

EXPLORING 'UNSEEN' SOCIAL CAPITAL IN COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Everyday Lives of Poor
Mainland Chinese Migrants
in Hong Kong

Sam Wong

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

Exploring 'Unseen' Social Capital in Community Participation



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Having lived in England for the past seven years, I have now decided to settle down here. Separated from my parents by 8,000 miles, I am haunted by the feeling that, one day, I will receive an unexpected phone call, telling me that my parents are seriously ill, have had an accident or have passed away. I, therefore, dedicate my first-ever book to my parents – you will see them in my family photos in the preface! – and to all fellow sojourners who share my fate.

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Preface

This study stems from my personal desire to comprehend the migration experiences of my parents and their peers.

My parents, now in their 70s, both migrated from mainland China to Hong Kong. In the 1960s, they left their own hometowns and fled to Hong Kong, then still a British colony, for different reasons. My mother was involved in the Cultural Revolution in 1965 and she had to escape to avoid political persecution, leaving behind her husband and children. My father's motive was simpler – he wanted to have a better life. Hong Kong has become their home, and my four brothers and sisters and myself were all born in Hong Kong.

Photo 1.1 *My family photo: In my mother's arms – aged 10 months*



My childhood was illuminated by my parents' fascinating and adventurous stories about their migration experiences – they were exploited by 'snake-heads', chased by the police, starved for a whole week, and betrayed by their relations in Hong Kong.

Thanks to the emergence of Hong Kong's economy in the 1970s, our standard of living was improved by relocating from squatter camps to public housing estates. The Open Door Policy in China in 1978 allowed us to enter the mainland to visit our step-siblings in the city of Guangzhou in the southern part of China. Our relatives in China treated us like VIPs because we had brought a TV, cooking oil (there was rationing at that time) and other 'luxury' goods as gifts.

The early 1980s marked the watershed of immigration policy in Hong Kong. To stop massive illegal immigration, the Chinese and British authorities agreed to tighten border controls. Only legal immigrants were allowed to settle in Hong Kong in order to re-unite families. Since then, the majority composition mainland Chinese migrants has changed from men to middle-aged women with their young children.

My interest in Chinese migrants grew stronger, in particular, after I had talked to my parents and I heard their critical comments about new migrants. I was really curious: they, the past generation of migrants, now discriminate against their more recent counterparts of the current generation. These anti-migrant feelings are not just confined to my parents. When I worked as a journalist, I heard similar comments about the new arrivals. In the media, migrants are either portrayed as victims or devious social-benefit crooks. Their own voice is not truly represented.

I realised that social capital could offer a starting point for me in understanding how migrants maintain their ties across borders while building new lives in the host society. I started this research project in 2000 with the intention of combining the subjective experiences of migrants with a theoretical analysis.

1 Building a 'Pro-Poor' Social Capital Framework

1.1 What this book is about

Social capital, in the form of social networks and trust, is generally known as resources generated from social interactions. How we understand the nature of social relationships in people's everyday lives is, then, crucial for us in analysing the process of how social capital is formed, evolved, remade, and dissolved.

The mainstream social capital approach, led by Robert Putnam and Michael Woolcock, regards social capital as the 'missing link' in poverty alleviation and as the 'essential glue' in binding people together. Dense social networks and high levels of trust among community members are claimed to have spill-over effects which facilitate social co-operation (Woolcock 2000; Putnam 2000). Against this background, there has been a strong call for investing in social capital and getting social relations right to the top of the social policy agenda, in both developing and developed countries.

This understanding of social capital is underpinned by neo-institutional thinking. It considers social capital building as a social re-engineering exercise, aiming at (re-) building contractual, co-operative relationships by incentive restructuring, institutional crafting and authority redefining. This development perspective, wittingly and unwittingly, fits into the 'pro-growth' agenda (Fine 2001).

The effectiveness of this approach to social capital building, this book will argue, is constrained by its two implicit assumptions: firstly, social capital is necessarily good for poor people, and secondly, poor people are willing and able to use social capital in exchange for other forms of resources. These assumptions reflect an inadequate understanding of the nature of social relationships in people's associational lives (Cleaver 2005a).

Increasingly, research is warning us that social capital is not equally available to all, and the outcomes of the processes are not always beneficial to poor people (Edwards et al. 2006). Studies show that poor people are often constrained by inequitable institutional arrangements, intermittent support from social organisations, and a lack of financial and human capital and unfavourable physical environment (Cleaver

and Frank 2006). Worse still, the processes can undermine poor people's already limited social capital. Helping the poor to secure social capital can, unwittingly, lead to reinforcing power inequalities. (Wong 2007).

The central theme of this book is, therefore, to develop a 'pro-poor' social capital perspective. The poverty specificity aims to maximise the benefits and minimise the costs of collective action to poor people. In order to capture the dynamics of social capital, a robust framework is needed in order to uncover the messiness of social lives. This book will propose an 'agency-institution-structure' framework. Inspired by Mary Douglas (1987), Mark Granovetter (1992) and Frances Cleaver (2002), this framework aims to offer a deeper understanding of human intentionality, institutional complexity and structural constraints in shaping access to, and distribution of, social capital in communities. *Agency* explores people's subjectivities and the meaning of, and motivations for, social co-operation. *Structures* highlight the enabling and the constraining factors that influence people's participation in their communities. *Institutions*, defined as formal organisations and social norms and values, are the mediating factors that are embedded in our everyday practices and are shaping the interactions between agency and structures. This 'agency-institution-structure' framework acknowledges the way in which social capital building is *structured* as well as the degree to which individuals can *structure*.

This book coins the concept of 'unseen' social capital in the analysis. The concept is used to capture the dynamic processes and outcomes of the 'agency-institution-structure' interactions. 'Seen' social capital, as mainstream social capital research often refers, is organisation-based, purposively crafted and demonstrated in public manifestations. It represents an 'ideal' form of co-operation, characterised as functional and visible. 'Unseen' social capital, in contrast, discards the instrumental approach which views social relations as 'raw materials' to be manipulated. Instead, it highlights the nature of everyday co-operation between individuals. 'Unseen' social capital is embedded in inter-personal relationships and shaped by norms and practices. It can be informal and subtle, and is formed, evolved and destroyed, subject to livelihood priorities and circumstantial changes. Its formation is influenced by both conscious and less-conscious motivations. Reciprocal activities can be spontaneous and less-organised. This book will explain how the interplay between 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital matters to the improvement and transformation of poor people's livelihoods.

Drawing on twelve-months of ethnographic research on poor mainland Chinese migrants in Hong Kong in 2001-2002, this book will illustrate, with examples, how this framework offers a useful tool for social capital interventions which result in better outcomes for the poor.

This chapter will first discuss the mainstream social capital theories, highlighting the features and limitations of the neo-institutional thinking. It then suggests an alternative approach to understanding social capital and further elaborates the ‘pro-poor’ perspective, the ‘agency-institution-structure’ framework and the notion of ‘unseen’ social capital. This chapter will also briefly discuss the research methodology and the context of mainland migrants in Hong Kong.

1.2 Theorising social capital

It has become fashionable to talk about ‘capital’ in the social sciences. Different interesting terms have been invented in the academic world, such as moral capital (e.g., Kane 2001) and oppositional capital (e.g., Wieloch 2001). Yet, as far as the scale of popularity is concerned, nothing can compare to social capital. The term ‘social capital’ is generally regarded as the assets of the poor and their communities which they can ‘draw upon to help negotiate their way through an unpredictable and unforgiving world’ (Woolcock 2001:15). In macro-economic theory, it is argued that social capital generates increasing returns – and therefore growth – because it is a public good that, once created, can be reused without cost (Knack and Keefer 1997; Grootaert 1998).

Mainstream ideas about social capital are largely based on the economic approach of institutions. Relations of trust and co-operation are regarded as mediating institutions to enable, as well as constrain, human behaviour. By restructuring individual incentives, redefining social relations with rules and roles, and reorganising the local structure of authority, additional channels are supposed to be created to give the poor access to resources (Ostrom and Ahn 2003; Uphoff 2000).

Thanks to the strong advocacy of neo-institutional scholars and the endorsement of international and bilateral development institutions, such as the World Bank (2002), EU (Adam 2007), IFAD (2001), UNDP (2001), OECD (2001) and DFID (2001), social capital has become a truly world-wide concept in both the developing and developed world and in development ideology, as well as practice. Edwards (2004) argues that the rediscovery of institutions and social relations seems to suggest that we are facing a ‘social capital-deficit’ crisis in society, and that we have found, in social capital, a panacea to world-wide and local poverty as well as other social problems.

There is increasing ‘evidence’ to support the positive impact of social capital on socio-economic development. Social capital is considered the ‘missing link’ in development and the ‘essential glue’ for society (Uphoff 2000:9). Halpern (1999:4) regards social capital as the ‘new golden goose’ – a metaphor to suggest that social capital is more important

to economic growth than human capital. Knack and Keefer (1997) show that one standard deviation increase in a measure of country-level trust increases economic growth by more than one-half of a standard deviation (quoted in Glaeser 2001:34). Narayan's research in Tanzania (1997) finds that a one per cent increase in village-level social capital results in a 30 per cent rise in household incomes. Higher social capital also implies more prosperous and healthier societies with lower crime rates (Helliwell 2001:7).

1.2.1 *Collective action theories*

There is a tendency to go back to the writings of three social capital protagonists, James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Putnam, to seek clues about the 'methods' or 'guidelines' in building social capital (Cunningham 2002; Cohen and Prusak, 2001; Leana and Van Buren, 1999). The search, however, is not at all satisfactory. Coleman's research on education (1990) highlights the functional nature of social capital. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital (1986) focuses on mechanisms of how the ruling class reinforces its authority by mobilising social capital and other forms of capital, and thus reproduces inequalities. Putnam's emphasis on civic engagement and associational life (1993, 2000) may offer a better clue, but his analysis is largely at the community level. How individual and organisational social capital is formed, sustained and then evolves at the group level remains unclear.

Another approach is to examine social network theory. Ronald Burt (1998) and Nan Lin (2001), two prominent social network theorists, suggest that network characteristics, relations and locations are the key element in determining the access to, and use of, social capital. This perspective represents the 'minimalist view of social capital' (Ostrom and Ahn 2003:xxvii) which focuses on network features and plays down other forms of social capital, such as trust and institutions. Biggart and Beamish (2003) challenge this approach for structural determination without paying enough attention to 'the realm of meaning, interpretation and individual agency' (p. 450).

A possible way to look at social capital is by considering it in the collective action framework. As Ostrom and Ahn (2003) put forward,

'Theories of collective action play a key role in the current formulation of the concept of social capital ... The economic and political performances of societies, from villages to international communities, depend critically on how the members of a community solve the problem of collective action' (xiii).

The relevance of collective action in social capital theorising lies in the concerns of co-ordination and reciprocity, and the understanding of the processes determining the interaction of people with their resources.

Mainstream institutional thinkers, including those at the World Bank, regard social capital as mechanisms of trust and relations of co-operation that have a positive impact on the capacity for collective action. In the view of Woolcock and Narayan (2001), social capital increases the ability of individuals to engage in collective action. Their primary concern is the incentive structures for the provision of public goods as they consider free-riding as a challenge for incentives. Therefore, the collective action framework is to examine how to get the incentives and institutions right (Kaul et al. 2003).

The debate concerning collective action is divided into two camps, or as Ostrom and Ahn (2003) put it: the first- and second-generation collective action models. Mancur Olson (1965) and Garrett Hardin (1968) represent the first camp. They offer a pessimistic view of collective action on the grounds that selfish individuals are tempted to get a free ride. They argue that strong state regulation or very well-defined private property is the solution to collective action dilemmas. In their analysis, they give little recognition to the possibility of group co-operation.

The alternative school of thought is represented by Elinor Ostrom and Norman Uphoff. They are more optimistic about the prospects for collective action. They highlight the role of institutions in facilitating and constraining individual behaviour. Although their research is largely preoccupied with natural resource management in the rural context, their attention has recently shifted to the discussion of public goods in the urban context (e.g., Ostrom and Sawyer 2003). Despite the divergence, these two models share some basic assumptions: firstly, they both agree that the nature of public goods causes 'free-riding' because it is not easy to exclude users. Secondly, individuals are assumed to be selfish by nature and they tend to maximise their own benefits.

1.2.2 *First-generation collective action model*

The core proposition of *The Logic of Collective Action* by Mancur Olson (1965) is that there is a general lack of motivation to pursue public goods because the temptation to free-ride is so strong that no co-ordination is possible. Garrett Hardin's *Tragedy of the Common* (1968) is concerned with environmental issues, and comes to a similar conclusion that individually rational strategies can 'lead to collectively irrational outcomes' (Mansuri and Rao 2003:20). Their pessimistic views suggest that the prospects for voluntary and sustained collective action

are slim because individuals are unlikely to co-operate unless it is in their direct interests to do so.

The 'free-rider problem' in collective action has led prominent rational choice theorists to question the relevance of collective interests in motivating participation in community affairs. Douglas suggests that 'Olson's case stands far more strongly on the problem of trust created by the possibility of free-riding' (1987:23). Olson and Hardin propose, that the solutions for free-riding problems, are as follows: firstly, size matters; smaller groups have a better chance of gaining co-operation. Secondly, socio-economic homogeneity has a more positive impact on the effectiveness of collective action. Thirdly, selective incentives, such as rewards and punishment, govern human behaviour. Fourthly, coercion can make individuals act in their own common interests.

The rationality of this model is largely based on the premises of rational choice theory. It assumes that rational agents seeking to maximise their own interests tend not to co-operate, and their incentives for collective action are primarily a response to financial or economic consideration. The role of institutions in this model is ambivalent. One group of scholars argues that Olson's model of collective action is constructed without reference to institutional arrangement. It leads Vandenberg (2002) to conclude that it has avoided or denied the importance of institutions. However, the other group believes that it has taken institutions into account, but that institutions take a highly regulatory form as well and are primarily perceived as constraints which are intended to remove the gains from malfeasance (Ingram and Clay 2000:528). Coercion and sanction are aimed to restructure institutional incentives.

This model has a considerable, far-reaching impact on development thinking and policies. It creates a strong impetus for state provision of public goods. However, simultaneously, it also places emphasis on the development of private property rights. In the 1980s, following the declining role of the state in development economics, most developing countries experienced a massive wave of privatisation and liberalisation reforms. Despite its influence, the first-generation collective action model has been severely criticised for its narrow rationality and oversimplification of individual motivation. Crossley (2002:69) argues that it falls into the trap of methodological individualism which is 'reducible to an instrumental disposition for liking means to ends and weighing up costs and benefits'. Ostrom and Ahn (2003) suggest that the assumption that individuals are atomised, selfish, and fully rational is mistaken. They point out that 'many collective-action problems are *embedded* in pre-existing networks, organisations, or other ongoing relationships among individuals' (p. xv, my emphasis). This explains why

they modify the rationality of individual actions in the second generation of the collective action model.

Olson's model is also challenged for playing down the heterogeneity of individuals over social positions and resources. It also neglects the role of leadership, individuals' psycho-social differences, and the impact of multiple identities. Using Mary Douglas's comment as a conclusion, this approach 'extends scepticism about the possibility of collective action to scepticism about the possibility of shared knowledge and shared beliefs' (1987:30). This leads us to the discussion of a more optimistic perspective.

1.2.3 *Second-generation collective action model*

This camp, led by Elinor Ostrom, Norman Uphoff and Arun Agrawal, revisits Olson's thesis and re-examines patterns of interactions between individuals and groups. It challenges his pessimistic prediction, suggesting that collective action can occur and be sustained in the right circumstances and 'right' institutional arrangements. They highlight the role of social capital in their model, arguing that spontaneous co-operation is made possible by the presence of social capital since trust, norms and networks generate expectations, facilitate co-ordinated actions and punish non-compliance (Ostrom and Ahn 2003). Contrary to Olson's proposition, absence of material incentives and coercion are not necessarily an obstacle to co-operation. Uphoff (2000) proposes that:

co-operation is motivated by norms, values, beliefs and attitudes that create reinforcing expectations, rather than having to gain co-operation through material incentives or coercive actions (p. 10).

The second-generation collective action theorists make three contrasting points from the predecessor school: firstly, they argue that the success in overcoming dilemmas of collective action depends on a broader social context. They take social norms seriously, emphasising that: 'norms were as important as formal rules in explaining how individuals cope with a diversity of collective-action problems' (Ostrom and Ahn 2003:xxvi). In other words, they modify the modelling of incentive by combining 'rational choice clarity with more socially informed complexity' (Cleaver 1996).

Secondly, neo-institutionalists also question the neo-classical institutional economists' assumption that efficient institutions arise *naturally* to respond to any transaction cost or information asymmetry (Fafchamps 2004, my emphasis). They argue that, because of imper-

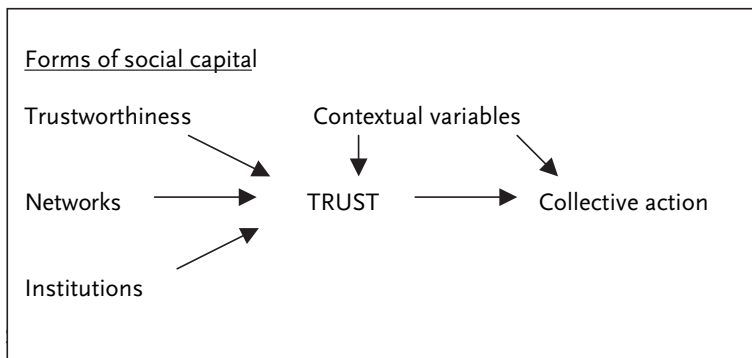
fect information and high transaction costs, individuals are unable to entirely predict future outcomes and that their rationality is 'bounded' by the availability of information and the ability to precede it (Ingram and Clay 2000). Therefore, agents are more likely to adopt satisfying, rather than profit maximisation, strategies. The 'bounded rationality' becomes the key modelling of incentive in the theory, and actors pursue their interests by making choices within constraints. Thirdly, they also reject Olson's proposition that socio-economic heterogeneity necessarily impedes co-ordination. From their viewpoint, it depends on how heterogeneity is 'managed', that is how effectively differences are debated and discussed and solutions arrived at (Mansuri and Rao 2003). This explains why they are in favour of broad public participation, open forums, democratisation, and increased transparency.

1.2.4 Ostrom's collective action model

This model (figure 1.1) is significant in two aspects: firstly, it is the cornerstone of Ostrom's 'Design Principles' that shape successful collective action. This will be further developed in a later section. Secondly, it is an attempt to clarify the confusing concept of social capital, in particular, the causal relationships between trust, networks and institutions. In this model, it suggests a clear linear relationship: trustworthiness, networks, and institutions are the three forms of social capital which generate trust. Trust is the key element in facilitating collective action. However, the question of whether collective action, in return, has any impact on trust and forms of social capital is not clear in the model.

Ostrom and Ahn emphasise the significance of trust in underpinning economic and social relations because trust plays a critical role in

Figure 1.1 *Social capital and the second-generation collective action model*



Source: Ostrom and Ahn 2003:xvii

facilitating transactions and enforcing contracts. More importantly, trust is a self-reinforcing mechanism because the success of a transaction will make future transactions possible. This means the cost of monitoring is low (Fafchamps 2004). Woolcock (2001) suggests that trust can be generated by repeated interactions, the factor of reputation, and a credible legal institution.

In the various forms of social capital, trustworthiness is the belief about the intrinsic motivation of others. But neo-institutionalists voice their pessimistic criticism regarding individual rationality: 'the evidence suggests that few individuals are truly unconditionally altruistic' (Ostrom and Ahn 2003:xx). Therefore, mechanisms must be developed to overcome the temptation of a free-ride.

Building dense networks for the poor, via high membership and civic engagement, helps to reduce transaction costs by transmitting information to members about who is trustworthy and who is not. Thus, social reputation generates pressure against free-riding. Weak ties are preferable to strong ties because 'overlapping weak ties are more important than intense personal ties in sustaining social stability and collective action' (Ostrom and Ahn 2003:xxii).

1.2.5 *Design Principles*

Ostrom's second-generation of collective action model suggests how to build the 'right' types of social capital. Drawing upon the literature of common-pool resource management in the developing world context, Ostrom argues that the success of building the 'right' types of social capital lies in getting the institutions and incentives right (Ostrom 2005). The reasons for institutional interventions, she claims, are that there is a perceived management deficit within existing organisations or communities, which are weak at capacity building and ineffectual in developing tight contractual relations. The solutions she proposes are famously known as 'Design Principles' which are intended to align individuals' private and collective interests by increasing the costs of free-riding (Platteau and Abraham 2002).

The 'Design Principles', shown in box 1.1, can be divided into three themes: participatory decision making, good governance, and authority building. Participatory governance is intended to give group or community members a say in strategic decisions, thus generating a stronger sense of ownership and a higher motivation of compliance. Social legitimacy also facilitates a consensus on complex issues. Institutional inclusion of the marginalised into formal groups provides democratic space for them to build mutual-help networks. Roles and rules are discussed through a process of negotiation amongst members (Dasgupta 1998).

Box 1.1 *Ostrom's Design Principles in building organisational social capital within groups*

- 1. Participatory decision making**
 - * joint decision making
 - * inclusion of marginal into groups and committees
 - * negotiating rules
 - * conflict resolution mechanism

- 2. Good governance**
 - * clear accountability
 - * high transparency
 - * clearly defined membership and boundaries
 - * regular meetings
 - * visible public manifestation of collective action

- 3. Authority building**
 - * clear roles and responsibilities
 - * majority ruling (preferably by voting)
 - * electing leaders
 - * rule-based management
 - * robust monitoring and enforcement mechanism
 - * sanction

Sources: Author's original table, based on ideas from Ostrom (1992), Ostrom and Ahn (2003), Uphoff (2000)

Focussing on transparency, representativeness, and accountability, together with a clearly defined membership and boundaries is intended to address management deficit problems. Regular meetings and highly visible collective action form strong bonding and advocate collective empowerment. A clearly defined structure of authority is expected to evoke trust. Crafting clear roles and rules is crucial to 'create a structure of organisation to produce decisions, mobilise resources, facilitate communication and resolve conflict' (Uphoff and Wijayaratra 2000:15), and makes the outcome of co-operation more predictable. Disputes can easily arise during the bargaining process, so building mechanisms for conflict resolution is crucial (Ellis 2002).

