The Impact of Host Country Policies on the Overseas Chinese Family in Singapore and Malaysia

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The purpose of this paper is to provide an account of changes in the family construct of the Singaporean Overseas Chinese resulting from migration, settlement, and public policy. The family institution then changes in response to family policy, so that today it bears little resemblance to the traditional blueprint. Differences between the family institutions of the three major racial groups in Singapore have emerged as a result of discriminatory policy pressures. The Singaporean government has used family planning policies to create the ideal social structure and human resource capital, possibly at the expense of Malays and women with less education. The fate of the Overseas Chinese family institution in Singapore may also differ to its counterpart in Malaysia. In Malaysia, the pro-Malay affirmative action program has contributed to a dramatic reduction in Overseas Chinese fertility, whilst creating unintended consequences that are not easily reversible. Both examples lend credence to the "minority status hypothesis" on family planning. The paper concludes with issues for macromarketing scholars to ponder.

Introduction

Industrialization has triggered demographic transition in many countries and its effect on the family institution is apparent. Family size is rapidly diminishing, populations are ageing, and family units are increasingly isolated. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how the family construct has changed through the immigration and settlement of the Overseas Chinese in Singapore. The context of this paper follows Chinese migrants who immigrated to Singapore between the turn of the 20th century and the Second World War as a result of uncertain socio-economic conditions in rural Southern China. They are collectively referred to as *huaqiao* or the sojourner migrants (Wang 1991).

The Traditional Chinese Family

The traditional Chinese family is characterized by values derived from the Confucian ideal of preservation of harmony (Kuo 1987; Slote 1998). According to Confucius and Mencius, the reinforcement of the 'Five Bonds' are necessary for a harmonious society. These are the authority of the ruler over his subjects, the authority of the father over his son, the authority of the husband over his wife, the authority of the elder brother over his younger brother, and the kinship shared between friends (Zhou, Shi, and Xu 1982). Slote (1998, 39) observes that "the hierarchy is centered on the image of the ultimate benevolent father – omniscient, omnipotent, and protective – and is a derivation of certain stages of psychological development of a child that sees the parent as an all-fulfilling and all-powerful godlike figure". This patriarchal authority over family dynamics and the cultural values of Chinese society is inextricably linked through the Confucian ethic. Therefore, a large part of traditional Chinese culture is bound to the family.

The traditional Chinese family construct is very complex and scholars such as Baker (1979) provide more elaborate accounts of its structure and dynamics than what the scope of this paper permits. Nonetheless, there are three characteristics that are of interest in this paper: (1) deference to paternalistic authority, (2) patrilineal nuclear family (preference for males), and (3) interdependence on extended family.

In a traditional Chinese family, the son is not to question the authority of his father; nor is the wife to question the authority of her husband. Obedience and solidarity are expected from family members, whilst grievances and dissent have to be restrained. The father is a feared and distant figure whose role is to teach, direct, and discipline. Thus, he is restrained from any displays of affection (Slote 1998). Only the eldest son can succeed the father as the head of the household and is expected to provide care to his parents in their old age. When a daughter marries, she leaves her family to join her husband's family where her new role is primarily to assist with household chores and bearing children. Baker (1979) observed that women are 'acquired' to help families achieve key tasks, such as the enlargement of the family in order to compete better with rival families. In agrarian China, family size matters; hence, the basic unit of a traditional Chinese family often includes the extended family comprising several generations. Large families provide an ample and steady supply of labor to generate wealth for the family.

The traditional Chinese family construct also extended beyond the household to include the entire village. Since Chinese lineage is patrilineal and family landholdings were subdivided among sons, members of a settlement or village often shared one surname and each household was bound together by consanguineal relationships. This kinship among villagers was economically beneficial. Members worked together on capital improvements such as digging wells, making roads, and, since the lineage held the land collectively, building ancestral temples. The extended family construct gave each member a sense of solidarity and identity that distinguished them from other villages. This is the familial context with which the emigrant leaves China.

Migration: The Overseas Chinese

Warlordism, banditry, civil wars, and revolution had further impoverished the rural areas of Fujian and Guangdong provinces in southern China. Meanwhile, new export industries in colonial Southeast Asia required more laborers. The British in the Straits Settlements (current-day Malaysia and Singapore) recruited labor from China to work in the tin mines. Earlier Chinese settlers who had established businesses in growing industries often looked to recruit relatives from their home village as workers. These factors brought the sojourner Chinese migrant to Singapore. The sojourning migrant is characterized by mercenary intentions of pursuing economic gains in the short-term, but ultimately wanting to return to the home country with accumulated riches (Bonacich 1973). Money was remitted back to China to acquire land and other investments back home, thus suggesting that the sojourner made every preparation to retire there. Until then, the sojourner made the journey alone, often leaving this family behind.

