she makes sense of her circumstances. She is aware of the Taiwanese Confucian family tradition, but chooses not to comply with it and becomes critical of many Confucian gender discourses. She identifies with many non-Confucian gender discourses but can be critical of the contexts and does not necessarily agree with the ideas transmitted. She develops her identities through an ongoing process of self-attribution which involves lots of thinking, questioning, reflection and reflexivity until she secures a sense of self where she feels she can be true to herself and is happy with who she is as a wife, mother, in-law and an individual. The ways she perceives Confucian and non-Confucian gender discourses refers back to who she wants to be as an independent individual irrespective of her role as a wife, mother, in-law, or an employee.

9.2 My contribution to theories and literature:

My findings suggest that it is worthwhile examining a working mother's identities in terms of concepts, such as "transition", "consciousness" and "agency", which explore a woman's identities by asserting her abilities to interact with social institutions, narrate her life experiences and relate them to her sense of self. My research findings indicate that focusing on a working mother's narratives helps to unveil the complexity of how she interacts with a changing society of the 21st century, such as Taiwan, and how that shapes her sense of self. This point is important especially considering the fact that a changing society might create uncertainty

resulting from weakening gendered binary in this society, which might press individuals, including working mothers, to fall back on personal judgements and preferences to find out about solutions, instead of merely seeking advice from a set of tradition or authority figures, such as senior members in the family. Helen's narratives which show the complex nature of her self-attributions of who she is evidence this point. I have highlighted that her strong sense of "I am I", her strength of self-differentiation, her ability of reflexivity, and her determination of being true to herself are elements which contribute to her sense of self as a wife, mother, in-law, employee and a person. Her identities are complex because the way that she perceives her personal and social roles is not necessarily determined by any set rule, but depending on how she relates herself to gender discourses. However, this is not to say that the influence of a gendered binary should be disregarded. As Miller (Miller 2005, 2011) has pointed out, the context of how a (working) mother performs and narrates her family roles as a mother and a wife is related to her ways of viewing her circumstances and how she interacts with the (gendered) society. Her identities are complex because they are developed resulting from the interaction of "the persistence of patriarchal legacies and associated practices of agency" (Miller 2011:1106).

My findings contribute to current literature by exploring a working mother's subjective views about the idea of "gender equality" in relation to domestic work. My study reveals that a working mother perceives the division of domestic work between her husband and herself as a "personal choice".

She is capable of rejecting the idea of "gender equality", which in much research on married women in the West reinforces that an "egalitarian" woman should voice her view if her husband fails to share domestic work fairly with her. My findings, however, confirm current research by suggesting that to evaluate a woman's family role as a wife, one should explore how she narrates the meanings of domestic work and her caring roles, instead of using predetermined terminologies such as "gender equality" to restrictively define her identities and her views about family contributions.

My contribution to current literature also includes findings that reveal a Taiwanese working mother's views about divorce and extra-marital sex. A woman considers a divorce as a "positive" outcome because of her perceptions that a divorced woman can live and think for herself in a sense that she has an opportunity to decide how she wants to manage her relationships with her children without conforming to the "restriction" of marriage. My study also reveals that a married Taiwanese woman's perceptions of faithfulness might have an impact on her decision to engage in exra-marital affairs. For example, despite the emphasis of the Taiwanese Confucian tradition and the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues", a married Taiwanese woman may engage in extra-marital sex because she does not perceive 'faithfulness' as essential to her in her marital life as a wife.

9.3 Limitations to the study and areas for further work

This case study explored a woman's narrative that presented a working Taiwanese mother's subjective views about her perceptions and identities. However, due to the small sample size, this study is unable to generalize the findings to the population of educated working mothers. Nor can this study's outcome be generalized to women from different cultural backgrounds. However, I expect that my case study serves the purpose of a "pilot" study for future research on educated working mothers.

More research needs to done to understand the correlations between "differentiation", "reflexivity" and identities. How social institutions influence women's perceptions and identities should be explored in-depth, especially with women who live in a changing society where a gendered binary tradition is experiencing a transition because of political, economic and social developments. Research on women from a Confucian-based culture should study the influences of "social discourses" on women's perceptions and identities, instead of restrictively focusing on "gender discourses". The reason for that is because Confucianism is a complex cultural and philosophical system that transmits ideas about how people should define and conduct themselves in every aspect of their lives. Its influences on individuals, including women, are far more multifaceted than people's identities as men or women. The term, "nature", which was used by Helen to elaborate her thoughts about how she perceived her marital life, is an example. "Nature" in a Confucian context originally was used to define

human beings' harmonious relationships with the earth but it's teaching of

harmony might have an impact on how a Taiwanese woman perceives and

cultivates her (family) life as a wife and mother.

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