1.2.6 *Neo-institutional thinking*

These guiding principles are primarily built on neo-institutional thinking, and this economic analysis of institutions has become influential in current development debate, especially on poverty, resource manage-

ment, sustainable livelihoods, and other rural and urban development problems. Shifting from getting 'the prices right' to 'the institutions right', the neo-institutional school redefines the role of social relations, culture, norms and values in economic development. It addresses the former approach of putting the main emphasis on constructing physical capital and adopting a top-down approach. It also illustrates a more complex and multidimensional nature of collective action dilemmas and shows concerns about the complex model of incentives. It raises recognition of the process and context of the organisation of rural and urban life as a whole.

Among the three forms of social capital, Ostrom and Ahn (2003) argue that institutions are regarded as the most important element because they are the 'cause for the success and failure of collective action', but they are 'frequently not included in the popular definition of social capital' (p. xxx). The role of institutions is highlighted in shaping the motives and actions of the bounded, rational individuals, and the institutional arrangements are intended to govern and regulate resource use and individual actions. Yet, these institutional arrangements are not 'once-and-for-all' in nature, but are consistently needed for ongoing re-arrangement to ensure efficiency and sustainability. The ultimate aim of the arrangements is to form contractual relations between the community and individuals to secure a self-enforcing form of ownership and responsibility for their community resources (Mansuri and Rao 2003). Membership becomes important because it ensures qualification for use. Negotiating over rules amongst the stakeholders is also crucial in counteracting perverse incentives (Ostrom and Ahn 2003: xxiv). This approach shifts from the mere provision of facilities toward resource management. Having said that, resources may be held in common, even when they are still individually used (Cleverly 2005b).

The school of 'crafting institutions' constructs social capital in the framework of the public good. It believes that relational assets have an externality effect, and once they are created, they can be reused without further cost. For example, Hodgson (2003) argues that 'social capital has certain peculiar properties in that, once created, it can spill easily into the hands of others at zero marginal cost. The process of spill-over is the source of the increasing returns that generate economic growth' (p. 440). This approach also recognises the strength of traditional rules, regulations and authority, and acknowledges the influence of the socially and culturally embedded institutions. Social institutions are now perceived as solutions to problems of trust and malfeasance in economic life because they make free-riding too costly.

1.2.7 *Institutional evolutionism and transferability*

The economic approach of institutions attaches importance to the idea of an 'efficient evolution of institutions' (Vandenberg 2002:227). It is a belief that weak and inefficient forms of collective actions will be replaced by robust, efficient, and more sustainable one. This leads to the desirability of developing one ultimate form of institution, for example, Chu (2003) suggests that if a country wants to become a mature market economy, it must pass through two stages: from transactions without adequate third-party enforcement to widespread impersonal transactions with third-party enforcement.

The transferability of institutional arrangements across contexts and countries is controversial even amongst neo-institutional thinkers. Fukuyama (2001) argues that: 'social capital is frequently a by-product of religion, tradition, shared historical experience, and other factors that lie outside the control of any government' (p. 17). However, the general consensus is that institutions are transferable in the promotion of desirable outcomes. For example, in view of the institutional deficiency in Africa, Fafchamps (2004) suggests that: 'there is scope for improving Africa's institutions by borrowing ideas from other countries and cultures' (p. 459).

The call for intervention brings us to the debate of the role of state, market, and external agencies. The triumph of social capital and community is generally regarded as a result of market and state failure. Ostrom and Ahn (2003) consider social capital as 'a valid criticism to Hobbesian tradition in which the state is regarded as the inevitable and omnipotent solution to the collective action problem' (p. xxii). Community management is also regarded as a compensation for market failures which highlights the role of informal institutions in strengthening market mechanism. Recently, neo-institutional economists have called for a synergy of state and market to provide a more social capital-friendly environment. However, the role of NGOs in building social capital is rarely examined critically. NGOs are considered as playing catalytic roles in providing incentives, introducing roles and reinforcing sanctions that facilitate trust formation (Uphoff and Wijayaratra 2000). They also increase the voice and economic opportunities of poor people (World Bank 2000). Donors are encouraged to invest in institutions to complement the investment in physical infrastructure. Despite this optimism, Hulme (2000) urges NGOs and donors to be more reflective about their roles and consider whether their agenda would contaminate the process of delivery, and how the paradox of assisted self-help is addressed.

1.2.8 *Bottom-up, community-based participation*

The neo-institutional perspective runs parallel with the currently popular discourse of bottom-up, community-based participation. For example, in the World Bank social capital website, it suggests that: 'investing in social capital is directly and indirectly through participatory project design'. Broad and inclusive participation is intended to achieve co-ordinated action.

There are three main reasons why institutionalists celebrate participatory development: Firstly, public goods are assumed to be more effectively and equitably managed by 'the people', and structural obstacles are challenged by wide participation. This is echoed in the discourse of decentralisation which allows the poor access to local public goods more easily. Secondly, local self-government is considered to be more sustainable because community members involved in the processes of rule negotiation and interpretation can develop a workable and agreed-upon set of rules. Thirdly, certain categories of people, rather than individuals, are targeted for development interventions. Participating in local self-governing institutions helps them in 'evolving collective identity and building social capital, which over time can lead to empowerment' (IFAD 2001:219).

This approach marks the recognition of 'community' which is now highly regarded as supplementary to the state and market. A basic underlying unity in 'community' is assumed, but a diversity of interests is recognised and solved by negotiation. Moreover, indigenous knowledge is emphasised, and traditional and modern forms of organisations are held to be equally capable of facilitating collective action. The bottom-up approach also tends to use formal groups and organisations to overcome social exclusion and enhance the livelihoods of the poor. Creating more accessible institutions, the World Bank claims, helps the poor to 'articulate their interests to those in power more clearly, confidently and persuasively' (World Bank 2000b). Increasing the representation of the marginal on local management committees is specified since it generates 'consensus, trust and social learning' (Narayan 1999:39). It is also hoped that it will deepen a sense of shared community and shared ownership to develop local capacities, in order to lessen the dependent relationships upon the government and donors.

1.3 Criticisms

Despite their strong influence, the neo-institutionalists' conceptualisation of social capital has generated a lot of debates and has been severely challenged (Dillard et al. 2004; Edwards et al. 2006). Pro-social

capitalists are generally criticised for their lack of sufficient understanding of the complex and overlapping nature of poverty (Bradshaw 2005). Field (2003) points out that questions about access to, and use of, social capital and the impact of power relationships in our everyday interaction are not adequately addressed. Edwards et al. (2003) and Fine (2001) accuse mainstream social capitalists of side-stepping issues of socio-economic inequalities and over-simplifying the power relationships between individuals in communities. Molyneux (2002) and O'Neill and Gidengil (2006) both challenge their research for not paying sufficient attention to the unequal gendered distribution of social capital. Research by Beall (2001) indicates that poor people bear the alarmingly disproportionate costs of participation. An increasing number of studies also suggest that the notion of social capital tends to highlight the benefits of a mixed neighbourhood, without deeply analysing the downside (Musterd and Ostendorf 2006, Tunstall 2003). The critiques can be summarised in four aspects: ambiguous intentionality, over-simplification of institutions, inadequate social construction of authority, and methodological limitations.

1.3.1 *Ambiguous intentionality: shifting from interest- to norm-driven?*

Despite the recognition of social complexity and the emphasis on structural factors, what motivates individuals to co-operate or not remains ambiguous and problematic in social capital theory. Institutionalists highlight the power of institutions, suggesting that strict rules, sanctions, and a clear authority structure help prevent free-riding by increasing the cost of cheating. This gives an impression that, under the new institutional arrangements, individuals are transformed from opportunistic to rule-abiding people. In other words, agents who were formerly interest-driven suddenly become norm-driven. Critics argue that the suggested transformation remains speculative, and thus far, no research has shown evidence to substantiate it. The shift from one motivation to the other is still unclear, and the processes have thus far been inadequately examined. Concerns have also been raised about the over-deterministic nature of institutions which turn agents into mere role players (Scott 2003:198). This represents the over-socialised reduction of agency.

Another group of critics believes that the basic assumption of human motivation in the economic approach of institutions has not changed. Despite the acceptance of bounded rationality, it borrows heavily from rational choice theory, viewing social capital as the 'result of investment decisions taken by individuals' (Glaeser 2001:34). For example, individuals are expected to stop free-riding out of fear of punishment (Platteau and Abraham 2002). This fits into the assumption of

the economic rationality that people ‘do things’ for each other, and ‘expect and trust that these actions will be repaid so that, in due course, they will benefit from the “cost” of their helpful effort’ (Edwards 2004:12).

This economic rationality, however, oversimplifies the nature of human agency. It supposes that ‘human rationality is reducible to an instrumental disposition for linking means to ends and weighing up costs and benefits’ (Crossley 2002:69). This fails to take complex and diverse motivations into account. For example, Douglas (1987) points out that individuals may contribute to public goods altruistically even without obvious direct self-interests. Another criticism is that individuals are assumed to be more or less homogeneous and rarely socially located. Their motivations do not change over either the short- or long-term.

The role of consciousness hinges on the intentionality of agents. Ostrom and Ahn (2003) suggest that ‘there is really little question about the conscious choice made when one joins associations, forgoes an immediate payoff in order to follow a norm of reciprocity’ (p. xxxi). However, other studies have shown that the processes of decision making are influenced by socio-cultural factors, prior experience, daily routines and personal attributes. They are far more complex than institutionalists think. I will use the socially embedded nature of agency to elaborate this point in the later section.

1.3.2 *Over-simplification of institutions*

The neo-institutional school tends to idealise the role of formal institutions in solving collective action dilemmas. For example, in the World Development Report 2002, it suggests that: ‘widespread income growth and poverty reduction require formal institutions that can serve as bridges between separate groups’ (p. 172). In evaluating three pro-social capital programmes in Africa, Hulme (2000) discovered that NGOs are in favour of creating new local organisations. The normative bias towards formal institutions is explicit in Fafchamps’s comment: ‘formal organisations with clear rules and procedures *should* be better than informal organisations’ (2004:310, my emphasis). Critics warn that uncritically transplanting formal institutions can result in disastrous consequences, such as eroding existing stocks of social capital rather than building them up. The implementation of formal rules can also contradict the pre-existing informal ones which may generate unnecessary tensions (Ahsan 2003).

Despite the recognition of socially embedded institutions, neo-institutional scholars tend to adopt an instrumental approach. For example, Uphoff (2000) suggests that: ‘social organisation is less costly and

often more effective where co-operation is motivated by norms, values, beliefs and attributes that create reinforcing expectations' (p. 10). On other occasions, the incorporation of informal institutions is for increasing the legitimacy of the project (e.g., Chu 2003) and enhancing the success of formal institutions (World Bank 2002). This approach, however, does not consider the 'dark side' of socially embedded institutions. For example, they may perpetuate gender and ethnic exclusions, and reinforce unequal access and distribution of social capital. Studies show that the reliance on local elites may reproduce power inequalities as they may articulate their own interests in the name of the needs of the poor (Williams et al. 2003). The school of 'crafting institutions' is in favour of the idea that institutions can be deliberately designed and purposefully created. For example, the IFAD report (2001) suggests that 'it is possible to create trust where strong traditions of collective economic action did not previously exist' (p. 198). Some scholars, however, have already warned that social capital, in most cases, occurs naturally, and it is inherently difficult to predict how changes occur over time. Another concern is about the negative impact of the new institutional designs on the livelihoods of people (Clever 2004).

1.3.3 *Inadequate social construction of authority*

The exercise of clear authority is regarded as necessary in the bounded rational model in the absence of sufficient incentives to induce people to co-operate. Legitimised leaders are elected, formal judicial and arbitration bodies are set up, laws are laid down, and systems of graduated sanctions are enforced. Conveying authority is intended to enforce collective action by encouraging compliance, evoking trust and punishing free-riders. However, this approach has disregarded the complexity of authority in the emergence and development of institutions. Although references are made to the social norms which shape human behaviour, they are often inadequately informed socially and analysed in an unconvincing manner. How individuals, for example, respond to and adapt to the change of authority structure is insufficiently examined. The designs of the authority structure rarely consider local cultural practices, social traditions, personal networks, and the perceived 'right way of doing things' (Clever 2003).

Clear rules are set and then open to negotiation. Chu (2003) suggests that 'rule implementation should be politically neutral' (p. 23), and once rules are laid down, they should be implemented 'in a non-discretionary manner' (p. 20). Critics are concerned with the idealisation of the process of negotiations. The resource- and time-poor are put at a disadvantage, and outcomes may be distributed asymmetrically. The political nature of new rules and roles should be explored

rather than concealed. Hulme (2000) shows his deep concern that only the rich and the powerful may benefit from the newly crafted authority structure:

‘There is no guarantee, however, that ‘good practice’ will stop [the] elite capture of local organisation or the creation of new elites (particularly if DFID policy is to ‘back winners’) or that it can stop organisations from reinforcing forms of identity that could fuel conflict (e.g., ethnicity, religion, etc.) in specific context’ (p. 16).

The desirability of sanctions is also questionable. Uphoff (2000:3) argues that roles and rules are ‘reinforced by sanctions and by incentives’. This, however, may create confrontations, and even Ostrom and Ahn (2003) have shown their concern for the negative impact of sanctions on trust because sanctions ‘reinforce prior doubts about the reliability and trustworthy of some participants’ (xxiv). Sanctions can undermine collective action rather than consolidate it.

Authority in the model of institutions is also built on the economic concept of ‘community’. It is assumed that community promotes trust by continuous interactions. It also creates a feeling of sameness or togetherness that establishes a sense of collective identity. However, the absence of meaningful analysis of ‘community’ is a critical weakness in the economic perspective of institutions. It tends to romanticise community by exaggerating its homogeneity and disregard the socio-economic divisions and diverse interests within it (Platteau and Abraham 2002). Another shortcoming is that communities are assumed to be waiting to be mobilised via outsiders. Williams et al. (2003) argue that this suggests an inaccurate impression and ignores ‘the breadth of individual and collective action already present within any community’ (p. 171).

1.3.4 *Methodological limitations*

An influential body of opinion suggests that the World Bank’s rapid operationalisation heats up, rather than cools down, the debate about social capital measurement (Field 2003). In the mainstream approach, measurement is largely based on quantitative, econometric analysis by aggregating individual levels of social capital. Uslander (2007) is keen to measure trust. Participation density (i.e., the number of people claimed participating in organisations) and organisational density (i.e., the total number of associations in a ‘community’) are two key indicators (e.g., Narayan 1997).

The most difficult issue is aggregation. Focusing on the quantity of organisations disregards the quality of norms and values. The complexity and contextuality of social relationships are neglected, and historical and cultural practices are inadequately analysed. Glaeser (2001) questions why the combination of private social skills necessarily creates a more socially productive society. He argues that the increase of an individual's social capital may undermine those of others. In addition, how to measure such unobservable characteristics, as social norms and trust, is another difficulty. Doubts have been raised about whether large-scale surveys can really capture the meaning of trust.

Although increasing numbers of scholars are aware of this methodological limitation and intend to combine qualitative and quantitative research, what is still unclear is how qualitative and quantitative data are actually complemented in the data analysis. The classic example is Narayan's research in Tanzania (1997) which shows that the qualitative data of the meanings of trust is completely separated from the whole statistical analysis. The outcome-oriented approach of the project-based analysis of participatory development raises another concern. It tends to concentrate on measuring 'ultimate' impacts of participation rather than the processes of the ongoing flow of people's daily life. Hulme (2000) warns that this approach 'has become an objective in its own right and was displacing the primary goal of improved livelihoods for people' (p. 10). Finally, this approach has left insufficient room for the unexpected consequences of social interactions. Even Putnam shows his concern that 'external imposition of a common set of formal rules will lead to widely divergent outcomes' (1993:180).

1.4 Alternative perspective to social capital building

I intend to expand upon these critiques from three angles: firstly, there is a tendency for the neo-institutional scholars to simplify the complexity of social relationships in order to explore the links between a few variables. For example, Ostrom has strong preference for experimental research. Despite her recognising the diversity of cultural, social and institutional aspects of communities that shape individual capacity (2003:xvi), she encourages researchers to reduce the scope of investigation down to a few variables, so that they can 'focus in on well defined but narrow chains of relationships' (Ostrom 2005b:37). Her attempt to simplify the complexity of social relations, however, is not useful for enhancing our understanding about how social capital is formed, accessed and distributed through multiple channels and arrangements. Beall (1999) suggests that social capital is embedded social resources which are dynamic and negotiable in nature. In this book, I will

explore the dynamic nature of the processes through which poor people draw on to construct their livelihoods. I will argue that the multiple arrangements can become a double reinforcement of disadvantage through institutions and social relationships.

My second critique concerns the neo-institutionalists' thesis on civic engagement. This school of thought stresses that social capital is established through institutional engagement and repeated interactions within groups which generate trust and reduce opportunistic behaviour. The over-emphasis on associational life, however, fails to see the broader picture of how people organise their social lives. The daily *routinised* relations can produce certain social and cultural norms that encourage and discourage them from public engagement. It is not clear if increased associational and public participation at the community level will necessarily be beneficial to poor people. We need a more in-depth contextual understanding of how people do things in practice.

Thirdly, the implicit potentially positive impact of social capital on the lives of the disadvantaged is problematic. Ostrom (2005a, 2005b) asserts that not only does social capital help resolve collective action dilemmas, but it also engages people in productive transactions, so that they can use their network connections and participation to move out of disadvantaged positions. This claim on pro-poor outcomes is supported by Narayan's research in Tanzania, showing that a one per cent increase in village-level social capital leads to 30 per cent rise in household incomes (1997). In reality, however, not all social capital interventions result in pro-poor outcomes. These suggestions provide an insufficient consideration of the negative aspects of social relations and a general lack of detailed knowledge about the impact of social interventions on the poor. Maintaining social networks can place a heavy burden on poor people. Their fragile livelihoods, based on inequitable social relationships, can also lead to further marginalisation.

1.4.1 *Turning to social theories*

In addressing these issues, we need to put poverty back on the social capital agenda. Developing a 'pro-poor' social capital perspective means an alternative approach to human motivations and institutions is needed. The alternative perspective must be able to examine the process of social capital in a more complex and multidimensional setting. It must also look beyond formal organisations and conceptualises social relations as more dynamic and contextual than simply as resources to be manipulated. In doing so, this book draws on the theoretical contributions of the early Mary Douglas (1987) and Mark Granovetter (1992), and the more recent contributions of Frances Cleaver (2002),

to construct the 'agency-institution-structure' framework in analysing social capital.

Granovetter popularises the concept of social embeddedness. He suggests that research tends toward a false dichotomy: depicting agency as either under-socialised or over-socialised. The former indicates the indeterminate nature of human actions and the capacity of individuals for willed and voluntary action which is not governed by social structure. It strongly believes that individuals are necessarily transformative agents who can challenge structural inequalities. The latter, on the contrary, argues that individual actions are predetermined and constrained by social structures. It portrays agents as passive recipients who are totally incapable of resisting the structures surrounding them. The notion of social embeddedness, he argues, helps to explore everyday social interactions which link individual agency and social structure.

Douglas's book on 'how institutions work' highlights the role of social institutions, routine and habit in mediating individuals' choices, decision making as well as modes of social relations. She proposes a less conscious, less functional and less rational construction of institutions, and argues that: 'social institutions encode information. They are credited with making routine decisions, solving routine problems, and doing a lot of regular thinking on behalf of individuals' (1987:47). People, as she emphasises, rely on habits, conventions, precedents and 'common sense' as a guide to 'how they do things' in their everyday lives.

Cleavers suggests that agents are embedded in social norms and structures which facilitate and constrain their agency and the processes of decision making. In her research in African contexts, she is keen to show that the process of decision making is complex and dynamic, and the motivations are mixed and diverse. She emphasises the processes by which people consciously and unconsciously draw upon existing social and cultural arrangements to make decisions. She also examines how the mechanisms for collective action are 'borrowed or constructed from existing institutions, styles of thinking and sanctioned social relationships' (Cleaver 2001:29). She places social interactions within a particular historical, cultural and spatial context, and underlines the ongoing and multifaceted nature of the social livelihoods of the poor.

Based on their empirical research on water governance in developing countries, Cleaver and Frank (2006) investigate factors and processes that shape poor people's access to water and to guide subsequent interventions to ensure pro-poor outcomes. They identify three components: resources, mechanisms and outcomes. Resources are defined as 'the materials from which human interaction and structures are constructed' (2006:3). They are in the forms of institutions, social organi-

sations, rights and entitlements, finance, human capabilities, physical settings and technologies. According to Cleaver and Frank, identifying the variety of the resources and arrangements is the first step towards understanding what factors enable and constrain the access of the poor to resources. Mechanisms are the mediators which influence what resources are available to what groups and under what context-specific arrangements. These mechanisms of access, in turn, lead to a diversity of positive and negative outcomes, in terms of social inclusion, poverty reduction, and empowerment.

1.4.2 *Agency-institution-structure framework*

The process of building ‘pro-poor’ social capital, this book argues, lies in the understanding of three inter-related processes: *agency*, *institution*, and *structure*.

1.4.2.1 *Agency*

The term, agency, is used in a number of different ways in different discourses. Rapport and Overing (2000) define it as ‘the capability, the power, to be the source and originator of acts’ (p. 1). The concept raises questions about the importance of human intentions, moral choice and the extent of its freedom from exterior determination. It is also concerned with the meaning, subjectivity, negotiation, and experience of agency that individuals bring to the activity (Calhoun 2002).

Putting agency into the discussion of social capital studies is intended to analyse the meanings attached to people’s involvement in their social interactions and the complex relations of trust. Individuals’ experience and subjectivity suggest that they are the active subjects, rather than the passive objects, of collective action. Their perceptions also tell us how they make sense of information and interpret opportunities and constraints within their social environments (Kabeer 2000:53). Multiple realities and the diversity of circumstances under which agency is exercised also need to be explored. The details of the processes through which people build relations of co-operation also enable us to examine the rich and complex contexts, rather than the mere total numbers of exchange. All these place the lived experiences and livelihoods of individuals into the analysis.