The Chinese Family Abroad

The institution of the family changes in the host country because of the allegiances migrants make when they arrive in the host country. If the conditions there are hostile and unwelcoming, migrants often seek others from the same kinship or 'clan' to gain strength in numbers. This kinship comprises several broad associations including known relatives who are already established in the host country, earlier settlers who share their surname and/or originate from the same village in China, and fellow villagers (often with the same surname) who embarked on the journey together. Since most Chinese *huaqiao* were male, they swore a 'blood brotherhood' which even included non-relations for the sake of solidarity (Baker 1979).

These mock kinships gradually evolved into more formal institutions, resulting in hundreds of clan associations – commonly referred to as *huiguan* – which are distinguished mostly by dialect groups first, then by territory of origin or surname (Wickberg 1998). The *huiguan* provided new migrants with food, clothing, as well as the opportunity to partake in cultural rituals such as religious and ancestor worship. The *huiguan*'s most important contribution to the migrant's adaptation to the host country was access to employment. New arrivals were often recruited into the businesses of entrepreneurs who were either relatives or members of the same *huiguan*. As more clan members were 'pulled' into a particular trade, a chain migration pattern started to emerge.

The benefits and obligations of clan membership in host countries stirred the migrant's consciousness about kinship, possibly expanding the family institution to include a second family of 'relations' in the host country. Once the migrant became more well-established, he would then be able to bring his nuclear family over to be reunited in the host country. The sojourn ended when the migrant and his family decide to adopt the host country as their new home.

The Overseas Chinese Family in Singapore

The British welcomed the migration of Chinese who would supply the human resource required for their development plans of Singapore and the rest of the Straits Settlements. Unskilled Chinese 'coolies' were recruited to work in the tin mines; while other migrants were sought for their prowess in trade. British official Sir Stamford Raffles, widely regarded as the founder of Singapore, had plans to develop Singapore as a trading port to market various products from the West and opium from India. Raffle's *laissez-faire* approach to development also allowed the different dialect groups from China to carve out economic niches for itself (Chiew 1995). Based on Raffle's urban development plan, residential areas were also segmented by dialect groups, resulting in a spatial concentration of Chinese clans and family groups not dissimilar to villages in their rural homeland (Cheng 1995).

Demographic statistics published in the 1990 Singapore Census of Population recorded the influx of Chinese migrants in Singapore (Kwok 1998). In 1824, the population of Singapore was just over 10,000, 31% of which were ethnic Chinese. At the height of the Chinese *huaqiao* migration wave in 1931, the population of Singapore grew to over 550,000, 75% of which were ethnic Chinese. The most recent census reports that Chinese is still the largest ethnic group in

Singapore (Leow 2000). As a result, the national identity and ideology are largely influenced by Chinese culture and the Confucian ethic.

The Traditional Chinese Family in Singapore

Chain migration from China leading up to the Second World War altered the demographic profile of Singapore's population. The Chinese were now the new ethnic majority and most of the male migrants were able to either sponsor the migration of their wives and children or establish new families in their adopted host country. The gender balance was re-established and a greater proportion of the Chinese population is Singapore-born. During the post-war baby boom, which continued until the mid 1960s, nearly 80% of population growth was attributable to a natural increase rather than migration (Cheng 1989). The total fertility rate peaked in 1957, with more than six children per woman (Yap 2003). The Chinese family consisted of a large nuclear family and a network of other families related by kin, clan, or dialect group.

Cultural values are linked to reproduction, childbearing, and the preferred size of a complete family (Beaver 1975; Handwerker 1986). Therefore, anthropologists argue that cultural transformation underlies the demographic transition and changes in fertility observed in many societies. As the Chinese migrant becomes more established and well-adjusted in the company of other migrants from the same clan or dialect group in Singapore, the most familiar type of family structure is recreated. This culture is rooted in an agrarian society where a large family was beneficial. However, the conditions in Singapore are markedly different. Specifically, the traditional Chinese family institution became incompatible with the government's vision of a modern Singapore.