Anthony Giddens’s understanding of agency is worth special attention. He suggests that all human beings are knowledgeable agents who possess reflexive knowledge. That is to say, all social actors know a great deal about ‘the conditions and consequences of what they do in their day-to-day lives’ (Delanty and Strydom 2003:400). This echoes Long’s idea that: ‘the multiple realities and diverse social practices of various actors are accounted for their varied knowledgeable, capability

and response to differing circumstances occurring over time' (Long and Long 1992:5). Giddens also raises the concept of the 'unintended consequences' – agents' knowledge is bound by the unacknowledged conditions and the unintended consequences of actions.

While recognising the usefulness of Giddens's theory in conceptualising agency, Margaret Archer is aware of its limitations. She argues that the structuration theory 'puts too much emphasis on the ability of agents to transform structures simply by changing their behaviour' (1989, quoted in Haralambos 1995:906-7). She also questions the idea that structural features of society cannot merely be changed at will. Giddens's notion of 'knowledgeable agents' also tends to suggest the intentional and purposive nature of agency which gives a false impression that individuals 'often know how to act' (Calhoun 2003:379). In addressing the 'under-socialised' tendency in Giddens's theory, I draw upon Cleaver's idea of social embeddedness of agency (2004). She argues that individual actions are embedded in a wider social context. The processes of decision making are shaped by our perceived 'right way of doing things', moral concerns and other complex social dimensions of individual livelihoods. Agents' capacities are also historically and culturally 'structured' and this affects our responses to events in shaping our actions.

1.4.2.2 *Institution*

Institutions, defined as 'rules of the game' (North 1990), mediate individuals' choices, decision making as well as modes of social relations. They shape agency because, as Giddens (1984) explains, the repetitive nature of the implicit knowledge offers us an ontological security to deal with everyday interactions, so we tend to allow daily routines and everyday practices to guide our behaviour. Institutions interact with social structure in the way that they can both challenge existing structural forces and reinforce structural inequalities.

Cleaver (2002) divides institutions into two types: the bureaucratic and the socially embedded. Bureaucratic institutions are committee-like organisations which stress formal structures, fixed rules, and organisation-based public manifestations on a well-organised and regular basis (e.g., Putnam et al., 1993). Socially embedded institutions, in contrast, are conceived less in terms of fixed rules, and more in terms of practice. They reflect social values of trust and norms of reciprocity which are embedded in local customs and conventions. Individuals interact with each other by constantly drawing upon social rules and norms. People rely on precedents and 'common sense' as a guide to how they do things in their everyday lives. Douglas puts it this way: 'social institutions encode information. They are credited with making routine

decisions, solving routine problems, and doing a lot of regular thinking on behalf of individuals' (1987:47).

1.4.2.3 *Structure*

This book takes the realist epistemological standpoint that structures exist independently of people's consciousness (Sayer 2000). According to Giddens (1984), structure should not be viewed as outside of and coercive toward actors, as it is both 'constraining and enabling' (p. 25). They enable some individuals to exercise agency while constraining others. Highlighting the impact of structural forces on their everyday lives does not rule out the possibility that there is still room to manoeuvre since structures are produced, reproduced, and transformed in and through individual actions and social practice. That being said, the consideration of the structural complexity helps to underline the power relations underpinning structure. It also contextualises social interactions within particular historical, social, cultural and spatial situations, along gender, class, ethnicity and age lines (Lopez and Scott 2000).

1.4.3 *Understanding 'unseen' social capital*

The 'agency-institution-structure' framework is used to re-conceptualise the nature of social relationships and to re-link institutions, social capital and poverty. It rejects both total structural constraints and pure rational choice. It forces us to reassess the presuppositions in the mainstream social capital theory by offering a more complex theoretical framework which allows us to understand the diversity and multiplicity of the relational patterns of interactions between individuals, institutions, and social structures.

The framework, characterised as poverty-focused and outcome-sensitive, is highly relevant to the context of the creation of 'pro-poor' social capital. It helps to conceptualise how different individuals and groups draw upon a variety of particular context-specific channels to make claims. It explores how the processes change over time and space. While recognising the agency and subjectivity of impoverished individuals in negotiating the construction of social relationships, the framework does not neglect the structures of social interactions that constrain the room to manoeuvre and reproduce power inequalities. The central theme of this book is to illustrate how this framework is useful in examining the limits of individual capacities to act independently of structural constraints.

The 'agency-institution-structure' interactions also offer a framework within which to explore 'unseen' social capital. The notion of 'unseen' social capital, coined in this book, is intended to highlight the inade-

quacy of 'seen' social capital in understanding poor people's associational lives. There are six distinguishing features:

1. Nature of social relations
2. Incentives of co-operation
3. Conceptualising institutions of trust
4. Livelihood priorities and changes
5. Methodology approach and design
6. Downside of social capital

This book will illustrate how 'unseen' social capital considers a wider and more complex understanding of social relationships. Unlike 'seen' social capital, which is characterised as universally applicable and apolitical in nature, 'unseen' social capital is both culturally specific and contextually sensitive. It also takes power seriously by suggesting how the role of negotiation in creating participatory social space and the use of rules in authority building can conceal and reproduce power inequalities by the process of negotiation and rule-based management. 'Seen' social capital is generated from the neo-institutional assumption of bounded rationality, claiming that rational individuals purposefully and consciously draw upon social relations for their own interests within constraints. I will explore a wider range of motivations that shapes collective action. These motivations may be less conscious and less instrumental than neo-institutionalists claim. Individuals can also be affected by the perceived 'right way of doing things', moral concerns, and the sense of commitment in their decision making.

'Seen' social capital, from the neo-institutional perspective, is created by careful institutional crafting. Specific groups are established to shape specific types of interactions in order to achieve rapid and visible results. Its formation hinges on the existence of good structures of authority by election, majority ruling, and a clear demarcation of property rights and administrative boundaries. The analysis of 'unseen' social capital, in contrast, will suggest that the single-purpose view of institutions is inadequate for understanding the multi-purpose and unpredictable nature of institutions. It argues that we need a different approach to examine how the presence of multiple and contesting authority and the influence of informal authority shape collective action. This book will also provide empirical evidence to suggest that 'unseen' social capital does not necessarily come from formal participation.

The fluid and plastic nature of 'unseen' social capital is also highlighted to reflect the changing social networks and individually differentiated livelihood priorities and circumstances. This book will also illustrate how the construction of these 'invisible submerged networks' is spontaneous and less-organised, and that it changes during the

course its life, as well as being fragile. Methodologically, the success of building 'seen' social capital is judged by the visibility of collective action and the quantities of organisations. 'Seen' social capital is measured by the numbers of groups, the densities of social exchange, and the aggregate level of trust. 'Unseen' social capital, as this book will show, is predominantly manifested in daily interaction and conducted through on-going relations of reciprocity. To capture 'unseen' social capital, it requires more flexible research methodologies and methods and is based on a culturally, historically and socially located analysis. This book will also emphasise the downside of 'unseen' social capital. While 'unseen' social capital may fail to challenge unequal structures, it can reinforce them by constraining individuals from exercising agency.

The contrast between 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital is not intended to create a dualism. I also do not want to make a claim that the 'unseen' is superior to, or more desirable than, 'seen' social capital. The main argument of the book is that we need to understand both types of social capital and the interactions between them that determine if, and how, poor people's livelihoods can be improved and transformed.

1.5 Research methodology and contexts

This book draws upon my empirical research about the lives of mainland Chinese migrants in Hong Kong. The research has three objectives: firstly, to evaluate the gap between migrants' 'actual' decision making processes around participation and the neo-institutional design framework for collective action; secondly, to explore 'agency-structure' duality by analysing migrants' perceptions about the opportunities and constraints of community participation and the degree of agency they brought to bear on different aspects of their lives. It is also an attempt to locate their accounts in a broader social and institutional context and offer a view of structures in which they lived; thirdly, to examine issues of access to, and distribution of, social capital and power relations in communities.

This research adopts an ethnographic perspective to explore 'unseen' social capital. According to Brewer (2000), this methodology is effective in capturing people's social meanings and ordinary activities. It requires researchers to participate directly in the setting, staying in the field for a long period of time. It offers a contextual approach to deal with the messiness of social reality and to analyse local conditions and histories of communities. These characteristics are crucial to the understanding of the process of reciprocity and the formal and informal networks involved in people's daily interactions. This methodology is

particularly useful in addressing some of the limitations of the mainstream quantitative approach to the understanding of social capital, such as the risk of imposing fixed categories of associations (Hulme 2000) and playing down the complexity of cultural and gender contexts (Molyneux 2002).

While ethnography is the research perspective, case study is the research approach used in this research. It is a preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed. The purpose of case studies is to 'reveal processes and connections by a focus on the particular and the detailed, nested within a broader context' (Jackson 2002:504). In this research, two levels of analysis are considered: organisational and individual. This is an attempt to avoid biases towards group analysis, to show migrants' social lives in a holistic way, both within and beyond groups, and to consider migrants' experiences and their subjective views in participation (and non-participation).

Recognising the multiple levels of social capital and norms theoretically analysed by Harris and de Renzio (1997) and empirically demonstrated by Hibbitt et al. (2001), this book will focus on the process of building bridging social capital¹ within groups and the impact of pro-social capital policies on human interactions. The relationships between NGOs and the relationships between NGOs and local government in building social capital are not the focus of this book. This book adopts a micro perspective and focuses on three levels of analysis: individual/household, organisational, and community. The individual/household level explores the changes in people's associational lives before, during and after migration, the factors which motivate individuals to participate, and the impact of participation on their lives. The organisational level examines the norms of co-operation within groups and how authority structures are established. On the community level, questions, such as the history of collective action and the role of government and development agencies in communities, are posed.

Hong Kong is selected as the site for investigation because, according to Ng and Hills (2000), the city fits into the 'social capital-deficit' story or, in other words, a picture revealing the collapse of trust and reciprocity owing to the rapid pace of urbanisation, social, and political changes. However, this book is specifically interested in the strained relationships between migrants from mainland China and local Hong Kong people.² Despite various adjustment policies, the majority of migrants feel discriminated against in the host society. Strained relationships have sparked numerous conflicts between migrants and the police and caused a number of social disturbances and casualties. Consequently, the government established the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund in 2001, making the improvement of the relationships between migrants and local people a top priority in social reforms.

1.5.1 *Profile of migrant groups and research areas*

My fieldwork was conducted in Hong Kong between 2001 and 2002. The goal of my twelve months of continuous fieldwork was to deepen my involvement in migrant groups and communities. This research shows that migrants' social lives are embedded in a wide range of institutions, both in Hong Kong and the mainland. These institutions include the domestic, economic (such as employment and the fish and meat markets), social (including NGOs, clan associations, and informal meetings in local parks), educational (such as schools), and religious (including church and temple). Their significance varies among individuals and changes over time and space. Three key locations were involved in the process of selection for this study. They were: public parks (for informal group observations), migrant groups (run by voluntary organisations), and clan associations (by local community organisations). Local parks were ideal places for natural observation since they were where the migrants gathered; this was particularly true for female migrants. Two local parks, one in Mongkok and the other in Wanchai, were chosen for the pilot study because they were both densely populated urbanised towns and they are highly accessible and safe for conducting research.

Migrant groups were contacted through voluntary organisations that provide services for mainland migrants. These voluntary organisations provided me with access to a variety of migrants, including men and women. They also allowed me to conduct participant observation, so that I could gather first-hand information about group dynamics. After a few weeks' preliminary observation, I finally opted to focus my research on three groups: a female migrant mutual-help group in Mongkok, a community currency project in Wanchai, and the abused women support group in Tsuen Wan. They were chosen for different reasons: the first group campaigned for migrants' rights and all of its members were female. Development workers in the second group explicitly used the concept of social capital to seek funding from the Hong Kong branch of Oxfam. They also advocated building bridges between migrants and the locals. The last group had a long history of campaigning for abused women's rights. It was also active in public protests.

Investigating clan associations was not included in my initial plan, but after a few months of observations and interviews, I discovered that clan associations played a significant but implicit role in the lives of the migrants. Three clan associations were chosen: a Yunnan clan association in Causeway Bay, a Chiuchow clan association in Sheung Wan, and a Fujian clan association in North Point. The first group was relatively young and small. Their members spoke with an accent that was very different than that of the locals. The second and third associations

were both well established and well connected within the local communities, but the third one was more hierarchical.

Participant observations, semi-structured interviews and participatory methods, such as mapping exercises and diary writing, were the key research methods. The geographical mapping exercise was effective in identifying the boundaries of their social lives and locating 'community symbols'. Some migrants were also encouraged to write diaries and keep details about their daily lives over a period of time, such as recording their expenses when they participated in social exchanges and social events. A total of forty-five migrants and social workers in the migrant groups were interviewed. Through snowball sampling, five local leaders and seven migrants not participating in any migrant groups were also interviewed.

1.6 Chapter map

Chapter 2 will provide more details about the methodology adopted in this research. It will highlight the potential of ethnography in exploring the social capital building process. Research methods, such as participant observation, natural conversations, interviews, and participatory exercises, will also be discussed.

Chapter 3 will set out the political, historical, and social backgrounds of migration in Hong Kong. It will focus on how changing immigration policies influenced the composition of migrants settling in Hong Kong. It will also examine the government's changing migrant policies and discuss how they are related to residential distribution, neighbourhood features, poverty and migrants' social networks. In my analysis, they are not merely 'background', but are significant in affecting the various forms of community development in migrants' lives. The second part of this chapter will incorporate my case studies of migrant groups, NGOs, and clan associations. They provide details of the migrants' personal and associational lives. The focus is the exploration of their cultural values, social practices, multiple identities, and the complex interlocking of their livelihoods across borders. It will also analyse the organisational structures of these migrant groups, and examine how collective action is organised, social networks formed, and public participation induced.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are the main analytical body of this book. They examine the three key processes in social capital building: *agency*, *institution*, and *structure*. I recognise that these three processes are overlapping and interrelated, but for the sake of clarity, these issues are discussed in three separate chapters. The dynamics of their interactions will be discussed in a concluding chapter.

Chapter 4 will explore the complex individual motivations of participation. It begins with a critique of the simplistic ideas of economic incentives in social capital theory derived from the premises of bounded rationality. I will attempt to explain the paradoxes of agency and highlight the complex reasoning of agency and diverse motivations in the processes of decision making. I will also place agency within livelihoods and examine how changing networks shape the migrants' livelihoods. In the later section, I will also explore the role of routine, norms of conflict avoidance, and how the perception of the 'right way of doing things' shapes the involvement of migrants in everyday co-operation. Finally, I will consider the structural forces impeding the exercise of agency.

In Chapter 5, I will analyse data by considering the theory relating to institutions. It begins by questioning the instrumental construction of institutions. I will show that institutions are more complex and diverse than much of the literature suggests. Then, I will discuss the nature of institutions, arguing that they can be multi-purpose, ad hoc, contested, and ambiguous, and some of them are exclusive in nature. I will demonstrate that institutions are also historically specific, socially and culturally embedded and contextually sensitive. By examining the interactions between different institutions, I will discuss whether the over-reliance on bureaucratic institutions denies the role of socially embedded institutions in shaping people's preferred institutional environment. In the last part of this chapter, I will question whether sanctions are necessarily desirable and whether assigning clear roles and majority rules will generate legitimate authority.

Chapter 6 will deal with the complex idea of structure and authority. Authority is considered necessary, in the economic model of institutions, to encourage compliance, to evoke trust and to punish free-riders. However, what is missing in this perspective is how access to, and distribution of, resources are shaped by the structure of authority. How individuals respond and adapt to the reorganisation, and how authority is tied to cultural and social practices, tradition and perceived 'right way of doing things', are also not adequately analysed. In this chapter, I will explore the political nature of institutions and investigate who actually benefits from newly crafted institutions. The examination of the structure of socially embedded authority also helps to illustrate how local elites may manipulate ritual and cultural symbols and also re-invent traditions to reinforce social inequalities. At the end of this chapter, the idea of simplistic institutional evolutionism will also be challenged.

In Chapter 7, I will draw together the critiques of the theories presented in the previous chapters, suggesting that the issues of distribution and access to social capital are essential in the main debate and

that the highly political and economically charged notion of community should be placed under more scrutiny. I conclude by re-emphasising the significance of building the 'pro-poor' social capital perspective. I will compare and contrast the nature of 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital. Finally, I will highlight the policy implications that decision makers and practitioners may find useful. This book calls for the development of a more socially informed model of collective action which is sensitive to the processes of people's everyday interactions and an adequate understanding of people's complex livelihoods.

2 Ethnography – Alternative Research Methodology

2.1 Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: firstly, it shows how the research was conducted, how data were generated and interpreted, and what research ethics were concerned, so that readers are able to actively engage with the research process and the text. Secondly, it is an attempt to offer an alternative methodological approach to social capital studies, other than the current mainstream quantitative research methods.

As I pointed out in the introductory chapter, the aims of this research, and hence the methodology adopted, are to explore mainland Chinese migrants' associational life in Hong Kong, and to examine the context, meanings, and motivations which lie behind individuals' involvement in their 'communities'. The methodology adopted for this research can thus be described as exploratory in nature, rather than relying on statistical analysis. I was interested in observing the everyday lives of migrants, understanding their formal and informal social networks, inquiring about their accounts of how their decisions on participation were made and the impact it had on them, and producing situational, contextual, and culturally specific knowledge (Wong 2002).

The three specific aims of this research are:

1. to evaluate the gap between migrants' 'actual' decision making processes of participation and the neo-institutional design framework for collective action.
2. to explore 'agency-structure' duality by analysing migrants' perceptions about the opportunities and constraints of community participation and the degree of agency they brought to bear on different aspects of their lives. It is also an attempt to locate their accounts in a broader social and institutional context and offer a view of structures in which they lived.
3. to examine issues of access to, and distribution of, social capital and power relations in communities.

2.2 Research questions

Formulating research questions, as Mason (2002) argues, is a device for subsequent analytic focus and guidance for my observation and interviews. The identification of these research questions was generated in the initial planning stage, arising from an initial review of the social capital theory and literature on community participation in order to identify what important issues needed to be explored and where the gaps in knowledge and explanation lay.

Questions regarding participation were stimulated by Uphoff (1986) and Cleaver (1996); questions about group dynamics were inspired by Chant and Gutmann (2000) and Dikito-Wachtmeister (2000). There were three levels of analysis in this research as shown below: the individual, organisational and communal. The individual level focused on the everyday lives of agents and their perceptions and motivations for participation (and non-participation). The organisational level emphasised the internal structure, decision making dynamics, and norms of collective action within groups. The community level highlighted the history of collective action in 'communities' and the roles of government and development agencies.

Individual / household level

1. *What are the changes in the associational lives migrants before, during, and after their migration to Hong Kong?*

Are they involved in any formal and/or informal, small-scale, personal networks of associations?

How has the relocation affected their networks on the mainland, and how do they maintain them?

2. *What are the factors which motivate individuals to participate? What rewards do various actors gain from participating?*

Are these related to their previous experiences of collective action and their expectations of benefits? Is there any distinction between individual motivations and those of the groups?

3. *Does participation make any changes to their lives? Does participation increase the sense of belonging to their 'communities'?*

What are the obstacles to participation? Do their patterns of participation change over the course of their lives?

Do they feel obliged to maintain certain networks? Do their behaviour and perceptions differ from that of non-participants?

Organisational level

4. *Who is involved in management and how do they exercise authority?*

What are the gender and socio-economic status of members of the migrant group committees? What activities do committee members undertake?

What is the role of the leaders? Are there any specific people who dominate the decision making processes? Who makes the final decisions at the meetings?

Who is excluded from participation?

5. *What are the norms for co-operation in the groups?*

Are there any rules within the groups? Who enforces them? Do people comply with the rules? Who decides what particular forms of collective action need to be reinforced?

Who do they turn to when problems arise? Who helps to resolve their problems?

Do any particular types of conflicts arise? How are conflicts resolved?

Community level

6. *What sort of collective action has there been, and what sort is currently taking place within the communities?*

What is the history of community participation and the nature of current activities?

7. *How do the roles of government and development agencies relate to that of community participation?*

2.3 Ethnographic research

2.3.1 Limitations of current quantitative approach

The main impulse to try a different methodological approach to social capital studies comes in response to the limitations of the current quantitative approach to the understanding of the concept. The shortcomings are categorised in four dimensions: firstly, Molyneux (2002) points out that social capital research is largely diagnostic in nature which identifies social problems in poor communities, so as to justify intervention. Secondly, the frequent use of large-scale data sets for comparative research on countries, such as the cross-cultural comparison of trust, denies the heterogeneity of the cultural process and historical context. Thirdly, the norms of reciprocity that are solely considered

as the numbers of economic exchanges between individuals are overly simplistic. This bears the risk of overlooking the deep social meanings of mutuality. Fourthly, Hulme (2000) suggests that the present quantitative social capital research imposes fixed categories of associations on the 'field' which neglects the significance of informal networks to people's everyday lives.

These criticisms highlight the narrow sense of social life. The inflexible nature of research design also places too much emphasis on control and measurement in guiding development towards specific and measurable objectives. The current quantitative practice, therefore, is not satisfactory to deal with the concept of social capital which is about relations of trust and co-operation and the culture and history of collective action. We need a contextual approach which allows us to deal with the messiness of social reality and deepens our understanding of the complex processes involved in development. This perspective must also permit us to observe both formal and informal networks involved in people's daily life and the norms of reciprocity and trust. Local organisations have to be viewed in the 'context of the overall structure of social relations and of power' (Harris 2002:92). We also need an in-depth research method which has both exploratory and explanatory power in analysing local conditions and the histories of communities. The fieldwork process must be of sufficient duration to allow researchers to get involved with the people in their settings and think reflectively about the ongoing personal and political struggles that take place between the various social actors involved. Therefore, I have proposed to adopt an ethnographic perspective in this research which allows me to document, observe, describe, and analyse the meanings and intensity of social interactions.

2.3.2 *What is ethnography?*

Ethnography is defined as 'the study of people in naturally occurring settings or "fields" by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting' (Brewer 2000:6). Methods of data collection, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and personal documents, are commonly used in ethnography.

The main purpose of ethnographic research, Smith (1998) argues, is to understand the social meanings of people in a given setting and generate 'thick description'. Jackson (2002) suggests that this approach is effective in dealing with cultural specificity, historical background, and the 'messy particularity of life in specific times and places' (p. 504). Since ethnography is based on methods which are both flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced, At-

kinson (et al. 2001) suggests that this perspective can convey 'vivid, dynamic and processual portrayals of lived experience' (p. 229).