The Singapore Government and its Influence on the Population

Since its independence from the Malaysian Federation in 1965, Singapore has been governed by a Chinese-dominated People's Action Party guided by Lee Kuan Yew and his vision of building a modern and industrialized city-state. Most Singaporeans regard Mr. Lee as the patriarch of modern Singapore, under whom many have prospered during the country's rapid economic development in the last four decades. Singapore's GDP per capita rose from US$701 in 1968 to US$37,597 in 2008 (Statistics Singapore 2009). The government recognized that, since Singapore lacked natural resources, it needed to rely heavily on human resources to industrialize the economy. The government made significant investments in education and training to upgrade the workforce to higher value-added industries such as shipping, oil refining, manufacturing, and banking. During that period, the literacy rate in Singapore rose from under 60% in the 1960s to 98% in 2008 (Statistics Singapore 2009). Already highly-regarded by businesses from the West for its high standards in education and English, Singapore was also well-poised to benefit from the recent economic growth of China because its Chinese population was proficient in Chinese business culture, as well as being fluent in Mandarin.

Singapore also had to undergo a significant demographic transformation. In the formative years during the 1960s, the government was faced with a high unemployment rate, limited industrial base, scarce land and natural resources, and a growing population. The government's

broad response to this predicament was to improve the quality of human resources while limiting its quantity. This approach gave rise to anti-natalist and other social engineering policies that may seem discriminatory and invasive to Western observers. However, since one of Confucius' 'Five Bonds' is the ruler's authority over his subjects, the Confucian ethic appeared to grant some permissibility for the government to intervene in the private affairs of the individual and family. Government intervention brought significant changes to the traditional Chinese family institution in Singapore. Some of these were inadvertent or unanticipated, and irreversible.

Government Policy on Nuclear Families

In 1966, following the Singapore government's tightening of immigration controls, the statutory Singapore Family Planning and Population Board was established to limit population growth. The Board introduced a range of incentives and controls, collectively known as the "Stop at Two" policy, in order to reduce the fertility rate. Several authors have catalogued these measures (e.g. Palen 1986; Quah and Quah 1989; Graham 1995; Teo and Yeoh 1999). They include:

- Income tax relief for the first three children only;
- Paid maternity leave for only the first two children;
- Higher hospital delivery fees for each child after the second;
- Higher priority in public housing for smaller families (75% of the population lived in public housing);
- Higher priority in the choice of primary school for the first three children if their parents underwent voluntary sterilization.

These measures, along with the subsequent liberalization of abortion laws to facilitate abortion on demand, were extremely effective in lowering the fertility rate. The fertility rate dropped from 4.66 children per woman in 1965 to 1.73 children in 1980 (Yap 2003; Cheng 1989). The fertility rate for Chinese women was 1.66 children, substantially lower than counterparts in other ethnic groups. The government, by succeeded in limiting population growth, soon realized that there were other concomitant demographic trends and inadvertent policy effects occurring. In just a decade after instituting anti-natalist measures, the fertility rate dipped below the replacement level. This trend, coupled with a rapid delay in marriages and childbearing, meant that the size of Singapore's human resource would likely decline in the next generation. This concern prompted a policy reversal by the government in the 1980s.

The government's worries about a population decline were compounded by an unanticipated fertility pattern. In a public address to the country in 1983, Mr. Lee expressed concern that well-educated women were increasingly unmarried and having fewer children than less-educated women (1.65 children and 3.5 children, respectively). He implied that this trend would be detrimental to the eugenic quality of Singapore (Palen 1986). He ascribed genetics and education as two key determinants of achievement, and was determined to improve the 'national IQ' even if it meant selective breeding. The government instituted a controversial population policy to achieve two objectives: to increase fertility of educated women, and to decrease fertility of uneducated women. Consequently, even more incentives and controls were introduced. Palen (1986) lists some of these measures:

- Children of graduate mothers received highest priority in their choice of primary school;
- Higher tax relief for each of the first three children of graduate mothers;
- Childcare subsidies to encourage graduate mothers to rejoin the workforce;
- Cash grant of up to $10,000 for non-graduate mothers who opt for voluntary sterilization after the second child;
- Establishment of the Social Development Unit, a bureau which enables graduate men to meet graduate women for the purpose of increasing marriage rates among graduates.

The government abolished this policy after a public outcry concerning the discrimination of non-graduate mothers. The effect of these measures is still not clear since the disparity in marriage and fertility rates among graduate and non-graduate mothers persists today. Nonetheless, the government's message was clear. It had a vision of Singapore as an achievement-oriented society and was not afraid to exercise its authority to engineer such a society. This policy was short-lived but it provided the template for a new, more inclusive, pro-natalist family planning policy.

In 1987, the government instituted the New Population Policy to replace the anti-natalist population program (Cheung 1989). The Family Planning and Population Board was replaced by the Population Planning Unit and the Family Life Education Unit. This was designed to reflect a greater emphasis on educating young Singaporeans on the value of family life (Teo and Yeoh 1999). These agencies were charged with the difficult task of raising the fertility rate against the backdrop of increasing modernization, competition, and empowerment of the individual and specifically women (Graham 1995). The anti-natalist campaign of "Stop at Two" was now replaced by the pro-natalist campaign of "Have Three, or More if You Can Afford It". Many old policy instruments were revised:

- Whereas before smaller families had received higher priority in public housing, now larger families (three children or more) received higher priority;
- Whereas before, income tax relief had been awarded for the first three children, now it was awarded for each child, with additional tax rebates for the third child onwards;
- Whereas before, higher hospital delivery fees had been levied for each subsequent child after the second, now hospital delivery fees were subsidized for each subsequent child after the third;
- Whereas before, abortions were available on demand, now women with fewer than three children seeking abortion were required to undergo counseling.

Policy Implications

To date, these policies have not been able to reverse the trend of declining fertility. This problem is not unique to Singapore. Populations in many industrialized countries are also ageing and unable to replace themselves. However, the Singaporean government has demonstrated that it is prepared to enforce population policies by using bold incentives and disincentives to influence decisions in personal and family spheres. Successive policy changes and the persistence of the 'carrot-and-stick' approach in policy implementation even now may have formed a pattern of conditioning for young Singaporeans. Chen and Fawcett (1979) argue that this is the *facilitating effect* of population policies.

An association is created when the decision to marry or bear children is reinforced, either positively or negatively, by extrinsic benefits or costs, such as monetary entitlements or losses. Theories in economics and sociology suggest that people would eventually consider the benefits and costs of building a family before they respond (Bagozzi and Van Loo 1978). If this is indeed the decision process for some, then it is reasonable to expect that they would defer their decision until all the extrinsic benefits or costs are known. Since family policy incentives and disincentives vary periodically in Singapore, those who seek to maximize utility may postpone starting a family until they get the 'best deal' possible. Unlike in agrarian China where fertility was once driven by labor demands and social insurance for the elderly; in Singapore, a smaller nuclear family is a purposeful adaptation to the natural and socioeconomic environment, as well as public policy.

Government Policy on Extended Families

The Singaporean government's efforts to create a national identity and restructure urban development have indirectly altered the concept of the extended Chinese family. In the interest of building a national identity with three sizeable ethic groups (Chinese, Malay, and Indian), the government's imperative was to marginalize the institutions that perpetuated cultural segregation. The government began to enforce the use of Mandarin as the *lingua franca* for Chinese of all dialect groups and to discourage the use of dialects. The government also instituted an urban redevelopment plan that dispersed the concentration of clan or dialect group members into new housing areas which are now more ethnically diverse. Community Centers and Residents' Committees were then established in each housing area to promote greater social interaction between members of different ethnic and dialect groups in the hopes of building a collective identity. For the Chinese, these policies marginalized the role of the *huiguan* as the transmitter of Chinese culture. Cheng (1995) reasons that with these developments, along with an increase in inter-dialect marriage, the Chinese-Singaporean identification with dialect or clan groups has eroded. The contemporary Chinese family institution no longer includes clan or dialect group members and its focus has reverted to the nuclear unit.

The Contemporary Overseas Chinese Family in Singapore

The Nuclear Family

Latest statistical reports (e.g. Housing & Development Board 2003; Singapore Department of Statistics 2005, 2005; Statistics Singapore 2009) show that, in general, the nuclear Chinese family in Singapore has shrunk in response to the changing environment and public policy. The average nuclear family size is now 3.5, typically one male and one female parent and one or two children. This smaller unit appears to be the result of a number of trends including:

- *The postponement of marriage* – the median age at first marriage has risen from 23 in 1990 to 30 in 2008 (Statistics Singapore 2009), and the proportion of individuals between 35-44 years old who are unmarried has grown (Leow 2000).
- *Changing attitudes towards courtship and marriage, particularly among females* – surveys showed that more females than males find marriage undesirable (Chan 2002), and that most remained single because they have not found the ideal partner (Ministry of

Community Development Youth and Sports and National Family Council 2009). Overall marriage rates have dropped from 10 years ago, but females have a lower marriage rate than males (Statistics Singapore 2009).