There are a number of advantages to using ethnography in social research. Hammersely (1998) points out that it is more desirable to study people's behaviour in everyday contexts than under experimental circumstances created and controlled by researchers. Fieldwork is generally conducted over a sustained period of time, which helps develop long-term and multi-stranded research relationships. This provides more contextualised details in the webs of social relationships and the 'voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals' (Denzin 1989:83). The flexible design of data collection requires a dynamic response to new research questions and avoids pre-fixed arrangements that impose categories on what people say and do (Noaks and Wincups 2004). This approach, however, is not without its limitations. Its validity and degree of generalisability have been severely challenged. I will leave the critique to the section on validity and reflexivity.

2.3.3 *How is ethnography relevant to social capital study?*

Ethnography allows researchers to investigate social groups or specific fields from the 'inside', so that 'unseen' social capital or the unacknowledged mode of collective action can be uncovered. As Giddens (1984) argues, much social knowledge exists at the level of practical consciousness which individuals constantly draw upon in their everyday lives, but do not consciously think about. This approach is particularly effective in exploring the routine grounds of everyday activities and situations of interaction. The insider's account is also crucial to exploring the interaction between a wide range of 'institutions'. Mehta et al. (1999) define 'institutions' as 'what people do and how people behave' (p. 13) which engages with social and political practices that 'authority and obligations are contested and negotiated' (p. 5).

Ethnographic studies also shed light on the processes and relations operating within and between multiple sites. This helps focus on observing the informal forms of associations amongst members and the norms of decision making in organisational settings. This approach also emphasises 'agency' which seeks to explore the context of human subjectivity and motivations and 'people's individual and collective understandings, reasoning processes and social norms' (Mason 2002:56). However, it also pays attention to social positions that different individuals occupy and the role of local practices and cultural forces that shape people's lives (Porter 1993).

2.3.4 Realism

Ethnography is characterised in terms of its own diversity of epistemology. Here, I will focus only on three epistemological standpoints: the positivist, social constructionist, and realist. These three perspectives share a common assumption: that social knowledge is generated in the 'field' and gained from observation (Atkinson et al. 2001:31). However, their disagreement lies in the role of researchers, the nature of knowledge, and the validity of data. Table 2.1 compares and contrasts their commonalities and differences.

Positivist ethnography is criticised as 'naive realism' which claims

Table 2.1 Comparing and contrasting three epistemological standpoints of ethnography

	<i>Positivist ethnography</i>	<i>Social constructionist ethnography</i>	<i>Realist ethnography</i>
<i>Role of researcher</i>	Researchers as 'neutral' data collector	Researchers are not 'neutral', their identity and cultural backgrounds affect their observation	Researchers are not 'neutral', their identity and cultural backgrounds affect observation
<i>Nature of knowledge</i>	'Telling it like it is', objective observation	'Objective' knowledge is impossible; knowledge is situated, partial, and subjective; knowledge is constructed by both researchers and the researched	Knowledge is subjective and partial; knowledge is not wholly constructed between researchers and the researched; structures exist independently of agents' awareness; non-verbal discourses are stressed
<i>Complexity of knowledge</i>	Only one 'true' telling	Multiple, complex and conflicting realities	Multiple, complex, and conflicting realities
<i>Way of dealing with subjectivity</i>	Standardisation of all research problems	Methodological triangulation; reflexivity	Methodological triangulation; reflexivity
<i>Validity</i>	Universally valid knowledge which can be replicated	Findings are context-dependent, unlikely to be replicated	Findings are context-dependent, unlikely to be replicated

Sources: ideas from Brewer (2000) and Atkinson (et al. 2001)

that ethnography is 'telling it like it is' and researchers, as 'neutral' data collectors, can obtain access to 'objective' knowledge of the social world. It stresses only one 'true' telling and standardisation of research procedures can eliminate the researcher's effect. Research findings are believed to be capable of being replicated owing to the assumption of universally valid knowledge (Brewer 2000).

This perspective has been severely attacked by social constructionists and realists. They both argue that researchers are not 'neutral' and research processes are not free of biases and value-laden judgements. Ethnographers' social identity and cultural background play a significant role in shaping the products of knowledge. They also suggest that 'objective' knowledge is neither possible nor desirable because observers are involved in the settings, rather than detached from them. Research findings are inevitably situated, partial, and selective (Fielding 1993). Instead of standardisation of research procedures, they encourage researchers to think reflexively throughout the entire research process and explain their decisions thoroughly at each stage (May 1997).

However, realist ethnography does not agree with its social constructionist counterpart in three respects: Firstly, it does not view knowledge generation as purely and wholly constructed and reconstructed in the interpretive process. Secondly, it examines not only the verbal, but also the non-verbal part of our daily practices, in particular, the role of silence and muteness (Porter 1993). Thirdly, it argues for the existence of structures which partly shape agents' rationality and behaviour although actors may not be fully conscious of them. Realists tend to focus more on the interplay between agency and structure and consider a wider social and institutional context (Brewer 2000). I adopted the realist standpoint throughout the study since it was highly relevant to my research objectives and offered an analytical perspective for answering my research questions.

2.4 Case studies approach

While ethnography is the research perspective, case study is the research approach utilised in this research. Yin (1994) defines case study as 'a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence' (p. 177). It is a preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being asked. The purpose of case studies is to 'reveal processes and connections by a focus on the particular and the detailed, nested within a broader context' (Jackson 2002:504).

Table 2.2 Comparing the policies of the three NGO groups in Hong Kong

Principles	Community currency project	Abused-women support group	Female migrant mutual-help group
1. Group formation and visible collective action	Est. 2000; 500 members: 30% migrant, 70% local people. Exchange of goods in monthly bazaar; services exchanged via advertisements in bi-monthly newsletters. New participants given 50 community currencies. Encouraged to trade with local supportive 'fair trade' shops.	Est. 1993; 110 members. Migrant membership rose from 30% to 50% over the past decade. Organised high-profile street demonstrations to campaign for abused women.	Est. 2000; 30 female Chinese migrant members. Assisted by social workers; members built external community links to combat discrimination. Petitioned against the government.
2. Stakeholder participation	Migrants encouraged to participate in Central Committee which decided most of the group's affairs. Migrants comprised only 10% of Central Committee.	Increasing numbers of migrants gave them a larger voice in Central Committee. Numbers of migrants on Committee varied from 20% to 80%, depending on who led the election campaigns. Migrants tried to avoid media photographers in demonstrations.	Migrants from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds encouraged participation in Central Committee, but representation hinged on annual election and social workers' influence. Group leader invited to attend monthly District Council meetings. Social workers responded to media as advocates.
3. Authority building	Central Committee members elected by ordinary members annually. Leaders selected by consensus. Academic advisers played key role in monitoring the project.	Two-tiered system formed: Central Committee and Ordinary Members. Many believed Committee was designed to serve members in power to monitor Committee. Clashes were common.	Two-tiered system, but power lies with Central Committee. Social workers introduced a 'record system' to the Committee, requesting members to report weekly on new support; intent is to increase transparency and accountability, but caused much dissatisfaction.

<i>Principles</i>	<i>Community currency project</i>	<i>Abused-women support group</i>	<i>Female migrant mutual-help group</i>
4. Rule enforcement	Quite relaxed rules and enforcement. Organisers believed members wanted to play a role in community building. And that members lived in a close-knit, self-monitored community.	To avoid clashes between Committee and members, Committee established many rules, often used them to back up decisions. Rules constantly subject to interpretation; rigidity affected less-advantaged members.	Social workers used rules to 'test' Committee members' participation levels. Always ready to drop rules when they met strong resistance.
5. Effective monitoring and sanction-in-use	Formal sanctions seldom applied. Rule-breakers approached informally by social workers or Committee members. Consensus approach preferred.	To encourage respect, formal sanctions more likely to be applied when members broke rules. Members threatened with expulsion for repeated misconduct.	Formal sanctions seldom applied. Social workers often used their close social relationships with members to bring compliance.
6. Conflict resolution mechanisms	Friction settled mainly by social workers who talked to both sides, seeking early consensus. If unsuccessful, social workers might request that one side resign.	Disagreement dealt with publicly in monthly meetings, but not managed effectively. Sometimes conflict resolution resulted in fighting which frustrated many.	Social workers highly sensitive to group frictions; monitored by close contact with Committee. Disputes resolved by talking to both sides.

Source: own research

According to Brewer (2000), case analysis can be a single person, group, critical event or community that in some way ‘exemplifies or illustrates the phenomena under study’ (p. 113). In my research, migrant groups and group members naturally became my case studies. However, this selection would exclude non-group participants. Over-emphasis on group dynamics and internal activities can also prevent the observation of migrants’ everyday lives beyond the groups. Therefore, the selection of case studies, as Stake (1995) suggests, should be based on a number of criteria: uniqueness, complexity, diversity of cases, and contradictory views which demonstrate the multiple realities. In the later section, I would suggest that we should also consider the accessibility of case studies and the possibility of participating in the field. The gatekeeper’s willingness to help and my own personal interests are also crucial. Despite its strength, the case studies approach is criticised for being subjective and untypical. For example, Robson (2002) suggests that the selection of case studies relies too much on a researcher’s personal experience and the small size of the samples makes generalisation impossible. Jackson (2002), however, argues that these criticisms are wrong. She points out that it is legitimate to ‘seek the atypical, the unusual and the rare’, and small-scale and in-depth case studies ‘contribute important insights, from a viewpoint situated somewhat closer to the lived experience of people’ (p. 504).

2.4.1 *Migrant groups*

Migrant groups were contacted through voluntary organisations providing services for mainland migrants. Initial contact with the organisations was facilitated by my personal networks of contacts as a journalist and through the government websites. The use of voluntary organisations as a starting point was based on a number of considerations: Firstly, these organisations covered a variety of migrants, such as men and women as well as the young and the elderly. Secondly, they allowed me to conduct participant observation, so that I could gather first-hand information about group dynamics. Thirdly, they introduced migrants who were willing to be interviewed.

Three migrant groups were selected as case studies: a community currency project in Wanchai, an abused-women support group in Tsuen Wan, and a female migrant mutual-help group in Mongkok. They were chosen because they were explicit about their objective to build social capital between migrants and local people. They were located in different areas and their diverse activities and policies in building social capital enabled me to make comparisons (see table 2.2).

2.4.2 *Clan associations*

Investigating clan associations was not included in my initial plan, but after a few months of observations and interviews, I realised that clan associations played a significant but implicit role in migrants' lives. Furthermore, discussion with government officials about the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund also revealed that the government wanted to strengthen local organisations to build social capital for communities.

I did formal interviews with leaders of various clan associations and briefly introduced my research to them. I offered to teach an English class for their organisations free of charge, and in return, I could interview their members. Finally, three clan associations agreed to work with me: a Yunnan clan association in Causeway Bay, a Chiuchow clan association in Sheung Wan, and a Fujian clan association in North Point. The first group was relatively young and small. Their members spoke with an accent that was very different from that of the locals. The second and the third clans were both very established and well-connected within the local communities, with the third one being more hierarchical (see table 2.3)

The inclusion of clan associations marked a change in my research strategy. It meant that I would spend most of my time with migrant groups in the first six months of my fieldwork; while my involvement

Table 2.3 *Comparing three clan associations in Hong Kong*

	<i>Fujian clan association</i>	<i>Yunnan clan association</i>	<i>Chiuchow mutual-help association</i>
<i>Established in</i>	1985	1983	1930
<i>No. of members</i>	1,000	1,000	600
<i>Location</i>	North Point	Causeway Bay	Sheung Wan
<i>Structure</i>	City-level	City-level	Mutual-aid co-operative
<i>Motives of establishment</i>	Political and economic (facilitating leaders' investment in China)	Economic and social (providing services to members)	Economic and social (providing services to members)
<i>Nature</i>	Community-based	Non-area-based (members scattered throughout city)	Service-oriented to both members and non-members
<i>Service provided</i>	Social events, organising tours to China	Social events, offering scholarship and hardship grants to less-well-off members	Cheap medical services, social events
<i>My involvement</i>	English tutor	English tutor and volunteer	English tutor

Source: own research

became more intermittent in the second six months since my research focus gradually shifted to clan associations. My research interests in migrant groups and clan associations were quite different – while I concentrated more on rule enforcement and decision-making processes within migrants groups, I am more interested in access and the distribution of social capital and power dynamics within clan associations and local communities.

2.5 Research methods

My fieldwork was conducted in Hong Kong between 2001 and 2002. Twelve months of continuous fieldwork aimed at deepening my involvement in migrant groups and communities. The analysis was conducted using a number of different research methods, including natural observation in local parks, participant observation both in migrant groups and clan associations, in-depth interviews with migrants and key informants, as well as documentation and records. The use of multiple methods was aimed at achieving methodological and data triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). The purpose of triangulation was to 'offer an alternative to validation, [and] to militate against the impact of values on research, rendering it less subjective, more valid and reliable, and therefore more credible' (Brewer 2000:75-6).

2.5.1 *Natural observation*

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I anticipated engaging migrants in conversation in the parks, but I was too naive! Most of the migrants in the parks were female. As a male researcher, my presence easily generated suspicion and mistrust. In addition, it quickly became apparent that hostility and the tensions between migrants and locals had a tremendous influence on my relationship with migrants. The constant presence of Hong Kong-mainland China relations within the context of my fieldwork situation highlighted the political nature of my research. This geo-political tension exposed at the initial stage of my research reminded me that negotiating social access in migrant groups was going to be difficult. Developing trust with migrants by negotiating a less threatening role was crucial. Acknowledging the difficulties in conducting natural observation, I used in-depth interviews to explore the significance of informal forms of association with migrants. Asking questions as to why they went to local parks and who they met offered a glimpse into their intricate social lives.

2.5.2 *Participant observation*

Participant observation is an intensive data-collection technique which involves, not only a researcher's participation in the informants' daily lives, but also 'a sharing of life experiences' with them (Silverman 1993). By observing, hearing, talking, and participating, researchers are expected to enter the 'social symbolic world [of the researched] through learning their social conventions and habits, the use of language and non-verbal communication' (Robson 1993:194). This data-gathering method can also increase the possibility of encountering unexpected issues. Brewer (2000) argues that a researcher's values, fears, and perceptions involve the people in the field which, in turn, informs some of the data.

Researchers using this research method are expected to remain in the field for an extended period of time. They experience the 'journey' and also share their experiences with those they are observing, which this allows them to develop deep, intimate, and informal relationships with those being researched. Data generated are generally deeper, more situational, and specific. This method is also effective in studying daily routines and decision-making dynamics. Questions, as to who talks most and how discussions are conducted, are easily answered by observation. In addition, it supplements the shortcomings of interviews. Rather than relying on people's retrospective accounts, researchers' participation allows the generation of data on social interaction in specific contexts as it occurs (Cohen and Manion 1994).

2.5.2.1 *Negotiating physical access*

Getting the support of gatekeepers (i.e., from among both migrant group and clan association leaders) was particularly crucial since they controlled access to the settings and determined the degree of my involvement in the groups. In order to raise their interests in my research, I worked hard to 'sell' the study and highlight the contributions I would be making to them. I proposed teaching English and computer classes and working as volunteer. This appealed to some of the development agencies which needed to train its members. The government's Community Investment and Inclusion Fund also facilitated my involvement since it popularised the concept of social capital. Workers wanted me to explain it, so as they could use the concept to apply for funding. To get their trust, I was very careful about self-presentation and demeanour, for instance wearing 'proper' clothes and using 'proper' words in my conversations with migrants. These were attempts to close up the distance between me and those to be researched.

I played various roles in different organisations. I was an English teacher for the clan associations but was considered a volunteer among

the migrant groups. My roles changed over time as well. For instance, in the female migrant mutual-help group in Mongkok, I was an English class teacher in the afternoon, a private tutor in the evening, and a helper on weekends. Despite my efforts, the success of my role play depended on recognition by the group's members. Some elderly migrants ended up treating me like their 'son'. This facilitated my involvement in the groups.

Establishing contacts with research subjects was a long process of negotiation and mutual familiarisation. These required patience and my regular appearance and involvement in the groups. Apart from teaching, I attended both committee- and ordinary-member meetings. I often had lunch with staff members and engaged in conversations as we walked to and from meetings. I also attended birthday celebrations, New Year's banquets, and retreats to allow members to get to know me. I also participated in public demonstrations and forums in order to get a sense of what it was like to be a member of the organisations. I hoped that members would gradually accept me as a fellow member of their respective groups.

2.5.2.2 *Data recording and analysis*

Mason (2002:98) suggests that 'fieldnotes are a form of representation, that is, a way of reducing just-observed events, persons and places to written accounts ... fieldnotes (re)constitute that world in preserved forms that can be reviewed, studied and thought about time and time again'. I kept a field diary as a form of data organisation during my stay in the various settings. It contained notes on meetings, conversations with migrants and accounts of on-going activities. Apart from information about time, data, location, identities of the people involved, and other circumstances, I also recorded my impressions, feelings, and emotions, reflecting on circumstances and relationships which were developing in the field. Data collected was written on an almost daily basis, then constantly reviewed and discussed. Recording my observations in my field diary helped generate questions for further exploration and marked changes during the course of my research.

I read my diary notes repeatedly in order to identify key words, ideas, and themes. Then, I coded the data into categories, such as gender, agency, and institutions. Patterns of social interactions gradually surfaced from the data by comparing the coding and respondent's social characteristics and cultural backgrounds, such as length of arrival, size of family, and place of origin. This flexible coding process also allowed me to examine concepts and data on the ground analytically. I then drew upon the coded materials to develop ideas and substantiate my arguments when I wrote my thesis.

The processes of data analysis were tremendously difficult. It was not easy to decide where to draw the line from the massive, messy, multiple, and conflicting data. Coding, then, is an effective way of narrowing down the scope. There was also a risk of over-interpretation of the respondents' perceptions and ideas, but constant discussion with key informants was expected to minimise the impact.

2.5.2.3 *Reflections on participant observations*

The literature about participant observation, primarily stresses the researcher's conscious involvement in 'role design', but not on how their roles were perceived by members. From my experience, while gaining permission from gatekeepers in negotiating my 'physical access' was crucial, obtaining informed consent from ordinary members to achieve 'social access' was equally significant. Sole reliance on gatekeepers sometimes had negative impact on trust development because researchers might be regarded as social workers' accomplices. Potential participants also had good reasons for not wanting to take part in the study owing to the lack of trust.

For example, my background as a researcher, and the fact that I was male, had caused embarrassment and resistance in the abused-women support group. Some senior members challenged my presence overtly, asking 'why is he there' and 'why do our sisters need to be researched'; or covertly by refraining from expressing their views. This case demonstrated that development workers and members had different agenda for my presence in the group. Bitter feelings and conflicts were generated since members were not properly consulted. I then became a source of power struggle between these two parties.

Organisations with a hierarchical structure implied that negotiation at different level of authority was necessary. Noaks and Wincup (2004) suggest that gatekeepers at different layers might not share the same interests. For example, winning a leader's support was indispensable in gaining legitimacy to undertake research within clan associations. However, getting support of members of staff, in my experience, was equally important because they had better understanding of the everyday practice in their associations. They knew their members very well, so they helped to introduce some cases for interview.

Participant observation runs across a wide spectrum from complete participant to complete observer. Questions as to how close my field relationships should be, and how much 'insider' and 'outsider', were always asked. While it needs to get close to members to acquire an insider's view, it is essential to maintain a professional distance which permits adequate observation and data collection. This dual role, however, was not always in harmony. At the beginning of my role as a participant, my relations with migrants were oppositional: there was

'them' on the one side and 'me' on the other. I felt at the margin of the collectivity. As the work progressed, my role as 'insider' and 'outsider' became blurred. The social activities in which I took place became routinely included in my weekly activities. By repeatedly attending meetings and events, they became part of my daily life. I felt that I was slowly integrated in the groups and members started asking me for advice. Yet, I needed to keep reminding myself of my role as a researcher.

2.5.3 Interviews

In this research, the term 'interview' took a broader sense which included natural conversation arising from participant observation and informal discussions at community events and meetings. Miller and Glassner (1997) mention that interviews provide opportunities to talk interactively with people and to gain access to their 'meaning-endowing capacity' (p. 100). Mason (2000) argues that interviewing is not a passive process, but an active one as respondents negotiate the 'meanings' of questions and 'reframe their experiences in the act of retelling their stories to fit the immediate context' (p. 23). More attention is given to the role of researchers, and the interaction between researchers and participants, in the meaning-production processes.

Natural conversation stresses 'natural' settings which engaged researchers in informal and face-to-face encounter with respondents. The advantage was to minimise the effect of interviewers and to create an environment that respondents feel relaxed. However, it generated the problem of privacy since it was conducted in 'covert' situations which did not seek the respondents' informed consent.

The semi-structured interview technique was adopted in my research. It gave greater freedom for respondents to answer my questions. It also allowed them to answer more of their own terms and raise issues which might have been overlooked in interview schedule. Since questions were asked in a semi-formal way, researchers could prompt, probe and ask supplementary questions as new issues arose. I agree with Hughes and Ackroyd (1992) that the semi-structured interview establishes a relaxed and encouraging relationship which facilitates the development of trust between researchers and the researched.

Two groups of interviewees in my study included ordinary migrants and their family members and key informants, comprising of development workers, clan association leaders, legislative councillors, government officials and scholars. The focus between them was very different. While the former was asked about their changing experiences of associational life and perceptions of community participation, the latter was more involved in the social, historical and cultural contexts of col-

lective action in Hong Kong. Ordinary migrants were chosen for interview from a variety of sources, including my intensive involvement in various migrant groups and clan associations, natural observation from local parks, introduction by voluntary organisations, and meeting migrants through snowball technique. This was intended to approach migrants from diverse background who came from both poor and better-off households, married and single, young and old, and urban and rural, for comparison.

I discussed plans with interviewees well before the event, telling them that they should feel free to talk. Interviews took place wherever suitable to migrants -sometimes at their home, but most of them in the McDonald's and local parks. Different migrants were asked different questions, depending on their background and position, year of arrival and social characteristics. When new research questions came to mind and details called for clarification, I requested follow-up interviews. Interviews were not taped since many migrants felt very uncomfortable with the presence of tape recorder. They were worried that the tape would be used as evidence against them one day. This apprehension was especially strong amongst the middle-aged migrants who had experienced the Cultural Revolution and political persecution on the mainland. Instead of tape recording, I jotted down key words on paper during the interviews and wrote a more detailed account immediately after interviews. This was a compromise to strike a balance between data reliability and the interviewees' psychological security.