- *Shifting priorities between work and marriage* – a survey shows that many remained single because they wanted to focus on their studies or career and achieving material goals (Social Development Unit 2000). Salaries and household incomes have increased, but working hours are also getting longer (Singapore Department of Statistics 2005).
- *Shifting priorities between work and childbearing* – married couples were surveyed and admitted that they currently have fewer children than they would like (Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports and National Family Council 2009). Those surveyed would have grown up in a household of 6.2 persons just 30 years ago. Today, the fertility rate is 1.28 children per resident female (Statistics Singapore 2009).
- *The elevated status of women* – there are more females with post-secondary qualifications than ever before, specifically tertiary enrollments have increased by 69% in the last 10 years (Singapore Department of Statistics 2009). The female labor force participation has increased from the year 2000 to 2005 and at a higher rate than male participation (Singapore Department of Statistics 2005). Yet, female graduates are the largest segment of singles (Leow 2000). Palen (1986, 8) reports stereotypes that portray female graduates as "more headstrong, self-seeking, and less family oriented than their less-educated counterparts," as well as, being "too fussy regarding potential spouses."

The Extended Family

Since clan associations and family businesses are less prevalent in the lives of most Singaporeans today, the extended family appears to be restricted to the nuclear family, parents, siblings, and parents-in-law (Wong and Kuo 1979). By that measure, the extended Chinese family is evidently smaller because of lower fertility rates. The number of large households with six or more members has declined from 21% of all households in 1990 to 11% in 2005 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2005).

The Nuclear Family Institution

The government feared that the modernization of Singapore brought significant detrimental changes to the nuclear family institution. Thus, in an effort to promote marriage and childbearing, it used the media to educate Singaporeans about the joy of married and family life. In reality, marriage and child-bearing are still largely the norm, and Singaporeans are likely to feel some anxiety or stress if they do not marry and have children (Pereira 2006). However, some aspects of the traditional Chinese nuclear family institution have evolved. Today, arranged marriages are almost obsolete and individuals are now free to find their own partner. Nonetheless, children still show deference toward their parents by seeking their input to legitimize their choice of partners. This process can be problematic with dogmatic parents in a society where the number of inter-ethnic marriages is on the rise (Leow 2000).

Women are no longer objectified as they were before in the traditional Chinese family. Wives and mothers now enjoy higher status in the household. Gender roles are less defined with the increase in education and labor participation among females. This liberation implies that

power, which was traditionally conferred only through childbearing, now comes from a woman's performance of other roles. In addition, since it is common for married sons to move out of their parents' home, their wives are no longer in servitude to his family in the way she would have been in the traditional model. To a much lesser extent today, the wife does not have to contend with her mother-in-law and other wives or concubines. Despite polygamy being recognized legally in Singapore, it is less socially acceptable and practiced. A woman is now able to maintain continuing strong links with her own family.

Alternative nuclear family arrangements are also becoming more acceptable among Chinese-Singaporeans. Overall, attitudes are still strongly against homosexual couples, cohabitation, children born out of wedlock, and divorces. However, Singaporeans under the age of thirty are markedly more accepting of cohabitation and divorce than older Singaporeans (Chan 2002). Indeed, divorce rates are higher than they were ten years ago (Leow 2000). While it is true that marriage is still the norm, the institution of marriage can change in response to public policy. For example, a pro-family public housing policy has prompted Singapore couples to register for marriage in order to qualify for public housing, only to have the wedding ceremony much later.

Alternative living arrangements for the nuclear family are also becoming more common. An interesting development is the case of 'astronaut parents' and 'parachute children' (Pe-Pua et al. 1996). This is a strategy where a Singaporean Chinese family seeks residency in another country suitable for retirement (e.g. Australia). This is a form of reverse-sojourn where the sojourner stays but the rest of the family moves: the wife and children are 'parachuted' into the host country while the husband remains in the home country to resume working. Periodically, the 'astronaut' husband shuttles back and forth between home country and host country to fulfill the minimum residency requirements. Meanwhile, his family spends most of their time in the host country and makes periodic visits back to the home country. In this arrangement, the wife takes on her husband's traditional household roles and responsibilities and the children spend very little time with their father.

The Extended Family Institution

For the fear that Westernization would erode traditional Confucian values, the government uses the media to promote greater kinship and interaction among extended family members. Most imagery in these public messages depicts a three-generation family. In reality, kinship and frequent interaction with extended family members are still largely the norm. Recent survey results indicate that the extended Chinese family in Singapore remains close-knit, specifically the relationship between adult children and their parents (Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports and National Family Council 2009; Pereira 2006; Housing & Development Board 2003). Ninety percent of senior citizens received visits at least once a month from their married children, and 22% received daily visits. The most common reason for this is for childcare support and to have meals together (Housing & Development Board 2003). Two-thirds of senior citizens receive regular cash contributions from their children, perhaps as nominal payments from unmarried children living with them, or from married children to offset the cost of babysitting and preparing meals (Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports 2005).