2.5.3.1 *Life course approach*

During the interviews with migrants, I adopted the life-course approach which placed emphasis on the importance of continuities, as well as discontinuities in their life trajectories (Mishler 1999:151). It also tracked the changing roles, identities and decision making before, during and after the process of migration. I usually began the interviews by asking them to tell me a little about themselves and their social lives. I also asked them their views on a number of matters, including the feelings and meanings of group participation and the perceived costs and benefits. Clearly, this method provided me with a lot of information that was not immediately relevant to the research, but it offered some insights into each migrant's background and previous history. It also helped to provide insights into the structures in their lives and decisions.

Some migrants were involved in a geographical mapping exercise. This visual activity was effective in identifying the boundaries of their social life and social arrangements. The process of mapping encouraged them to mark any places and 'community symbols' which they thought were relevant to their daily life. For example, a migrant sug-

gested that she did not go to a local park since she felt discriminated by the middle-class tenants there. This case showed the geographical dimension of social exclusion which was crucial in researching community participation (see map 5.1 for more details). The life course approach helped to show the changes of the boundaries. Some migrants were also encouraged to keep details about their daily life over a period of time. For instance, a family recorded their expenses on social exchanges and the social events they participated in (see table 4.2 in chapter 4). This information provided a good starting point in studying the meanings and contexts of reciprocity and community involvement.

2.5.3.2 *Key informant/key player interviews*

Key informants were understood as having deep knowledge about their own field. I identified eight different groups of key players in my study. They had different degrees of influence on the migrants' everyday lives. They were: development workers, clan association leaders and staff, community leaders, legislative councillors (equivalent to MPs), church leaders, government officials, school teachers and academics. Their roles and the specific questions I posed are summarised in table 2.4.

Table 2.4 *The identification of 8 different key players in migrant communities*

<i>Key players</i>	<i>Roles</i>	<i>Information gathered</i>
<i>Development workers</i>	Service provider, forming migrant groups, building social networks	Perception on migrants' social involvement and constraints
<i>Clan association leaders and staff</i>	Providing social services and entertainment for members and non-members	The changing role of migrants in the development of clan association and history of collective action in their communities
<i>Community leaders</i>	Campaigners for community solidarity	Role of migrants in community, local-migrant relationship
<i>Legislative councillors</i>	Campaigning for social inclusion policies	Evaluation of migrant policies
<i>Church leaders</i>	Providing immediate material needs to migrants	Perceptions on migrants' involvement in community
<i>Government officials</i>	Providing financial support to voluntary organisations, improving legislations to protect migrants' citizen rights	How migrants benefited from the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund
<i>Schoolteachers</i>	Teaching migrant children	Discussing adjustment, academic achievements and family support of migrants
<i>Academics</i>	Researchers on Chinese migrants	Perceptions on migrants' community involvement and obstacles

Source: own research

The diversity of key informants offered multiple perspectives on the complexities of migrant issues.

2.5.4.3 *Reflections on interviews*

Requesting voluntary organisations to introduce migrants for potential interviews might be regarded as a short-cut method to actually get to meet potential interviewees, but its effectiveness was never certain. Interviews are an interactive process, and if mutual trust between researchers and interviewees had yet to be developed, a fixed way of doing interviews did not help to understand the migrants' deeper meanings and motivations in collective action. Another problem was the individual characteristics of the interviewees themselves. Volunteer agencies tended to introduce active members for potential interviews because they were more willing to talk, were more skilled at expressing their ideas, more experienced, and had a more positive view of their organisations. These 'already empowered' interviewees, however, might offer a very limited perspective of a particular group of migrants. An ethical concern was also raised about whether interviewees felt obliged to do the interviews to return a favour to their social workers. This had the potential of reinforcing the existing power inequalities between social workers and their members.

As we have already seen in the previous section, I played numerous roles in the migrant groups: I was student, teacher, volunteer, and researcher. Group members invited for interviews might be confused regarding my various roles or even feel pressured to accept my invitation, because rejection might lead to repercussions. To address this problem, I declared very clearly that their involvement was completely voluntary and that no strings were attached. They could choose to stop at any moment during the interviews, and it would have no effect on their participation in my English or computer classes.

The literature on research methods sometimes suggests a very simple picture of power dynamics between researchers and the researched. Researchers are often reminded to be conscious of the unequal power relations (e.g., Brewer 2000). This implies that researchers are necessarily powerful and, thus can easily have an adverse effect on the lives of the respondents. In other words, interviewees are often regarded as passive and powerless. However, in my experience, the issue of power was far more complex. This is particularly applicable in the case of the clan associations where the leaders always turned down my initial requests of interviews. Moreover, migrant group interviewees might have their own agendas in accepting my invitations. On one occasion, a migrant launched into a serious attack on some development workers and fellow group members. Looking back at my research diary, I some-

times felt that I was nothing more than a political tool to some of them.

Snowball sampling was a way to locate potential interviewees or different sites through other contacts. For example, after each interview, I usually asked if the interviewee could introduce me to some of their friends who was not participating in any particular organisations, or if they might allow me to join their informal meetings. This method is similar to 'theoretical sampling' by Glaser and Strauss (1967) which does not attempt to seek statistically representative cases. It is also useful in addressing sampling biases resulting from interviewees who are selected by voluntary associations. The various experiences of migrants from different backgrounds (i.e., age, gender, year of arrival, and places of origin) were also explored. This sampling method has been severely criticised for being biased, but Mishler (1999) argues that it does not attempt to ensure representativeness. Instead, it seeks diversity, difference, and constant comparison.

Snowball sampling was a way to locate potential interviewees or different sites through others' contacts. For example, after each interview, I usually asked if they could introduce some of their friends to me who did not participate in any organisations, or if they might allow me to join their informal meetings. This method is similar to 'theoretical sampling' by Glaser and Strauss (1967) which does not attempt to seek statistically representative cases. It is also useful in addressing sampling biases resulting from interviewees being selected by voluntary associations. Diverse experiences of migrants of different backgrounds, such as age, gender, year of arrival and places of origins were also explored. This sampling method has been severely criticised for being biased, but Mishler (1999) argues that it does not attempt to ensure representativeness. Instead, it seeks diversity, difference and constant comparison.

In my fieldwork experience, however, the claims that it enriches research representation and captures multiple realities remains questionable. The effectiveness of this method has been exaggerated since it showed an inadequate understanding of the network characteristics of the poor. It also failed to take agency, social institutions, and the livelihoods of the poor into account. The poor were characterised by limited social networks. Despite their willingness to co-operate with my research, their friends and relations shared similar socio-economic characteristics, beliefs, class, and ethnic backgrounds. This method ultimately failed to achieve the increased diversity and representation which snowball sampling attempts to do. The policy of requesting that the poor make contacts for the researcher also risked putting an extra burden on their already-limited time, labour, and resources.

The rational choice model might explain why most poor people refused to help with the snowball sampling method. Migrants found the cost too high and were deeply concerned that the involvement of researchers in their social lives might destroy their already limited social networks and friendships.

2.6 Validity, reflexivity and research limitations

Mason (2002) describes that research is not passive or neutral, but 'interactive, creative, selective and interpretative' (p. 30). This nature causes much concern about generalisation, data reliability, a researcher's subjectivity and ethical issues. In this section, I will deal with the issues of validity, examine how reflexivity helps to minimise the negative impact and discuss the limitations of my research.

Issues of validity are broadly divided into two aspects: external validity and internal validity. The former is related to the generalisation of research, that is, how do we know that the results of this one piece of research are applicable to other situations? The latter is concerned with the reliability of data, that is, how do we know that the results of this one piece of research represent the 'real' thing? This sheds light on the problem of a researcher's subjectivity, identity, and positionality.

2.6.1 *External and internal validity*

Ethnographic research, case study approach, and the participant observation technique have all been criticised for being a weak vehicle for generalisation. The observer is criticised for recording only a small selection of cases, and case studies which are chosen are susceptible to a focus on the exceptional and the abnormal. However, at the beginning of this chapter, I emphasised that this study was exploratory in nature and its aims were to examine processes and contexts of community participation. As Jackson (2002) argues, exploratory research aims 'to reveal processes and connections by a focus on the particular and the detailed, nested within a broader context' (p. 504). In her words, it is legitimate for researchers to seek the atypical, the unusual, and the rare. Burns (2000) makes a similar argument. He believes that the debate regarding generalisation tends to fall into the trap of positivism, assuming that 'generalising theory is the only worthwhile goal' (p. 474). Instead of focusing on the 'obscurities of mass representation', he insists that research can focus on 'circumstantial uniqueness' and the complexity of the environment. This means that every case is embedded in the historical, social, political, personal as well as other contexts and interpretations. The aim, he argues, is 'to increase under-

standing through the naturalistic generalisation' and to 'facilitate the readers' own analysis more than deliver statements of generalisation' (p. 474-475).

One of the big concerns about internal validity is the role of human subjectivity in research. Being a lone researcher, the data generated in my study could easily be criticised for being partial and subjective in that it reflected my own personalised view. The process of selecting research methods was also influenced by my own personal beliefs, biases, and individual tastes. My response to these criticisms was to admit, rather than deny, the role subjectivity played in my research. My understanding is that there is no real 'objective' research, and this study was influenced by my personal assumptions about the field as well as my social position and identity. However, this confession does not mean that we do not need to deal with subjectivity. Academics have put forward different strategies to minimise the impact of subjectivity, so as to enhance our research validity.

As Robson (1993) argues, giving a detailed account of how research decisions at different stages are made is crucial to research reliability. In my study, I tried to make all of my research processes transparent and tried to fully document all of my procedures. Other factors enhancing credibility include long-term observation, prolonged involvement, persistent investigation in the field, and my strong commitment to presenting the various voices and perspectives of migrants. Cross-checking evidence through a variety of sources and through methodological and data triangulation further enhances validity (Burns 2000).

Another way of minimising the impact of subjectivity is reflexivity. Reflexivity is a self-critical exercise that occurs throughout the research process. It requires a critical attitude towards data and it questions a researcher's prior assumptions and personal biases. It also unravels a researcher's emotional impact on their fieldwork experiences (Michalowski 1996). Critical reflexivity is concerned with the effects of researchers on their studies and the power relations between them and their subjects. Jackson (2002) notes that research activities are all social processes, and researchers need to consider how their presence, subjectivities and positionality are 'part of what gets found out in research' (p. 503). Factors, such as class, gender, and ethnicity, may shape the development of field relations and the writing up of the research. Michalowski (1996) reminds us that reflexivity is not a panacea for all of the problems caused by subjectivity, but it leads us to 'question the motives of [our] interlocutors, the impact of [our] audiences, and ultimately the validity of [our] interpretations' (p. 79). Based on this information, I was prepared to consider how my positioning as a male, Hong Kong-born, middle-class, thirty-three-year-old researcher had shaped my

ethnographic vision. In the following section, I will focus on gender and identity.

2.6.2 *Gender and identity*

How were the field relations mediated by my male identity? Female respondents obviously feared and felt threatened by being interviewed by me alone. They usually requested that family members or development workers remained behind to keep them company. Mistrust generated by sex/gender differences increases the difficulty of being able to conduct natural conversations with migrants in local parks. Being an unmarried male, I found it difficult to engage in 'women's talk' over lunch with female migrants concerning, for instance, their 'bad' husbands. However, my being male was not necessarily an obstacle. I exhibited my physical strength by offering to help migrants move from one house to another, for instance. Listening patiently to their stories also won their support. Some female migrants even praised me as a 'sensitive' gentleman.

Being the same sex does not necessarily help gain access to people's social worlds. In investigating the Ladies' Clubs in London, Fortier (1996) suggests that her being female did not make it easier to avoid the social differences of her female respondents. I had similar experiences when I investigated the clan associations. Although the clan association was generally considered a 'men's club', I did not feel socially accepted by some of the senior members who considered me an 'outsider'. They were also uneasy about my role as a researcher.

Jackson (2002) suggests that a researcher's identity also affects the research chosen and the manner in which it is executed. As a Hong Kong-born researcher, I was caught between the Hong Kong and mainland China cultures. Chinese migrants always felt discriminated against by the host society. Social hostilities and divisions between the locals and the mainlanders were deep and wide. This context shaped the micro-social relations between me and my respondents in the field. On the one hand, whenever I conducted natural observations in the parks and conducted interviews, migrants often refused to be interviewed or simply told me what they thought someone from Hong Kong wanted to hear. On the other hands, people from Hong Kong often thought my research was biased in favour of Chinese migrants.

To play down my Hong Kong identity, I always stressed my family roots on the mainland, telling migrants that my mother was from Chiuchow (south-eastern China) and that my father was from Dongguang (southern China). Highlighting the migrant status of my parents helped to bring us to some common ground, which minimised the social and cultural differences between us.

2.6.3 *Ethical issues*

The names of all of the migrants in my research are pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. However, safeguarding their privacy during interviews at home was not easy in the overcrowded environment of Hong Kong. A family of four, for example, generally lived in a one-room rental of less than 60 square feet [5.5 square metres] with no separate rooms available. Respondents could not easily express what they wanted to say since it might upset other family members or their neighbours. A possible solution was to interview them flexibly according to their needs and schedules. Interviewing children in the afternoon after school and parents in the evening after work made interviews less embarrassing.

Research ethics also takes into consideration a respondent's feelings, stress and pain during research process (Mason 2002). Families in Hong Kong generally work at least nine hours a day, six days a week. Poor families have to work even harder and longer. After a long day of work, being presented with a long list of questions at home often caused great stress, pressure, and exhaustion, especially among single parents. It was simply an extra burden on their already busy schedules and took whatever free time they had left over for their families. Flexible interview arrangements were, again, a possible solution.

2.6.4 *Limitations of my research*

My fieldwork was conducted in 2002 during a period when Hong Kong was undergoing a severe economic recession as part of the East Asian financial crisis. Unemployment rates were at a record high nearly 8 per cent. Economic hardship affected the social and economic lives of poor migrants. In one government study, for example, migrants who relied on financial assistance from relatives increased from 13.2 per cent in 1998 to 23.9 per cent in 2000 (HKSAR 2002). My intensive investigation of migrant patterns of social interaction in their communities during this period of time and in this particular context could not, and should not, be generalised to another period of time when Hong Kong was experiencing prosperity, for instance.

This research focused not only on migrants' social lives in the host society, but also on their connections with the sending societies on the mainland. Focus was placed on how their homeland played a role in their community participation and help-seeking patterns in Hong Kong. Although I received numerous invitations from migrants to accompany them to China, I could not do this during my stay in Hong Kong. Thus this research relied very much on the migrants' retrospective narratives regarding their connections with their hometowns. This

might cause concern that they had re-framed their experiences in the act of retelling their stories to fit the immediate context.

In addition, the majority of my interviewees were new arrivals who had come to Hong Kong less than seven years earlier. Their behaviour and perception might differ from their more established counterparts. This deserves further investigation. Another limitation is that the majority of my interviewees were female. Although I tried hard to look for male respondents, the gender imbalance, to a great extent, has influenced my findings on the relationships between gender and institutions. Another concern is the impact of age and generations on gender. These issues have been lightly touched upon in my study, but further exploration is necessary.

3 Historical and Cultural Contexts of Mainland Chinese Migrants in Hong Kong

3.1 Introduction

Hong Kong is generally regarded as ‘a city of immigrants’ which suggests that the history of Hong Kong is largely one of migration (e.g., Choi 2001). While this popular discourse highlights the fact that migration is not a new phenomenon in Hong Kong and emphasises the role of migrants in the host society, it bears the risk of oversimplifying the complex processes of resettlement over time and denying the migrants’ subjectivity and the diverse migration experiences of different generations. This complexity is manifest in the need to change what we call migrants, from ‘refugees’, and ‘immigrants’ to ‘new arrivals’ in the government documents and from ‘*Ah Chann*’ (literally, uneducated people) to ‘*Dai Luk Por*’ (a derogatory term for mainland women, implying lower status) in the media. The on-going and shifting debates about the role of migrants as economic assets and/or social burdens reflect the fact that ‘migrants’ is a very politically charged term.

This chapter is split into two sections. The first section will locate the mainland Chinese migrants historically. This historical account of migrants does not merely focus on the migrants themselves, but on the political, economic, and social settings all around them. I divide Hong Kong history into five phases since 1945, so I can examine the changing immigration policies, political situations, both in China and Hong Kong and both before and after colonial rule, and from the perspective of the internal and external economic environment. The emphasis will be on changing government policies from that of minimal intervention to that of social capital building and the roles of development agencies and local organisations in mobilising migrants to become involved in community development. I will also trace the development of community participation in Hong Kong and examine how it affects migrants’ adjustments and livelihoods.

As De Haan (1999) suggests, examining migrants’ historical patterns of movement is not enough. We also need to look into their ‘motivations, attitudes and [their] understanding of the structures within which they act’ (p. 12). Migrants have brought along traditions and social values derived from their homeland and adapted themselves to the

exigencies of the new environment (Lau 1982). Therefore, in the second section, drawing upon the existing literature, documentation, and my fieldwork, I will explore some cultural characteristics of mainland migrants, including the patterns of social relations, 'desirable' forms of neighbourhoods and livelihoods, their perception of collective action and gender relationships. The emphasis is on how these social and cultural features shape their preferences in community involvement. While I am aware of the danger in generalising the culture of migrants, my intention is to offer a rich and complex picture.

3.2 The history of Chinese migrants in Hong Kong

Many local migration studies tend to regard the early 1980s as a turning point in the migrant history of Hong Kong. The drastic change of immigration policies marks the end of the 'touch-base' policy and the beginning of the 'one-way permit quota system'. Since then, legal migrants have outnumbered the illegal ones, and the nature of migrants has changed from predominantly young, male migrants to middle-aged females with young children. In order to place the history of Chinese migrants in a broader context, however, we need a longer time frame. Cross-border movement is a continuous process which has built upon the previous migratory patterns and is shaped by the tradition and culture of migration in the population movement. The mid-1940s are a good starting point since it is marked by a massive influx of mainlanders into Hong Kong as a result of the civil war and the Communist victory in China.

I divide the history of Chinese migrants into roughly five phases: open and closed border (1945-1960), touch-base policy (1960-1980), one-way permit policy (1980-1990), the last decade of British rule (1990-1997), and the post-handover (1997-present). This division is largely based on changes in immigration policies and the political transformation. I acknowledge that this division is highly arbitrary, but it will help to clarify my presentation.

3.2.1 *Open and closed border (1945-1960)*

The mass exodus of migrants from China during this period was due to the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communist (1945-1949) and the eventual Communist takeover in 1949. A United Nations report estimated that some 1.28 million people arrived in Hong Kong between 1945 and 1949 (quoted from Chen 1988). While most of them were farmers, a minority were senior officials of the National Party as well as rich businessmen who fled to avoid political persecu-

tion. Before 1950, the border between Hong Kong and China remained open and the mainlanders could freely enter the territory. However, because of the unexpected massive inflows of migrants after the Communist victory, the Hong Kong government reassessed its immigration policy and closed its border. Mainlanders could no longer enter the colony without a permit issued by the Hong Kong Immigration Department.

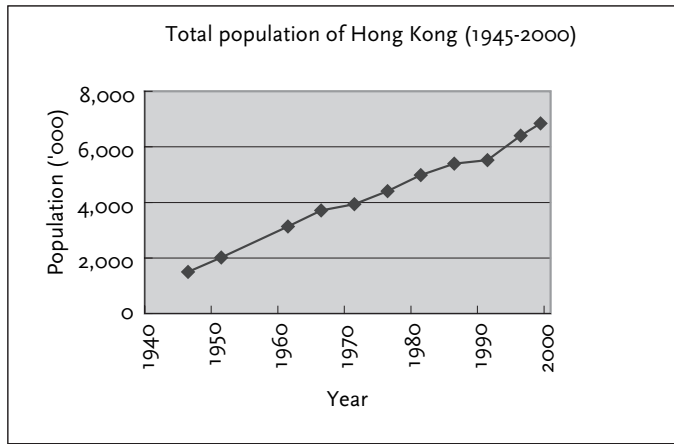
However, the new policy proved ineffective. The local population continued to grow and this created enormous strains on the already strained social and economic conditions in Hong Kong in the initial post-war years. Before the 1950s, Hong Kong had served as an entrepôt for China and the West. The international embargo of China during the Korean War, however, had serious deleterious repercussions on the economy and living standards of the recent migrants.

Hong Kong's government responded with great caution given its *laissez-faire* economic policies. It established the Social Welfare Department in 1958 to provide migrants with minimal basic services, on the one hand, while encouraging voluntary organisations to offer help, on the other (Wong, Fu Keung 1997). Local organisations functioned on an informal basis. Traditional Chinese social service organisations, such as Tung Wah Groups, and clan associations, for example, provided financial and mutual assistance accommodations and employment, to needy immigrants (Sinn 2003).

3.2.2 *Touch-base policy (1960-1980)*

The government's attempt to tighten its border was complicated by political developments in China. The period between the Great Leap Forward Movement in 1958 and the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) witnessed huge waves of immigrants pouring into Hong Kong. The famine and the economic difficulties on the mainland in 1962 saw a sudden relaxation on exit controls on the part of the Chinese authorities. From 1976 to 1981, about 400,000 Chinese immigrants entered Hong Kong (figure 3.1).

In 1974, the Hong Kong government implemented the 'reach-base' policy. Under this policy, any mainlander who managed to reach the urban areas of Hong Kong could apply for the right of abode in Hong Kong. Those who were caught at the Hong Kong border, however, would be repatriated to the mainland. This policy, unintentionally, encouraged more immigrants to take their chances of entering Hong Kong. These were predominantly young, male adults living in rural areas, from two nearby provinces, Guangdong and Fujian. This influx of migrants added extra pressure to the existing medical, educational and social services.

Figure 3.1 *The population change in Hong Kong*

Sources: Lee, 1996:8, HKSAR, 2000

The Korean War embargo forced Hong Kong to restructure its economy from an entrepôt centre to relying more on manufacturing. Entrepreneurs from Shanghai who had fled to Hong Kong after 1949 brought with them capital, skills, and experience. They took advantage of the availability of cheap labour from the vast pool of immigrants and started labour-intensive textiles, dyeing, and fashion garment manufacturing concerns in Hong Kong (table 3.1).

The adjustment, however, was not plain sailing. Civil riots erupted in 1956 and again in 1965. The government was alarmed by the scale of social disturbances and blamed the outbreak on weak social cohesion. The Hong Kong authorities initiated their 'four pillars of development' in 1970 in order to restore peace and order which were: public housing, social welfare (public assistance), education (compulsory nine-year education) and health care. Internationally linked social service organisations, such as Caritas and the Lutheran Social Services,

Table 3.1 *Migrants switching professions before and after their arrivals in Hong Kong*

Profession	Before arrival (%)	After arrival (%)
Farming	70.0	0.8
Manufacturing and transport	18.7	73.9
Management and administration	7.0	2.9
Secretarial and sales	1.8	8.7
Other	2.5	13.7

Source: 1981 Hong Kong Population Census, quoted in Lee (ed.) (2001:24)

were more active in offering help to poor migrants, for instance, by collecting relief materials overseas and providing vocational training.

3.2.3 *One-way permit quota system (1980-1990)*

The 1980s marked a rather different phase of migration in Hong Kong. In 1981, 58 per cent of immigrants were male and 42 per cent female, but by 1991, the proportion of males had dropped to 39 per cent. The number of children in Hong Kong had also increased, from 30 per cent to 40 per cent of the total influx (Lin 1998). This drastic compositional change is attributable to the change in immigration policy and the government's determination to curb illegal migration. In 1983, the British and Chinese governments agreed to replace the 'touch-base' policy with the 'one-way permit quota system' (OWP). This scheme was devised to facilitate the reunions of families with immediate members (spouses and children) still living on the mainland in Hong Kong. OWP holders were divided into two groups: children of Hong Kong permanent residents with a Certificate of Entitlement and spouses and other dependants. Mainland children in this scheme were regarded as permanent residents and had the right of abode in Hong Kong. Spouses and other dependants are non-permanent residents but may obtain permanent residency upon residing in Hong Kong for a continuous period of not less than seven years. This scheme was operated by mainland authorities which governed the exit of mainlanders to Hong Kong for settlement (Task Force on Population Policy 2003).

3.2.3.1 *Adjustment policy and split family phenomenon*

Preoccupied with the Vietnamese refugee problems in the 1980s, the colonial government maintained its minimal interventionist policy towards Chinese migrants. It believed that mainland migrants would easily be assimilated into the mainstream Hong Kong society since they were Chinese and already had family members in Hong Kong. This was justified by local research that suggested that migrant issues were merely 'adjustment problems' and migrants needed help in housing, health care, employment, and education (Hong Kong Council of Social Service 1985).

Lee (1999) argues that this kind of research helped the government justify its technical-residual welfare model. This model emphasises incrementalism – social welfare should not affect the free economy and undermine individual work incentives. The colonial policy was to 'maintain the Chinese tradition' which treated poverty as a personal matter that should be dealt with within the family system (Lee and Edwards 1998:27).

Table 3.2 *The length of separation between married couples under the one-way permit scheme*

Year	Guangdong province			Other provinces		
	Separated more than 10 years (%)	Separated less than 10 years (%)	Total number	Separated more than 10 years (%)	Separated less than 10 years (%)	Total number
1998	94.5	5.5	17,587	8.9	91.1	1,924
1999	95.0	5.0	17,286	3.0	97.0	4,892
2000	66.8	33.2	19,365	3.4	96.6	6,078
2001	27.4	72.6	9,417	6.4	93.6	8,626

Source: Task force on population policy, 2003:54

Since the quota for children and spouses are separated under the one-way permit scheme, the discrepancy in the arrival times in Hong Kong between mainland children and their parents meant a rise in separated families. Table 3.2 shows that 94.5 per cent of the couples were separated between Hong Kong and China for more than ten years in 1998 in Guangdong province. This caused enormous disruptions in their family lives. In Hong Kong, men had to look after their young children because their wives were still in China. Young children were left on their own at home during the day in situations where their fathers had to go to their full-time jobs. On other occasions, female migrants joined their husbands before their children, so they had to leave their children in the care of grandparents or other relatives on the mainland.

3.2.3.2 *Economic restructuring*

Following the opening up of China in 1979 and rising production costs in Hong Kong, many factory owners shifted their production to South China which resulted in a de-industrialisation of Hong Kong. In 1971, the working population in the manufacturing sector was 47 per cent, which fell to 28.2 per cent by 1991. At the same time, there was also a change in the internal employment structure of the manufacturing industries. While the number of factory employees declined 43 per cent, non-production staff increased 11 per cent (Lui and Wong 1995). The majority of the blue-collar workers had to find new jobs in the service or transportation sectors which were lower paid and more unstable jobs in general.

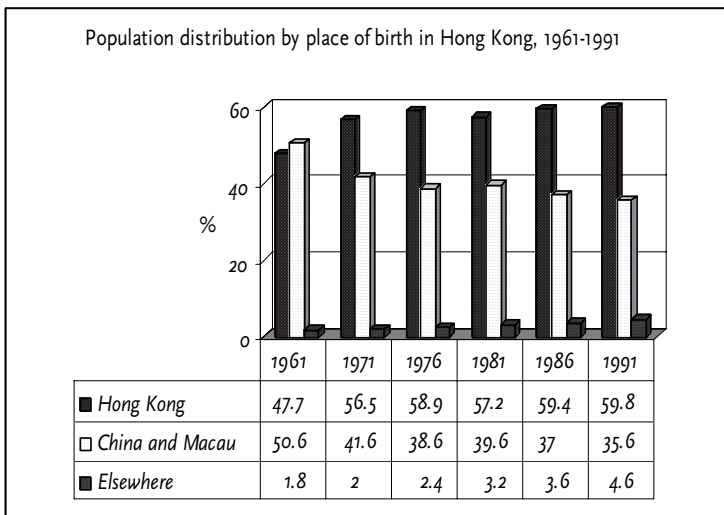
How well new immigrants fit into the various structural changes is highly debatable. A study by Lam and Liu (1993) shows that they are at a clear disadvantage. They argue that, as the manufacturing sector shrinks and the service sector expands, more country-specific human capital is required of the workers. A large portion of the human capital

of immigrants acquired outside of Hong Kong renders no economic value in terms of production in the host society. They only foresee the gap growing wider as the economy becomes more and more involved in the service sector (p. 31). Surveys suggest that the median family incomes amongst Chinese migrants were only 40 per cent of that of their local counterparts (HKSAR 1998).

3.2.3.3 *The rise of the Hong Kong identity*

The 1997 Question of Handover and the resultant political uncertainty, the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident and the economic boom have all led to the emergence of a Hong Kong identity. It is characterised by a feeling of superiority that Hong Kong people have over their mainland Chinese counterparts and is demonstrated by identifying themselves less as ‘Chinese’ and more as ‘Hongkongese’ (Wang and Wong 1999). Figure 3.2 shows that the proportion of local-born people, which stood at about 60 per cent in 1991, continues to increase. The divergent path of development in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s also demonstrated a large contrast between the laissez-faire capitalism of Hong Kong and Maoist socialism in China.³ It affects the Hong Kong-born generations who have an inexplicable fear of Chinese authority. The negative impact of the rising indigenous identity is that Chinese migrants are generally regarded as ‘outsiders’ and a burden on the social welfare system. This is demonstrated by the popular dis-

Figure 3.2 *Percentage distribution of population by place of birth in Hong Kong, 1961-1991*



Source: Siu, 1997:337

course regarding the 'Ah Chann' (literally, uneducated mainlanders) in the media. There has been a serious concern that the assimilation process has been hampered by this narrow-minded and hostile environment (Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs, 1999).

3.2.4 Last decade of British rule (1990-1997)

The daily quota for one-way permits was 75 in 1983, but this increased to 105 in 1993 and 150 in 1995. From 1983 to 2001, there were a total of 725,000 new arrivals admitted under the OWP scheme, which was 10.8 per cent of the total population of 6.72 million in 2001. From 1997 to 2001, new mainland arrivals under this scheme comprised 93 per cent of the population growth in the host society. The term 'new arrivals' replaced 'immigrants' in the official documents as the reversion of sovereignty approached, but the political nature of the 'migrant issues' had in the mean time intensified. The government continued its assimilation policy and introduced employee-retraining schemes to help migrants enter the labour market. It, once again, attempted to strengthen family relationships by subsidising the integrated family service for new arrivals.

3.2.4.1 NGOs challenge assimilation policy

The government's handling of migrant issues was in sharp contrast with the strong enthusiasm of voluntary social agencies in searching for a 'solution' alternative to the assimilation policies. This was aggravated by the increased levels of poverty amongst migrants and increases in discrimination. The Gini coefficient (the statistical analysis to measure income inequalities) rose from 0.45 in 1981 to 0.47 in 1991 and to 0.53 in 2001. 40 per cent of the migrants were living below the poverty line in the early 1990s (Lui and Wong 1995).⁴ Employed migrants worked long hours for low wages, minimal employment benefits, and an uncertain work environment. The government believed that the cause of poverty was a deficit of human capital, including lower qualifications among the immigrants. Table 3.3 shows the contrasting educational levels between migrants and the general population. While the majority of migrants attained only a lower secondary school level of education, the general population achieved an upper secondary level and above.

This human capital-deficit explanation, however, tends to blame the poor. It fails to examine structural inequalities. The Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs (1999) argues that the economic restructuring process has resulted in social polarisation – the development of financial activities has created a high-income managerial and

Table 3.3 *Education attainment between migrants and the population as a whole*

<i>Education attainment</i>	<i>New arrivals aged 15 and over (%)</i>	<i>Whole population aged 15 or above (%)</i>
No schooling or kindergarten	6.7	8.4
Primary	25.3	20.5
Lower secondary	38.4	18.9
Upper secondary or matriculation	23.9	35.8
Tertiary	5.7	16.4
Total	100	100

Source: Task Force on Population Policy, 2003:21

professional middle class with plenty of buying power while the shrinking manufacturing sector and the growth of the service sector have forced manual labourers into a low-wage labour market. From the social network perspective, Choi (2001) suggests that new migrants gradually ended up moving to new towns where a coherent ethnic community was absent (p. 293).

The rising levels of discrimination against migrants also caused deep concern among the Hong Kong authorities. The government was under great public pressure and launched an investigation into discrimination against ethnic minorities, including Chinese migrants. The report, however, showed no evidence to support the claim that Chinese migrants were being 'racially' discriminated against (Home Affairs Branches 1997). This evidence contradicted research by the Hong Kong Psychological Society in the same year. Their findings suggested that local residents tended to believe that Chinese migrants were 'bad' by nature. 54 per cent of respondents thought migrants brought bad influences to Hong Kong and 55 per cent believed that migrants were themselves to blame for their poverty.

3.2.4.2 *Paradoxes of community participation*

More and more development agencies became frustrated by what they regarded as the government's pseudo-community development. They believed wider participation, denser mutual-aid network support within communities, and more community empowerment could provide an alternative. Apart from providing services directly to those who needed assistance, they implemented strategies to mobilise and organise migrants to involve them in advocacy activities and to campaign for changes in government policy. Collective action was also encouraged by the formation of special interest groups which sought to strengthen the voice of the marginalised (Lui and Wong 1995:34-5). As a result of the various pressure groups, the government amended its policies towards migrants in a number of areas. In addressing the rising anti-migrant sentiment, the principle of social integration or acculturation was

laid down to promote mutual understanding between migrants and the local population. The self-help approach was also adopted. For example, self-help childcare centres were formed and recently arrived mothers were organised to form a group that provided low-cost childcare services on a non-profit basis. The aim was to 'enhance volunteer utilisation in the community, advocate a caring community and community integration and create many opportunity for local people to have direct contact with new arrivals' (Wong and Choi 1996:23).

The promotion of community participation, nevertheless, has raised a number of concerns. Firstly, some scholars worry that this may give the government a good excuse to provide a cheap alternative to institutional services and shift the responsibility for care onto the family. Yeung et al. (1997) point out that 'community care is very much equivalent to "family care", or perhaps more appropriately "care by women"' (p. 1). They also suggest that the emphasis on the family as a basic unit in the community fails to address the tensions within families and the complex relationships between families and communities in a wider context. Secondly, the network-building and help-seeking processes of new arrivals are complex and diverse. Yeung et al. (1997) argue that there are discrepancies between the felt needs of migrants and the problems identified by social workers. This pinpoints the suspicion that social workers lack a deep understanding of the patterns of support networks that migrants have and the factors that affect their help-seeking attitudes and behaviours. They argue that examining which networks facilitate and inhibit their social relations, is crucial. Advocating a higher level of community participation by migrants has backfired. In a discussion forum on new arrivals, development workers raised their concerns that the problems faced by migrants are also shared by many local residents. They further wondered whether migrants were necessarily poor. They also wondered whether it was fair to cut the resources already spent on local residents in order to provide services for new arrivals.

3.2.5 Post-Handover stage (1997-present)

Hong Kong became a Special Administration Region (SAR) of China under the 'one country, two systems' arrangement on 1 July 1997. Under the 'self-rule' principles, the new government has adopted a rather different approach to social development, which seeks to distance itself from the colonial past. Setting long-term development targets and mainstreaming community development shows its strong determination to break with the former regime. Paradoxically, however, the relationships between Chinese migrants and the locals have worsened,

rather than improved, since sovereignty. The unprecedented East Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, followed by an economic recession and the outbreak of the deadly disease SARS in 2003, have further undermined the economy. But the way the new government dealt with the Chinese migrants' right of abode just further poured fuel onto the fire of an already-strained situation.

Before the Handover, the British and Chinese governments agreed that mainland children born of Hong Kong parents would automatically receive the right of abode in Hong Kong after 1997. The Hong Kong government was worried about an influx of a large number of mainland children to Hong Kong after the Handover, so it passed the Right of Abode Ordinance to fill the 'loophole' in June of 1997. It set three criteria: first, only children born at the time that one of the parents was a Hong Kong permanent resident enjoy the right of abode in Hong Kong; second, children born out of wedlock do not have the right of abode; third, children adopted out of Hong Kong also do not enjoy this right. Human rights activists and legal experts questioned the change in the law and initiated legal action to seek clarification in the courts. In January 1999, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal ruled that the Immigration Ordinance violated the Basic Law and that the right of abode should not be restricted by the time of birth of the child.

The government claimed that the estimated number of first- and second-generation of mainland children eligible to enter Hong Kong according to the ruling of the Court of Final Appeal was 1.67 million. It also claimed that the government needed HK\$710 billion to help the newcomers. Although these figures were heavily criticised by scholars, the general public panicked and supported the government in asking the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) in Beijing to reinterpret the Basic Law. In June 1999, the NPCSC overturned the ruling of the Court of Final Appeal, deciding that in cases where at least one of the parents of these mainland children had permanent resident status by birth or residence at the time of the birth of their children and that they had to remain in China to await their one-way permit to Hong Kong. The row about the right of abode in 2000 led to an arson attack on the Immigration Department in which several immigration officers were killed and a number of mainland migrants were arrested. The Society for Community Organisation (2001) at the time commented that the relationships between migrants and the locals hit rock bottom.

3.2.5.1 *Community Investment and Inclusion Fund*

NGO campaigns for community development in the 1990s eventually began to influence government policies. The SAR government decided to set up a HK\$300 million Community Investment and Inclusion

Fund in 2002 to address political instability and the social crisis. It stated that:

Hong Kong is at the crossroads – it is time for us to act together to build up the social capital of Hong Kong. This will enable us to move forward during this difficult time and work towards building a strong, caring and harmonious community (Health, Welfare and Food Bureau 2002:2).

The Fund sought to encourage a mutually supportive community and enhance the social networks of the poor, including the Chinese immigrants. It promoted community participation, mutual assistance, and social inclusion. The Fund accomplished these goals by ‘encouraging bottom-up solutions that seek to promote the development of social capital’ (Health, Welfare and Food Bureau 2002:5). Despite these good intentions, the development agencies and scholars welcomed the Fund with great caution. The government tends to favour institutional intervention in the form of formal groups, such as neighbourhood associations and committees. It is largely based on the assumption that migrants do not seek help from development agencies because of their ‘ignorance of community resources’ and ‘lack of eagerness in seeking help’. Therefore, formal intervention is necessary to assist them in ‘tapping community resources’ (Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Kwun Tong Integrated Service Centre 2000:22).

In stressing the significance of building social networks for migrants, development agencies tend to adopt a highly instrumental perspective. For instance, Lee (1999) suggests that development agencies need to strengthen their clients’ ‘positive’ social networks while protecting them from the ‘negative’ ones. Furthermore, in recognising the important role of informal networks, development workers tend to highlight the ‘unprofessional’ aspect of informal support to justify their intervention. The Fund also encourages strategic partnerships with local organisations. This has led to the re-emergence of clan associations in creating social capital for their community members. Choi (2001) warns that this approach may reinforce social inequalities in communities while only aiding local elites in articulating their own interests on behalf of the poor (p. 208). Some scholars also argue that the ideology of the SAR government in community development is not that different from the colonial government’s ‘residual-technical welfare model’. Lee and Edwards (1998) suggest that the present government still strongly believes in individual efforts, mutual help within the family, and the role of education and training in facilitating social assimilation. The negative attitudes toward the poor and the refusal to set an official poverty line and a minimum wage are examples of this.

3.2.5.2 *Citizen rights, empowerment and the feminist movement*

Development agencies are disillusioned by what they regard as the government's inconsistent policies. On the one hand, the government builds social capital for migrants by community development. On the other, it victimises them by imposing constraints on their welfare rights. For example, mainland Chinese do not automatically enjoy the entitlement to social welfare unless they have been living in Hong Kong for more than seven years. Therefore, in recent years, a few NGOs have changed their strategies and have begun advocating migrants' welfare rights, stressing their contribution in mitigating the problems of an ageing population and sustaining economic development. Empowering the poor to recognise their civil rights by operating co-operatives and community-economy projects has gained much attention. These measures are intended to help poor households improve their economic condition through income-generating activities, to form a node of social networks within communities, and to enhance members' interest and confidence in community participation. Besides these activities, NGOs also seek to bring about multifaceted empowerment and 'break away from the constraints of government-centred provision' (Lui and Wong 1995:46).

A number of development agencies have adopted a feminist approach in examining the existing problems of migrants. They argue that the problems arise from power inequalities within families. The lack of financial potential of female migrants and their over-reliance on husbands place them in a subordinate position. These development agencies also challenge the government's adjustment policies for reinforcing women's roles as mothers and wives at home. The solutions, they suggest, include organising 'women-only groups' to form women's mutual-help networks and to raise consciousness through participation (e.g., Fung and Hung 1999).

3.3 **Social relations, culture and subjectivity**

In this section, I will draw upon documentation, local research, and my fieldwork to highlight some of the features of social relations, neighbourhoods, and livelihoods of the Chinese migrants in Hong Kong. I will identify some cultural characteristics, such as a strong sense of family, the ideology of success, and gender relations, in shaping their relations of co-operation and trust and cross-border movement. I also provide a broader picture by exploring their subjectivity in collective action and their preferred everyday co-operation.

Table 3.4 *Major sources of family incomes of new arrivals from 1998 to 2002*

	1998 (Q3) (%)	1999 (Q2) (%)	2000 (Q3) (%)	2002 (Q2) (%)
Wages	76.5	71.8	56.2	69.4
Financial assistance from relatives	13.2	12.4	23.9	12.8
Public assistance	10.5	6.6	15.5	12.5
Others	0	8.6	4.4	5.3

Source: HKSAR, 2002:12

3.3.1 *Informal social networks*

Numerous quantitative studies that look at the social networking patterns of Chinese migrants in Hong Kong have been conducted. They all draw a similar conclusion: migrants tend to rely on informal support networks and rarely utilise formal ones. For example, a study on the employment situation of female migrants by Chan and Leung (1999) suggests that 41 per cent of respondents rely on their relatives in the search for employment while only 2.7 per cent do so through the Labour Department. In terms of friendship, 78.5 per cent of the young new arrivals aged 20 to 24 respond by saying that the working place is the most common place for them to make friends while only 3.2 per cent do so through social service organisations (Hong Kong International Social Services 1997).

The sources of family incomes for migrants also reflect the significance of informal networks. Table 3.4 shows that wages are their key source of family income. However, when the families were hit by economic hardship, such as during the high unemployment rates in 2000, they turned to their relatives for financial assistance. Interestingly, the number seeking help from the government through public assistance remained relatively stable.

While acknowledging the significance of informal social networks in migrants' livelihoods, a number of scholars have shown their concern for the fragile and unsustainable nature of these networks (e.g., Wong Fu Keung 1997). They are also worried that these informal networks do not have the capacity to meet the diverse needs of migrants including the provision of professional advice.

3.3.2 *Strong Chinese familism and face-saving mentality*

The term, Chinese familism, is coined by Lau (1982), which is used to characterise the culture of Chinese families. Migrants frequently turn to social networks on the mainland to seek emotional support, food, and resources. Exchanges between borders are a regular feature. There

are no specific data for the cross-border movements of migrants, but a study by the Department of Transport (2001) suggests that more than 45,800 residents in Hong Kong visit their families in China at least once a week. I have observed that young migrant adults, aged 19 to 25, tend to go to China after work on Saturday and return to Hong Kong on Monday morning to work. The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1995) has expressed concern that this high cross-border mobility may increase the difficulties migrants have in adjusting to their new lives in Hong Kong. Efforts by NGOs to form groups for these migrants may generate an unexpected negative consequence – posing a dilemma for migrants by making them juggle between active participation in Hong Kong and maintaining close relationships with their families and friends in China.

The reliance of migrants on informal support and keeping matters inside their own families and kin groups reveal that they have a strong tendency toward self-help, self-sufficiency, and a strong culture of Chinese familism. This culture regards familial interests as the primary consideration and places the greatest emphasis on ‘earning a lot of money’. Family matters should also be kept within the family. Lam and Song (2002) argue that the idea of filial piety and the norm of feeling an economic obligation toward their families remains strong amongst these young adults.

The modes of interactions among migrants are also shaped by the concept of ‘face’. Seeking help from their informal networks is not necessarily a conscious, strategic act. As Fairbank suggests:

Face saving has been a social matter. Personal dignity has been derived from the right conduct and the social approval it has secured. ‘Loss of face’ came from the failure to observe the rules of conduct (1979:135, quoted in Yan 1996: 136).