Kinship with parents-in-law is also strong. Research indicates that a husband generally has more contact with his wife's parents than his own (Wong and Kuo 1979). Ironically, this is a departure from the traditional Chinese family practice which circumscribes a daughter's contact with her family after she is married into her husband's family. Close geographic proximity makes it easier to maintain regular contact. In fact, the government provides financial grants to married couples who apply for public housing in the vicinity of their parents' residence. Kinship between siblings and siblings-in-law is less strong. Wong and Kuo (1979) found that the relationships between siblings-in-law are generally considered obligatory, while sibling solidarity among middle-class Singaporeans is somewhat weak.

Differences in Policy Pressure and Response

Singapore's housing, education, and population planning policies were instituted in the interest of building a national identity. Unfortunately, it has produced differential effects for the three major ethnic groups.

Chinese and Other Racial Cohorts in Singapore

Figures in Table 1 below show that the Chinese are the largest ethnic group in Singapore, while the Malays make up only 14% of Singapore's population (unlike in Malaysia where the Malays are the majority). Indeed, the precarious position of the minority Chinese in Malaysia prompted Singapore's secession from the Federation in 1965. The Singaporean government has since been careful about consolidating the interests of the majority Chinese without marginalizing the Malay and Indian minorities. This was particularly relevant after the 1969 riots between the Malays and Chinese in Malaysia spilled over onto its shores. At that time, the government would have been concerned about the implosion of social order because the Malays had a higher fertility rate than the Chinese resulting in a 7% decrease in the Chinese population and a 4% increase in the Malay population with each generation (Heng and Devan 1995). The anti-natalist policies introduced in 1966 were intended to reduce overall population growth, albeit, in a discriminatory manner.

Table 1. Comparison of Ethnic Groups in Singapore and Malaysia

Country	Singapore		Malaysia		
Ethnic	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Chinese	Malay
[1]Percentage of population	76.8%	13.9%	7.9%	23.7%	50.4%
[2]Household income	$5,219	$3,148	$4,556	$3,456	$1,984
[3]Household size	3.6	4.2	3.7	n.a.	n.a.
[4]1960s TFR	4.3	6.3	6.7	5.2	5.4
[5]1987 TFR	1.5	2.2	1.9	2.2	4.5

[1]Ethnic segment data are for 2008 and sourced from the CIA World Factbook.
[2]Household monthly income in local currency; Singapore data are for 2000 and compiled by Lee (2004); Malaysia data are for 1999 and compiled by Chakravarty and Roslan (2005).
[3]Household size data for Singapore are for 2000 and are sourced from the Singapore Census of Population 2000.
[4]Singapore Total Fertility Rate data are for 1965 and compiled by Cheung (1989); Malaysia Total Fertility Rate data are for 1967 and compiled by Tey (2002).
[5]Total Fertility Rate data for 1987 are compiled by Saw (1990).
n.a. – not available

As a group, the Malays in Singapore have historically occupied a lower socioeconomic stratum. Their monthly household income is the lowest of the three ethnic groups (see Table 1), and their representation in tertiary education and professional occupations are less than that of the Chinese and Indians. Thus, the use of financial rewards and sanctions to influence family planning would necessarily mean these policies weighed more heavily on the Malays than on the Chinese or Indians. For example, the $10,000 cash grant for sterilization after the second child was offered only to non-graduate, working-class mothers, a segment that is over-represented by Malays. Increased delivery fees for the third child onwards were applied only to public hospitals, which were more likely to be utilized by Malays than Chinese. Having the largest average household size of all three ethnic groups, the Malays were again penalized when smaller families were given higher priority in public housing allocation. These incentives/disincentives had, in part, contributed to a significant reduction of the Malay fertility rate (from 6.3 in 1965 to 2.2 in 1987), though a high proportion of Malays have always felt that two children were too few for the ideal family size (Wong 1979). This decline in fertility comes with some reluctance because, unlike their counterparts in Malaysia, the Singaporean Malays' concerns about longer-term prospects for social mobility have likely entered into the calculus of child-bearing (Jones 1990). It should also be noted that, compared to the Malays, family policy pressure was less severe for the Indians primarily because a much larger proportion are tertiary-educated and had access to higher-paid occupations.

The inequity of Singapore's family policy sent implicit signals about the government's position on social order. Paul (1993) argues, however, that such a policy has exalted the status of the Chinese and further intensified ethnic segregation. In neighboring Malaysia, the government had also adopted discriminatory policies, but at the expense of the Chinese instead.