Keeping good ‘social face’ or one’s moral reputation regulates the degree of co-operation among migrants. The internal feeling of shame and guilt, and the anxieties about how people will judge them, motivate migrants to maintain social reciprocity with their kin and friends. This is related to Mason’s idea of ‘relational agency’ and it is not necessarily, as Yan (1996) suggests, a calculated act based on the fear of external social sanctions. Choi (2001) has some insightful observations about the daily interactions between Chinese female migrants in Hong Kong. She suggests that ‘women do not hesitate to disclose their disputes with their mothers-in-law, [but] they are very cautious about exposing conflicts with their husbands’ (p. 295). Her explanation is related to ‘social face’ – migrants complain about their mothers-in-law because they do not personally choose them, however, women do

choose their own husbands. Having a bad husband reflects their own personal failure and they fear 'becoming a joke in the community' (p. 296).

3.3.3 *Implications for collective action*

Strong Chinese familism amongst migrants emphasizes social stability and the avoidance of conflicts. The older generation of migrants fled China during the period 1950s-1970s because they were weary of political movements and the instability on the mainland and they regard Hong Kong as a place of social stability. The younger generation came to Hong Kong after the 1980s to reunite with their families. The painful experience of resettlement, together with the heavy debts incurred by having to bribe immigration officers in China, forced them to place more emphasis on earning a living and on relational harmony. A strong preference for social stability implies that they prefer to withdraw from activities which they perceive could lead to the disruption of social order and harmony. Preserving a high level of social stability, as Lau (1982) argues, can sometimes come at the 'price of injustice' and 'a loss of national pride' (p. 72).

The migrants' heavy reliance on their relations and friends for finding a job and frequent cross-border interactions play a decisive role in shaping their social behaviour. In order to secure stable livelihoods, they do not want to be labelled as 'troublemakers'. They feel that it is necessary to behave in accordance with people's expectations. This social pressure explains why few migrants apply for public assistance. The application form for assistance requires migrants to submit letters from family members and relations on the mainland to prove that they cannot financially support them. Legislative Councillors argue that this criterion is so harsh that the needy have to withdraw from the application procedures in order to save 'face' (memo of meeting in Health and Welfare Bureau on 12 June 2000).

Maintaining close ties with family members in China is not without its costs. The experience of migrant communities throughout the world indicates that sending remittances back home is a very common practice (e.g., de Haan 1999). However, local studies on remittances from Hong Kong are rather scant because of the extreme sensitivity of the issue. The only research available dates from 1982 by the Wong Tai Sin District Board. It asked 200 migrant households how much they sent to their hometowns. The result suggests that they remitted approximately one-fifth of their monthly incomes, which was obviously a great financial burden on the poorest households. Strong family obligations mark an 'insider-outsider' distinction. Because personal behaviour and practices focus on the interests of family members, those who are not

regarded as part of 'us' will be excluded. Moreover, while strong family collective responsibilities provide a source of support, this can generate considerable pressure and high expectations (Lam and Song 2002).

3.4 Neighbourhood

Local research on Chinese migrant neighbourhoods tends to focus on aspects of geographical distribution, poor living conditions, and high rents. On the other hand, neighbourhood relations between migrants and local residents have not been adequately explored. A common assumption is that migrants living in cramped living conditions is the cause of tense relations amongst residents, which then leads to worsening conditions in the neighbourhood, and this needs to be questioned. I will draw on my field observations and interviews to examine how the physical infrastructure and living conditions shape neighbourhood relations, the social lives, and community participation, and how migrants respond to these constraints.

3.4.1 *Geographical location*

The majority of migrants are concentrated in the old urban and industrial centres of Hong Kong, where jobs and factories were found in the past. For example, 10.4 per cent of newcomers cluster in Kwun Tong district in East Kowloon and 9.5 per cent in Shamshuipo in the West (HKSAR 2001). Attempts have been made to explain the geographical redistribution of migrant communities. In migrant literature, two competing theories have attempted to provide the answer. Rational choice theorists suggest that migrants cluster in a particular area, which provides them with social infrastructure and is close to a source of employment. These features of maximising returns and minimising costs contrast with the structuralists' view; they believe that the existence of ethnic communities is the results of racial discrimination and pre-existing kin networks. Prejudices towards newcomers are so strong that the migrants need to live together to establish a sense of solidarity. Living close to relatives and friends in a close-knit community also helps increase the information flow, particularly concerning the availability of jobs (Philip et al. 1989).

How well do these models fit into the context of migrants in Hong Kong? When I asked the newcomers why they chose to live there, they suggested that they simply moved to an area where their family members already lived. The family reunion motive suggests that the residential locality of the present generation is highly dependent upon the previous generation. This generational effect is, nevertheless, seldom dis-

cussed either in rational choice or structuralist theory texts. When I asked the partners or parents migrants the same question, they said they had settled in the old city areas where jobs were available and the cost of transportation was low. However, at the same time, the presence of family was important because their relations and close friends facilitated their social adjustments by initially providing them with accommodations and information about jobs. Thus language and birthplace, still play important roles in a migrant's choice of residence, and, meanwhile, clan associations are more active in these areas (diary 18/03/02, 11/04/02). Therefore, the rational choice and structural theories both bear some relation to reality, but neither of them can fully explain the complex picture of the geographical distribution of the migrants.

3.4.2 *Physical infrastructure and social participation*

The majority of migrants in the old city centres live in private apartments which were built thirty to forty years ago. The buildings are usually six to eight storeys high, with poor facilities, are very densely populated (about 10 to 15 square feet per person) and of mixed tenancy (about 3 to 4 households per flat). The rent on a 40 to 50 square foot room is generally somewhere between HK\$1,500 to HK\$2,000 per month, which is about one-third to one-half of their monthly household income (Law 1996). Summers are particularly uncomfortable and hot because tenants cannot afford air-conditioning. The over-crowded living conditions are illustrated in box 3.1.

In the first and second waves of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s, it was a common arrangement for a few, single, male newcomers to live together in small flats and share the rent. However, when they gradually became reunited with their families, this arrangement became unfeasible. Box 3.1 shows the flexible use of space and that most activities are bed-based, including homework and meals. Television is often the only form of entertainment at home. The over-crowded environment has also affected the sex lives of numerous mi-

Box 3.1 *Ah Ming (Ah Ching's daughter), nine years old, born in China*

She lives with her mother, brother and sister in a tiny room with only one small window. Their room only accommodates a double-deck bed and a few cupboards. Ah Ming usually lies in bed to read and do her homework. Watching TV is her only entertainment at home. She says she lacks the room, so she joins the girl guide group at school to be able to be outside once in a while.

Source: own research

grant couples. A female migrant told me: 'My husband and I don't even dare to make love because we are worried that it'll wake our children up' (interview with Ah Ching 16/03/02).

Sharing public facilities such as toilets, kitchens, and telephones, and dividing up the electricity and water bills among households are common features of co-residence. From my observations, neighbours make attempts at space co-ordination. For example, households cook at different times to avoid having to compete for space in the kitchen and they try to keep phone calls short. These unwritten rules are made informally in their everyday interactions. However, the harmony may be short-lived and is often fragile because sharing a small space often leads to conflicts. Arguments about who uses what and who should pay more are common. Furthermore, competition for public spaces, such as the lobby, often leads to hostilities between newcomers and older residents.

3.4.3 *Social relations between family members*

The restricted living arrangements can also impinge upon the social relations between various family members. Young people feel constrained at home because they cannot play the music loud or they do not have a proper table to work on. They want to stay outside and enjoy the space and freedom of being outdoors. While some child migrants go to public libraries after school, some young adults end up staying out till midnight. Limited indoor space also affects their social lives. They hardly ever invite friends over. Instead, they meet their friends in public spaces like parks. This is a big contrast to the home-oriented approach in China where their village homes in were much larger. The size and pleasantness of one's accommodations are important because this brings social acceptance – or shame. As a migrant exclaimed: 'You just don't want to show your friends in Hong Kong how crudely you are living' (interview 10/07/02). This restricted personal space explains why migrants, particularly the female migrants, are more visible in public spaces like local parks, McDonald's restaurants, shopping centres, and outside schools. They feel more comfortable in parks where their children have the space to run around and play with other children. They can also take advantage of the free air-conditioning in shopping centres. When migrants get together, they feel less lonely and vulnerable, which encourages even more migrants to come out and join them.

3.4.4 *Avoiding neighbourly contacts as a strategy*

To compensate for the limited private spaces, tenants tend to compete for public space and resources. Areas such as kitchens and toilets often become areas of conflict, and the sharing of public facilities can easily turn relationships tense and sour. This is particularly the case when poverty-stricken families squabble for scarce resources. In my observations, however, open conflicts seldom occur. Direct confrontations are regarded as highly undesirable because neighbours are in constant interaction with one another on a daily level in confined spaces. If a conflict does break out, it may cause unnecessary embarrassment and make everyone's life uncomfortable. Minimising one's close contacts with the neighbours is a logical way to avoid unnecessary conflicts and to protect one's personal privacy because living in close quarters can become a form of social control. Gossip like who came home late last night, with whom, and who was that on the phone, spreads quickly and exerts a considerable amount of social pressure on tenants.

Furthermore, neighbours also demonstrate their ability to constantly negotiate the use of public space. Neighbours work out ways to organise and re-organise their activities, exhibiting great flexibility in an effort to avoid friction. For example, some neighbours take showers in the afternoon to avoid the busier periods in the evening while others prepare their meals very late so that they have free use of the kitchen. If the kitchens are occupied, some migrants simply do not cook and make instant noodles instead. To avoid a landlord's interference, migrants make long-distance phone calls when everyone is not at home. When private spaces become overcrowded, men often leave to wander the streets. Gossip and complaints about their landlords and older tenants are common and are viewed as a way of resisting unfair treatment. In a nutshell, avoiding frequent contact with one's neighbours, from a migrant's point of view, is one way of preserving neighbourly harmony.

3.5 **Gender and authority**

The government's idea of strengthening the family in an effort to promote community development has been strongly criticised for paying too little attention to the access and distribution of resources within families. The strategic partnerships with local organisations, suggested by the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund, also fail to adequately consider gender relationships within organisations and communities. For example, Choi (2001) argues that clan associations exhibit hierarchical power relationships based on gender, age and genera-

Table 3.5 *Comparing perception of social status between local and migrant women*

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	
	<i>Local women</i>	<i>Migrant women</i>
1. A wife's career achievement should not be higher than her husband's.	20.4	37.6
2. Women only receive respect from family and relations if they have male children.	14.2	30.2
3. Wives should be able to reject their husbands' sexual advances.	76.5	47.2

Source: The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong, 1998:26

tion, and women are excluded from most formal ethnic networks and decision-making processes. Local studies that explore issues involving migrant women often tend to regard them as a 'problematic' group. The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (1998) interviewed 2,210 women to compare and contrast the perceptions of social status among local and migrant women. Table 3.5 shows that female migrants tend to believe that their career achievement should not be higher than that of their husbands, and they show their preference for male children as a way of gaining social status.

The Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centre (1999) also conducted a study on women's psychological health and found that the health of female migrants is much worse than that of their local counterparts. They conclude that female mainlanders have lower self-esteem and higher expectations of marriage. They also lack sufficient skills in managing their emotions and being involved in support networks.

3.5.1 *Ideal form of collective action*

While acknowledging that migrants' reliance on informal networks may perpetuate gender inequalities, questions as to why they do not make greater use the formal social services and networks is something that needs to be investigated. The Hong Kong Family Welfare Association (2001) raises the pertinent point that the Hong Kong's 'social worker system' simply does not exist in China. Their research also points out the misconceptions migrants have about social workers. For instance, many of them believe that social workers 'have special powers to influence the government to meet their needs' (p. 14). The expectations of migrants and social workers are also very different – new arrivals want direct advice from social workers, whereas social workers prefer their clients to make their own choices (p. 14).

Everyday co-operation by female migrants is generally not taken seriously by development workers because it does not fit into their ideal of collective action, which involves being both visible and functional.

For example, a study by the Tsuen Wan Caritas Community Centre shows that female migrants engage in many collective activities with their friends when their children are in school (1999:58). They go shopping together, chat in restaurants, and visit mutual friends. When their children are at home, they phone their friends or send letters to their mainland relations. They sometimes take their children to nearby playgrounds, markets, or schools where they then meet their friends. These activities may not necessarily be 'functional', but they are part of their collective lives. Lui and Wong (1998) therefore argue that collective action is not necessarily 'explosive and confrontational'.

3.5.2 *Complexity of gender relations*

Some local migrant studies tend to narrow gender down to women's issues and mistakenly create a dichotomy between 'men as oppressors' and 'women as victims'. The gender issues involving Chinese migrants in Hong Kong are far more complex and the location of suppression changes over time and space. In my personal interviews, a female migrant told me that she felt her marriage in Hong Kong had been 'an act of liberation' since it freed her from her authoritarian father and the oppressive village life. However, living in Hong Kong with her mother-in-law has made her social life very difficult since her mother-in-law does not accept her migrant friends.

As discussed earlier, men have been adversely affected by the process of economic restructuring. A few NGOs, such as the Hong Kong Caritas, have started recognising that their narrow focus in the past on female migrants has introduced biases against men. They have therefore begun viewing women and men's social lives as interdependent, rather than separate. They also set up mutual-help groups for men in an attempt to strengthen their support networks. An NGO organiser, in interviews, suggests that the women's group-sharing model is not always applicable to men because males hold onto their breadwinner roles so fervently that they want immediate and tangible help. The unstable nature of their jobs also makes their participation in groups more intermittent (diary 14/08/02).

3.6 **Migrant subjectivity and experience**

Most of the migrant research by development agencies largely involves problem solving and intervention-oriented activities. Little attention is, however, paid to exploring the diverse perceptions migrants have of the issues that relate to them. For example, most studies stress high levels of dissatisfaction about Hong Kong's welfare system amongst mi-

grants. This, however, is in strong contrast to my fieldwork, which indicates that most migrants are content with the level of service because welfare in China is far worse. My finding is reiterated in Linda Wong's research (1998) on the changing welfare system in China. She argues that the collapse of the commune system, agricultural decollectivisation and growing marketisation since the Open Door Policy in 1979 have all resulted in very limited access to welfare amongst the poor of mainland China. User-payment policies have been widely adopted and villagers play a big part in social care provision. Urban people working for non-state firms do not receive social security, which may provide an explanation for the limited public participation of migrants in Hong Kong because they feel 'better-off' than their mainland relations. While it is understandable that development agencies want more resources from the government to improve services, they also need to explore the complexity and diversity of the migrants' perceptions.

Another example is the discourse of discrimination. Most research presents a false dichotomy between 'local people as oppressors' and 'migrants as victims of discrimination' and conclude that the 'identity clash' between local residents and migrants is inevitable. However, the picture is far more complex than this. The Society for Community Organisation (2001) reports that migrant responses to discrimination are very diverse. While some simply ignore the situation, believing discrimination is unavoidable, others react positively and work hard to climb up the social ladder. Some even try to defend themselves by living and behaving like Hong Kong locals (p. 11).

3.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have historically located mainland Chinese migrants in Hong Kong since 1945. The history of migrants is characterised by the constant movement and resettlement across borders, their diverse origins and their changing natures and compositions. All of this is further complicated by Hong Kong's internal politics and the external environment represented by China, both before and after colonial rule. The transformation of immigration policies, the process of economic restructuring and the diverse responses of local organisations and development agencies have painted a very complex picture of migration and have only partially explained the rising popularity of community development in Hong Kong since the 1990s. Nevertheless, the success of community development lies in our understanding of migrant social values and cultural practices. Drawing on local literature and my fieldwork, I have discussed migrant social relations, neighbourhood, gender, and subjectivity. Their reliance on informal networks, their under-

utilisation of formal services and tight cross-border ties are largely shaped by the strong philosophy of familism, their perception of high social mobility and their face-saving mentality. Owing to their cramped living conditions, migrants withdraw from, rather than engage in, contact with their neighbours in order to preserve a fragile harmony. Their experience of migration and their perception of welfare also affect their incentives and expectations of community participation.

The significance of these social and cultural features will become clear in the following chapters when I begin to discuss community development and collective action in Hong Kong as illustrated by my case studies. In the next chapter, I begin by exploring the incentive issues of collective action, examining the complex reasoning for social co-operation. In chapter 5, I will look into the role of institutions in community involvement, exploring how socially embedded institutions shape the migrants' preferences for institutional arrangements. Meanwhile, chapter 6 will discuss the relationship between authority and relations of trust.

4 Investing in Social Capital? – Considering the Paradoxes of Agency in Social Exchange

4.1 Introduction

Neo-institutionalists argue that at the heart of the dilemmas of collective action lies incentive. The economic approach of institutions, which is largely based on the assumption of bounded rationality, suggests that individuals are selfish and calculating, and the temptation of free-riding is so strong that co-operation between individuals is impossible. To enforce collective action, the right institutional framework needs to be designed, so that individual incentives are aligned to be consistent with the desirable collective outcomes (World Bank 2003).

The neo-institutional school makes two key assumptions regarding human behaviour, which distinguish it from the neo-classical approach. Firstly, this approach is based on the premise of bounded rationality. It recognises the problems of asymmetrical information and imperfect market structures, which prevent individuals from making the 'best' decisions. They propose a 'choice-within-constraints' framework and assume that actors will pursue their best interests by making choices within these institutional constraints (Ingram and Clay 2000:525). This perspective, however, shares similar premises with the rational choice model which believes that individuals behave strategically up to the limits of their abilities. Secondly, neo-institutionalists highlight the role of institutions in the governing of human behaviour and suggest that institutional forces are involved in the moulding of individual preferences and purposes (Vandenberg 2002). Opportunism is thus minimised because it is supported by relations of trust, so that the monitoring and enforcement costs can be reduced. The objective is to integrate 'individual choices with the constraints institutions impose on choice sets' (North 1990:5).

Critics, however, have voiced their misgivings about the over-simplification of human motivation, which disregards the diverse and subjective meanings of co-operation people are involved in their everyday lives. They argue for a more complex model of agency which takes into account the role of routines, the perceived 'right way of doing things' and moral concerns (e.g., Kabeer 2000).

In this chapter, I will use the concept of ‘agency’ to explore the issue of incentives and motivations underlying the structure of social interaction. It allows me to examine how people make decisions that address participation and non-participation in specific contexts and various circumstances. This is particularly relevant to my research on Chinese migrants in Hong Kong. Making decisions, consciously or unconsciously, on what and when to reciprocate, and about why and how they are involved in the processes of social co-operation, feature in the daily lives of the migrants. Their intricate social engagements move across the border between mainland China and Hong Kong and reflect the nature of individual obligations to family, kinship, and wider social relations.

4.2 Modelling of incentives in the mainstream social capital model

4.2.1 *Strategic agency*

A distinctive feature of the neo-institutional model of social capital is its basic assumption that individuals are rational economic men who are motivated primarily by self-interest, who consciously construct their social relations with purpose and reason. This standpoint is particularly explicit in Ostrom and Ahn’s analysis of trust:

... an agent *assesses* that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action (Ostrom and Ahn 2003:xvi, my emphasis).

This suggests that individuals always undergo a conscious reasoning process in determining which methods are used to achieve certain goals. It fits into Ostrom’s argument that social capital can be appropriately modelled as ‘a self-conscious investment process’. She goes further by insisting that ‘there is really little question about the *conscious choice* made when one joins associations, [and] forgoes an immediate payoff in order to follow a norm of reciprocity’ (2003:xxxi, my emphasis). Although the rationality of individuals is often bounded, they are still capable of making choices between competing alternatives to maximise their personal utility. Since it is assumed that human beings calculate possible outcomes in a course of action, the process of decision making is certain and predictable. This suggests a high degree of predictability regarding human agency. The idea of strategic agency, however, faces severe challenges. For example, Fine et al. (2003) critically point out that this perspective leads us to believe that social connections function as ‘an investment strategy’, which over-simplifies the complexity of human interaction (p. 19).

4.2.2 *Linear transformation of agency*

Institutional scholars have also predicted that, once their institutional designs are implemented, agents will evolve from (self-) interest-oriented into norm-guided individuals. The assertion is that individuals necessarily become rule-followers. Uphoff (2000) puts it this way:

... norms, values, attitudes and beliefs by creating expectations about how people *should* act, by implication create expectations about how people *will* act, for example, whether they will be co-operative or not (p. 4, emphasis by Uphoff).

The transformation of agency is primarily based on the assumption that individual incentive structures are, and can be, restructured by group membership, role expectation, and clearly defined authority (backed up by sanctions). Rules create expectations and individuals behave themselves and follow others' expectations since they feel tremendous pressure if they refuse to co-operate (Ingram and Clay 2000). This model suggests the conscious decision of individuals to abide by the norms and the behaviour of norm-following is largely a consequence of rational deliberation and cost calculation. An individual's conformity is due to the fear of punishment, including informal social sanctions and exclusion. This, once again, reflects the opportunistic and calculating nature of agency. Individuals are not only capable of calculating the possible outcomes to any particular course of action, but also select an act based on calculating the value of the consequences associated with it. Ostrom and Ahn (2003) put it this way:

... [agents] determining whether to extend trust to others involves *calculations* as to whether others are known to be trustworthy (p. xxxi my emphasis).

4.2.3 *Individualised and optimistic agency*

The social capital model also places emphasis on negotiation. It considers that community participation can open up the possibilities for the poor to gain access to new space, resources, and rules. Community members involved in the processes of rule negotiation and interpretation can develop a workable and agreed-upon set of rules. Through negotiation, the diversity of interests is recognised and solved (Ostrom 1995). This perspective, however, suggests that individuals involved in explicit and implicit negotiations are motivated by self-interest. It also assumes that agents are able and willing to pursue their self-interests via negotiations, and that they are free from constraints in the process

of negotiation. For example, Mahmud (2003) argues that ‘people can define their own spaces for participation and their own entry points of change’ (p. 31). Critics are concerned with the romanticisation of the process of negotiations and the neglect of structured constraints which people face.

4.3 Complexity of motivations

What drives people to co-operate has generated fierce debate (Alkire and Deneulne 2002; Gamson 1992). What *actually* prompts migrants and local people to participate in the three aforementioned NGOs, for instance? Does the over-reliance on economic incentives leave any impact on long-term participation?

My research shows that the involvement of some group members was motivated by tangible benefits. A few migrants in interviews frankly admitted that they were attracted to various services and courses provided by the organisations, such as cooking classes and free tuition. They attended the monthly bazaars in the community currency project since the second-hand goods sold by the local people, such as cooking utensils, were useful to them. Some local people, especially the women, needed other members to help them with their childcare arrangements. Others were involved in the groups mainly because of their close relationships with the social workers. From their perspective, they felt that turning their invitations down might affect their long-term welfare.