Overseas Chinese Families in Malaysia

The Malaysian Overseas Chinese migrant is part of the same *huaqiao* cohort described earlier in the paper. Thus, the evolution of the family and family institution, leading up to Singapore's independence in 1965, is similar to that of Overseas Chinese in Singapore. Their political situation, however, is quite different. The Malaysian government explicitly protects the interest of the majority Malays at the expense of the Chinese who have historically wielded more economic power. Figures in Table 1 show that in 1967, the Chinese and Malays had similar fertility rates. This alarmed the predominantly-Malay government since the Malays were under-represented in urban centers and industry. By 1987, the Chinese fertility rate was only half of the Malay rate and had fallen just below the replacement level.

The rapid decline in Chinese fertility emerged for two reasons. Firstly, the Chinese prospered proportionately more from Malaysia's economic growth in the 1960s and early 1970s. This was due to the fact that they were more likely than the Malays to live in urban areas, have higher levels of education, have professional careers, and marry later. Thus, the declining fertility trend among Chinese in Hong Kong and Singapore, arising from economic growth and urbanization, foreshadowed the fertility trend among the Chinese in Malaysia (Jones and Leete 2002). Secondly, but more importantly, the predominantly-Malay government instituted discriminatory economic policies that accelerated the decline of Chinese fertility and create differential demographic effects on the three major ethnic groups.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) implemented in 1971 sought to eliminate income inequality along ethnic lines through an affirmative action program that provided Malays with greater access to education, employment, entrepreneurship, and ownership of assets. The NEP concomitantly reduced the Chinese and Indian communities' opportunities for local education and employment and effectively increased the cost of educating children. In the absence of the NEP, Govindasamy and DaVanzo (1992) reported that in 1976, Malay women desired fewer children (5.1) than Chinese women (5.4). However, after exposure to the NEP, the mean desired fertility reported in 1988 was higher for the Malays (4.8) than the Chinese (3.75). In 1987, the fertility rate for the Malaysian Chinese (2.2) was still higher than that of their Singaporean counterparts (1.5), but the rates of decline from the 1960s were comparable (see Table 1). From the outset of the 1990s, it was reasonable to presume that the fertility trend of the more successful Singaporean Chinese would be the bellwether for the Malaysian Chinese. After all, both countries had prospects of explosive economic growth and Chinese families were better poised to enjoy the trappings of modern-day urban life.

This was *not* to be. Despite the persistent efforts of its pro-natalist policymakers, throughout the 1990s Malaysian Chinese fertility increased steadily above replacement levels while Chinese fertility in Singapore dropped even further below replacement levels (Jones and Leete 2002). Although both cohorts share a similar value system concerning family issues, the critical difference is their adaptation to policy pressure. Unlike the Chinese in Singapore, those in Malaysia recognize the link between population size and political power. They sense the urgency from being increasingly 'crowded out' by the Malay population which is growing in numbers and privilege. Indeed the Malaysian government's public assault on the livelihood of Chinese families may compel them to politicize family issues and recognize that private and personal decisions about the family may have wider implications for their ethnic group. Leete (1996) explains that 'political embattlement' is a process by which certain ethnic groups would increase their fertility to prevent their political voice from diminishing. By that logic, the experiences of the Malay minority in Singapore and the Chinese minority in Malaysia suggest that there is a complex interplay between political power and population planning in both countries.

Chinese Families in China

The Mainland Chinese and Overseas Chinese in Singapore share the same Confucian family traditions. Nonetheless, differences in population planning and social policies have carved two diverging paths for the contemporary family institution. Quah (2005) reports that the 1995-2000 fertility levels for Singapore and China are similar (1.7 and 1.8 respectively) although it should be noted that Singapore's rapid economic growth and concomitant fertility decline precedes China's by 15 years. Both countries have experienced the demographic transition that accompanies economic development, however, differences in population planning policies suggest that China's policy pressure has been far more effective in producing the desired effect. Since 1979, the government in China has enforced the One-Child-Policy (OCP) by imposing financial sanctions for every subsequent child after the first. Whilst Fowler, Gao, and Carlson (2010) discuss how such a policy may have created unintended effects for the family institution in China today, the fact is that the fertility level is now satisfactory (Quah 2005). In contrast, although the government in Singapore had initially instituted an anti-natalist policy, the current pro-natalist policy has been in force for 23 years. It has yet to be successful in raising the fertility

rate above replacement level. Given this trend, it is foreseeable that the Overseas Chinese family in Singapore will become a one-child family akin to that in China today.

Therefore, several implications of a one-child family which Fowler, Gao, and Carlson (2010) raise would also be pertinent to Overseas Chinese families in Singapore in the future. Indeed, some adjustments are already taking place in Singapore. These include cultural norms towards a smaller family unit, the burden of elderly care now being shouldered between fewer children (not unlike the 4-2-1 family problem), and the shift in parent-child power dynamics as family resources are dedicated to one or two offspring instead of many (not unlike China's 'little emperors). Yet there are other implications that do not apply simply because the target fertility in China is one child and in Singapore, it has been two or more (even the anti-natalist policy promoted "Stop at Two"). The liberty to have two or more children enabled Singapore to achieve better gender balance and it doesn't have China's issues associated with excess men (Zhu, Lu, and Hesketh 2009). Since sibship size is greater in Singapore, the average extended family would also include more siblings and cousins (and in turn, aunties and uncles for the next generation) than that of an OCP child in China.

The difference in family dynamics between Chinese in Singapore and the mainland cannot be solely attributable to population planning policies, such as Fowler's, Gao's, and Carlson's (this issue) argument that the Cultural Revolution has served to subvert family traditions and authority structure. The *huaqiao* Overseas Chinese in Singapore were spared of the Cultural Revolution and as Chen (2001) conjectured, they may be more traditional than their mainland counterparts. There is some evidence for this. Fowler, Gao, and Carlson reviewed studies which surmise a growing distance between the elderly in China and their children and that children in China are increasingly less filial. In contrast, the elderly in Singapore still remain very close to their children. Admittedly, Singaporean government policy has played no small part. It is cognizant of maintaining traditional family values and has used financial incentives and housing policies cleverly to those ends.

Conclusion

A common thread in this paper is the Confucian ethic that underlies a traditional Chinese family, the Overseas Chinese family institution, government and its family planning policy in Singapore. This ideology holds that the welfare of a society comes from the ability to maintain civil order and achieving this warrants a patriarchal authority structure. It is debatable if this approach brought about the desired outcomes for Singapore. Instead, unintended effects were created and altered the concept of the family. This discourse on the Overseas Chinese family covers several areas of interest to macromarketing scholars: *welfare, public policy, and unintended effects*. Commuri and Gentry (2000) prescribe the concept of family as a pertinent construct in macromarketing (e.g. the role of family in human welfare) and a rich area for future research in marketing.

Naturally, a few research implications emerge for the macromarketing scholar. Firstly, if public policy instruments continue to reduce the calculus of marriage and childbearing decisions to a practical consideration of extrinsic benefits and costs, then it would be worthwhile identifying specific marketing or consumer theories that would be relevant to decisions on

fertility and family structure. Secondly, the Singaporean government's use of promotional campaigns for their family policies should prompt an investigation into the role of political advertising in modifying cultural norms. Thirdly, the differential effect evident in the family policies of Singapore and Malaysia would warrant research on minority groups as vulnerable consumers of public policy. Finally, marketing implications of the demographic transition are of critical importance but remain unexplored.

Changes in the family institution may be a reflection of the contemporary generation's search for its identity and culture. Singapore is a modern society where cultural values from East and West converge and often clash. An increasing number of Chinese-Singaporeans are selectively abandoning their traditional beliefs as they become better educated (in the West), more proficient in English than in Chinese, and more cosmopolitan in their outlook (Chiew 1995). As the generation of China-born migrants passes away, family ties with the home village will be lost (e.g. Lim 2002) and less of the Overseas Chinese identity will be bound to China (Choong 1995). The increasing rate of conversions to Christianity means that certain traditional Chinese customs, such as ancestor worship, will be abandoned due to the emphasis on the centrality of the family in life as opposed to God (Nagata 1995). Perhaps some traditional customs rooted in the agrarian society of rural China, such as Chinese New Year celebrations to usher in the crop harvest, might one day be abandoned because they are no longer relevant in the urban environment.

These questions surrounding the abandonment or loss of traditional Chinese culture become more pressing as an increasing number of Overseas Chinese re-migrate to Western countries where they will then be a cultural minority. What then becomes of the Overseas Chinese family institution in the case of re-migration? It is likely that the conflict between Eastern and Western values will deepen and the struggle for self-identity among Overseas Chinese will be more difficult. Wang (1991) asserts that there are cultural norms, such as the preservation of family ties, which the Chinese consider binding on them as Chinese. If the traditional Chinese family institution is altered until it is no longer recognizable or distinguishable, one must wonder whether the Overseas Chinese will still be Chinese.

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