While economic motivation plays a role in community participation, other factors are highlighted in interviews. In the case study of the community currency project, the social workers kept reminding the members to collect the currency after offering help to one another. Their insistence was well-intended because the strong demands for currency generate more demands for the exchange of goods and services, so it kept the system running. On many occasions, however, I observed situations where numerous members failed to ask for rewards after providing services. Some of the interviewed expressed their distaste for asking other members to pay. Some academics who helped evaluate the project regarded this as a bad sign because the members did not value the currency very highly because it was not real money. My interviews, however, revealed that the members had different opinions. They reiterated that they considered it too greedy to demand rewards. They felt that helping one another was simply the ‘right’ way to do things. One interviewee put it this way: a good community ‘needs love, not money’. Some volunteers felt a strong sense of commitment to their community work. It was this moral obligation that motivated

both the middle class and poor working class to participate in the exchange.

It has to be recognised that over-reliance on economic benefits to motivate individual participation has its downside. It is unrealistic and unsustainable for financially stretched NGOs to provide tangible benefits in the long run. In the female migrant support group, rumours about uneven distribution of resources have aroused suspicions, jealousy, and friction amongst its members.

4.3.1 *Wider motivations in decision making*

Sen (1977) warns that agents easily become 'rational fools' once they are continually modelled as self-interest-driven. He proposes some ideas about the roles of obligation and commitment in our everyday lives. For example, in my research, most of the senior elders in the clan associations are volunteers and are no longer paid employees, but they still play an active role in the daily activities of the associations. In interviews, they have stated that it is an act of honour and respect to be trusted by the other members. They want to contribute to the associations because they 'owe' so much to the associations. It is, therefore, desirable to be considered trustworthy with a sense of moral commitment and pride, as well as the desire of doing their part for the good of the community to which they belong. These are the underlying powerful motivating forces (interview with Mr. Chung 15/09/02).

Filial affection, duty, and obligation are all strong feelings the children naturally have because of the care and nourishment their parents have given them. Cua (2003) argues that this is strong in Confucian Chinese societies where filial piety is 'based on a sense of continuity with one's parents and ancestors and a devotion to further such continuity' (p. 793). Within the congested Hong Kong context, filial affection plays a crucial role in various habitation arrangements, which has come to be known as 'modified extended families' (Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups 2002). In Hong Kong, unlike the traditional extended family structure, family members are unable to live under the same roof, but the flow of emotional, financial, and mutual support between family members continues unabated because of filial obligations. Here is an example.

Miss Li's account, in box 4.1, reveals a woman trying to be flexible to adjust to changing needs. Because of the limited amount of space, she and her brother cannot live with their father, but the proximity between their flats makes it possible for her to see and cook for her father every day. She further notes: 'I feel it is my responsibility to take care of him. He is old and lonely. We try our best to make him happy'. It is this sense of moral responsibility that keeps the family intact and the fact

Box 4.1 *Miss Li, 20 years old, arriving in Hong Kong in 2001*

Her father came to Hong Kong when she was very young. Her father, aged 65, is a retired construction worker. She and her older brother have come to Hong Kong to look after her father who lives in a small flat in Mong Kok (an old urban area) with five other tenants. Because it was already overcrowded, Miss Li and her brother could not live with him and so they moved to a flat next door. She visits him every morning and cooks for him, does the ironing, and leaves for work at 2:00 p.m. After work at 9:00 p.m., she returns to her own flat where her brother usually cooks for her, because – by then – she is exhausted.

Source: own research

that siblings also help one another makes this living arrangement possible.

Spiritual merit, as a motivating force, is seldom discussed in an urbanised context because we tend to believe that rationalism replaces superstition to guide our daily activities. In Mary Douglas's (1987) analysis of how institutions work, however, she argues that spiritual merit still plays a role in our social reciprocal behaviour, and is not necessarily undermined by the forces of modernisation. This fits into my observation that traditional superstition and customs remains salient in guiding migrants' moral behaviour and instructing them on what they can and cannot do. This is the case during the Lunar New Year when exchanging *lai see* (cash gifts, literally, 'lucky money') among family members, kin, neighbours and friends remains a very common social practice in Hong Kong and mainland China. Married couples traditionally offer *lai see* to the unmarried. Although many interviewees find the Lunar New Year very stressful because *lai see* puts a tremendous financial burden on them, they continue to observe the custom, regardless of how poor they are. As a migrant suggested: 'I don't want to stop giving *lai see*; I am worried that it may bring us bad luck'. Spiritual concerns, as this example illustrates, continue to have an effect on the social exchange behaviour of migrants.

4.3.2 *The complex reasoning of agency*

Agents, from the neo-institutional perspective, are also assumed to be capable of ranking the desires in order of preference. The rankings are supposedly relatively stable over time. However, in real life, migrants often have to juggle a lot of conflicting desires. For example, when migrants are asked what they keep in mind when they are drawing upon

their social resources, they demonstrate their complex reasoning processes as they employ different social relations in the process of migration.

Ah Ching's account, in box 4.2, suggests that she and her family are able to turn to various social relations in the many procedures involved in migration, including meeting her future husband through a friend, borrowing money from her relatives to celebrate her wedding, leaving her children with her mother-in-law to work, borrowing money from friends to bribe immigration officials, as well as bribing her brother's friend to speed up the immigration process. In interviews, she reiterated that she did not put pressure on her friends to introduce men from Hong Kong to her, and that the meeting with her future husband was merely by 'chance'. She already felt old and that it was time to find a partner. She also felt it was 'not right' to reject her friend's good intentions. At the time, the idea of marriage was stressful because she was worried that villagers might have thought she was just after her husband's money, but she finally accepted his proposal because she felt he was nice and the marriage would set her parents at ease.

Ah Ching's story draws our attention to the complex reasoning behind an individual's action when someone draws upon social

Box 4.2 *Ah Ching, aged 38, arriving in Hong Kong in 1999*

She was born the oldest in a rural family in Mainland China. She felt great peer pressure because she was still unmarried at the age of 24. One day, her *friends* introduced to her a man from Hong Kong. Despite the age gap between them (about 30 years), she felt that he was honest and caring and she finally accepted his proposal of marriage. Her *parents* borrowed money from their *relations* to have a big wedding celebration for them. After her marriage, she moved to live with her *parents-in-law* in another village. She found a job in a factory and left her twin daughters with her *mother-in-law*.

She lived separate from her *husband* since he was working in Hong Kong. He came back home twice a month. In 2000, her husband borrowed HK\$30,000 from his *friends* and decided to bribe her *brother's friend* who worked in the Chinese Immigration Bureau. As a result, she jumped the queue and emigrated to Hong Kong with her *daughters*.

She returns home for the New Year festival. But her husband insists, she has to visit her *parents-in-law* before her own *family*.

Source: own research

resources. Firstly, some migration studies tend to suggest that rational and calculating migrants consciously mobilise their social capital in the process of migration. This rational model, however, is inadequate because we do not see a single cause for her migration. She finds it difficult to re-count a straightforward or strategic logic because there are different reasons in different situations and complex interconnections between various options. Secondly, agents do not always prioritise their reasons. Ah Ching finds it difficult to rank her reasons since her priorities change constantly over time and with evolving circumstances. In addition, the element of chance recurs time and time again in her narrative, for example, in the cases involving the bribes and the meeting of her future husband. She kept repeating over and over that she often makes the ‘wrong’ decisions and looks back upon them as mistakes. These kinds of comments pose a challenge to the assumption that individuals deal rationally concerning personal preferences as suggested by the rational choice model.

Compulsory social networking is also seldom mentioned in the social capital theory. Ah Ching’s case study shows that some of her decisions during the migration process were not always voluntary; for example, her husband insisted that she could not stay with her own parents before first visiting his family. The power dimension of social interaction has thus far been missing from current social capital thinking because it tends to be outcome-oriented, and the results are regarded as more crucial than the process.

4.4 Agent subjectivity

The poor have perspectives that are rarely taken into account when assigning values to social capital indicators. The obsession of outsiders with ‘unity’ and ‘social cohesion’, despite their best of intentions, fails to help us comprehend the livelihoods of the poor and can easily undermine their means of survival. The notion of subjectivity here informs us how local people do things. It combines history, experience, the perceptions of individuals, and the role of socialisation, education and culture in a wider context. In this section, I intend to use this concept to question Putnam’s notion of ‘good neighbourhood’ and Ostrom’s idea of the unalterable nature of social capital to further explore how significant human subjectivity is in informing us how local people do things.

4.4.1 *Disinvesting in neighbourhood*

Is an increase in neighbour interactions to create a 'good neighbourhood' really what migrants want? Capitalists encourage the poor to invest in their neighbourhoods because they believe that the strong norm of reciprocity generated among neighbours deters free-riding behaviour and makes co-operation possible. Intense neighbourly interactions are also supposed to help the poor solve their practical needs. However, this suggestion fails to adequately capture the real needs of migrants in the context of neighbourhood in Hong Kong. In my research, respondents avoided contact with their neighbours as their strategy for dealing with overcrowded living conditions and as a way of reducing unnecessary conflicts that arise from situations of limited space and shared facilities. The following case study is an example:

Ah Ming, in box 4.3, expresses a deep sense of frustration about her current living conditions and she really wants to move because of the tiny rooms, the poor facilities and limited amount of space. She notes that her ideal neighbourhood must include these three basics: a bigger flat with an independent toilet and kitchen, a lift, and supportive neighbours who are not nosy. Her ideal neighbourhood is also constructed in comparison to three different neighbourhoods: her existing poor neighbourhood, her well-off classmates' neighbourhood, and her previous neighbourhood in China. Encouraging migrants to invest in

Box 4.3 *Ah Ming (Ah Ching's daughter), 9 years old, born in China*

Ah Ming lives with her mother, younger sister, and brother in a tiny, hot, damp room with only one small window. Their living space is only 60 square feet and can only accommodate a bunk bed and a few cupboards. Ah Ming usually lies in bed to read and do her homework. Watching TV is her only home entertainment. Her family has to share the toilet, kitchen, and telephone and share the electricity and water bills with four other tenants. Quarrels and fights occur occasionally. Ah Ching sometimes avoids cooking in the kitchen in the evening by simply preparing canned food and instant noodles for dinner, rather than properly cooked meals. Ah Ming lives on the seventh floor but the building has no lift. Walking up and down at least twice a day can be an effort. Because of all these constraints, rather than return home at the normal time of 4 p.m., she stays at school for an extra two hours. She says she has no sense of belonging to where she lives.

Source: own research

their *existing* neighbourhood, therefore, does not necessarily suit their needs and aspirations.

4.4.2 *Undeletable nature of social capital*

Putnam et al. (1993) and Ostrom and Ahn (2003) both claim that social capital will not be depleted through use. As Putnam et al. (1993:170) note: ‘other forms of social capital, too, such as social norms and networks, increase with use and diminish with disuse. For all the reasons, we should expect the creation and destruction of social capital to be marked with virtuous and vicious circles’. However, poor migrants with limited resources may have differing rationales and views on help-seeking behaviour. Although help is available, they may not seek it because they may not want to deplete already limited social resources. They may also want to reserve or accumulate it until a day when they desperately do need help. This is highly related to personal experience. For example, one respondent from a rural village suggested that his parents reminded him to be cautious about requesting help from villagers and friends. He observed that ‘you really don’t know what tomorrow will bring’. He thus naturally postponed seeking any help until he really needed it.

4.5 **Routine, habit and precedent**

To highlight an agent’s subjectivity and reflexivity does not mean that individuals who draw upon their knowledge of the rules of society are necessarily conscious or calculating. This touches upon the issue of intentionality. Edwards et al. (2003) points out that social life is not always generated consciously via individual choice. Both individual and collective histories sometimes ‘unconsciously generate the social construction of everyday life’ (p. 13). People allow routines, habits, and precedents to make decisions for them. To be fair, the role of unconsciousness is not completely ignored by the neo-institutionalists. Ostrom and Ahn propose that ‘all choices can become somewhat *automatic* in a busy world ... Using a norm of reciprocity and co-operating with others may happen *without much conscious* internal debate by those who hold strong norms’ (2003: xxxi, my emphasis). Although the role of unconsciousness is occasionally acknowledged, it has not been thoroughly investigated because the mainstream approach to social capital believes more strongly in an individual’s conscious construction of social relations with purpose. Norm-following behaviour, based on the fear of punishment, for example, suggests a conscious and calculating act because agents are assumed to be very aware of making assessments

regarding future profits and losses. This is similar to Khalik's argument that 'belief is supposed to be forward looking, based on information about expected resources' (2003:xxvi).

In this chapter, I argue that the motive for trust and reciprocity is partially shaped by routine, precedent, 'community wisdom', and social conventions of which we are not always aware. Doing the right things, the desire to trust and to be trusted, and the willingness to reciprocate, are considered common traits of the human psyche. As Giddens suggests, routines provide the sense of ontological security that human beings need (1984). Moreover, Douglas notes that we sometimes allow institutions to think on our behalf, even if we are not conscious of this. How migrants use their 'common sense' or 'right way to do things' to achieve social co-operation is demonstrated by the following two examples.

4.5.1 *People routinely trust others*

I have noted that trust in a poor neighbourhood is not necessarily low when observing refrigerator-sharing strategies among neighbours. Not every family can afford a fridge, so neighbours share. Refrigerators are placed in kitchens or common areas where everyone can access them. This puts a tremendous strain on monitoring who gets what, but most residents do not bother label their food. When I asked them if they were not worried about their food being stolen, they were surprised by my question. They pointed out that 'You cannot assume your neighbours are thieves. They seldom steal it, and we trust each other' (interview with Mrs. Ma 10/9/02).

I suspect that gossip may be effective enough to prevent food pilfering; the low incidence of food thievery may further increase the confidence tenants have regarding one another. However, the unresolved issue remains what the trust is founded upon in the first place. A possible answer may come from the increasingly insecure lives led by migrants in Hong Kong. Poor migrants are too busy with the details of everyday living, many of which are beyond their control. The constant struggle with economic restructuring, unemployment, their children's educations, and their adjustment problems, as well as the increased anti-migrant sentiments usually leave them exhausted by the end of the day. In interviews, a majority of the migrants expressed a strong feeling that they had lost control of their lives. The sense of uncertainty regarding the outside world may be in direct contrast to their homes where things are more in their control. This gives them a reason to place their trust in their neighbours who may offer them a small sense of security (diary 23/08/02).

4.5.2 *The conflict-avoiding nature of routine*

The conflict-avoiding nature of routine is manifested in the space co-ordination efforts among immediate neighbours. The sharing of public facilities such as toilets, kitchens and telephones, and on the costs of electricity and water by households are common features of co-residence. From my observations, it is clear that the neighbours commonly made efforts to co-ordinate space. For example, households may try to cook at different times to avoid an overcrowded kitchen, and they may try to keep phone calls short. These unwritten rules are made informally in their everyday interactions.

Although stress is easily caused by their congested living environments, I noticed evidence of generosity in my research. These are usually comprised of maintaining good relationships with neighbours; for example, female migrants may share their hometown food delicacies, such as dried seaweed and mushrooms, with their neighbours. Meanwhile, the better-educated young adults may offer free lessons to neighbour children because they feel it is the right thing to do. The common gesture of sharing food is a demonstration of continuous mutual support among neighbours. They tend to preserve the continuity because they regard the continuous reciprocal flows as the right thing to maintain. This also explains why the previously discussed social practice of exchanging ‘*lai see*’ (lucky money) during the Lunar New Year remains a strong tradition in many neighbourhoods (diary 15/05/02).

4.6 **Injecting agency into livelihoods**

Putting agency into livelihoods seeks to achieve numerous objectives. Firstly, it places individuals in a context and challenges the atomised conception of the rational, economic model of social capital. Secondly, it aims to explore how the fluidity and negotiability of social networks are crucial to migrants’ livelihoods, and questions the simplistic dualism of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital advocated by Putnam (2000) and Woolcock (2000). Thirdly, placing the structural effects into the context is an attempt to highlight the *situatedness* and differentiation of agency.

4.6.1 *Relational reasoning of agency*

One of the limitations of methodological individualism, discussed in the previous section, is its individualistic and axiomatic nature. It assumes that people make decisions independent of any of their relationships and tries to explain social events by showing idealised ‘average’

individuals (Lawson 1997:93). Another assumption is that self-interested people relate to one another for the purpose of self-gain. This perspective, based upon an axiomatic view of human behaviour, fails to see that human beings are embedded in complex social relations and are involved in multiple networks, roles, and obligations. Here, I draw upon Mason's idea of the 'relational reasoning of agency' (2000) to examine the complex ways in which people are connected and 'think connected' (p. 22). She urges us to include the relational and contextual aspect of agency and consider the impacts of the existing and pre-existing structures of interaction on individual social behaviour to construct a more complex picture of social connections and livelihoods.

Interviewees always mentioned their connections to others. This relational nature of negotiations with others is especially intense at the family and kinship levels. For example, it may involve negotiations about childcare and the maintenance of neighbourhood networks with senior kin. Most of the time, the individuals did not create connections and become involved in reciprocal arrangements for themselves, but for others. For example, one migrant took her two children to a local Christian church because the church offers free education although she is herself a Buddhist. A poor migrant in another case study tried to cut expenses so that her husband could buy expensive gifts for his boss and reveals the role of women in their families' social capital formation (diary 22/05/02). The relational nature of livelihoods, however, is a double-edged sword. In a positive sense, it offers mutual information, support and cash, especially in the role of ethnic community networks which are widely regarded as a vital resource in ethnic studies. Yet, the dark side of a tight-knit community network may result in strict social control, conformity, excessive demands on group members, and restrictions of individual freedom (Portes 1998).

The increased salience of social networks does not necessarily mean that institutions of family and kin provide a reliable safety net for improvised households. The evidence does little to support the World Bank's claim that the family is the 'safety net' of the poor; nor Woolcock's assertion that 'poor people typically have plenty of bonding social capital' (2000:2). In my research, the family is not always a place of harmony and inclusiveness. Moreover, it is often not the migrants who do not want to maintain the relationships, but it is their family or kin members who are neither able, willing nor ready to offer help (Neale 2000).

One female migrant told me that after moving to Hong Kong, her husband was killed in an industrial accident. She wanted to take her husband's ashes back to his birthplace. To her astonishment, she was rejected by the villagers who believed that she had brought bad luck to her husband, and so she was no longer welcome there (interview with

Mrs. Lai 2/03/02). In another case, a divorced woman felt uncomfortable and embarrassed about going back to her hometown because divorcees are regarded as failures, who are likely to bring shame upon the family. Thus she only told her sisters about the divorce. A couple of months later, she decided not to return ever again. These cases demonstrate that families not only often fail to support the vulnerable, but also victimise them. In other words, whether family can be a safety net to the poor largely depends on whether those in need of support behave in acceptable ways. Moreover, help offered by kin can often be intermittent and fragile. For example, one new arrival was told by his uncle that he could live with him only if he paid rent in Hong Kong. This kind of behaviour by close relatives would be unacceptable in China.

4.6.2 *Changing social networks and priorities*

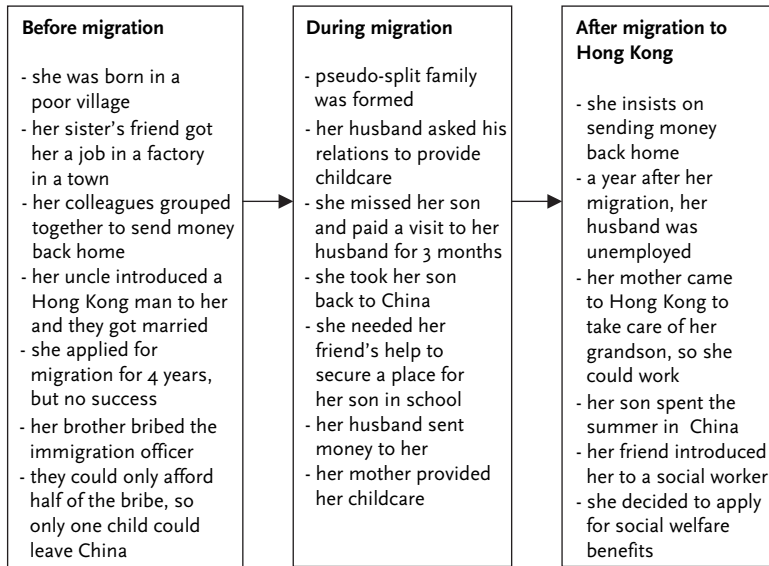
Social capitalists argue that the poor lack not only sufficient social capital, but also the ‘right’ kinds of social capital. For example, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) suggest that the poor ‘may have a close-knit and intensive stock of ‘bonding’ social capital that they can leverage to ‘get by’, but they lack the more diffuse and extensive ‘bridging’ social capital deployed by the non-poor to ‘get ahead’ (p. 227). However, in the following section, I question this assertion that weak ties are necessarily more desirable than strong ties. I also urge the examination of the significance of the changing fabric of relationships in the livelihoods of the migrants over time.

In my observations, migrants maintain multiple memberships by participating in wider spheres of exchange. They keep their established social ties on mainland China while simultaneously building new networks in Hong Kong. They define their social boundaries broadly and try to draw in distant kin and even those who are not even kin. They maintain their networks in as fluid, negotiable and open-ended a manner as possible, so as to avoid unnecessary conflict. In the example below, Sandy is a case study who reveals how she manages to keep her social ties intact, and how weak ties and strong ties play different roles at different times.

Sandy’s experience, in figure 4.1, sheds light on the overlapping and interdependent nature of bonding and bridging social capital, or strong and weak ties (Long 2001). It challenges the view that weak ties are necessarily more important than strong ties (Granovetter 1973). For the poor, the question is not weak or strong ties, but when is help necessary, how is help offered, and who offers support.

Table 4.1 shows that we need a holistic approach when we examine the complex livelihoods of migrants. When her husband was unemployed, he contacted his ex-boss, his friends, his brothers and kin. He

Figure 4.1 *Sandy, 40 years old, married with two children, arriving in Hong Kong in 1996*



Source: own research

also went to the Labour Department to apply for jobs. He used weak and strong ties simultaneously to maximise his chances. Sandy's experience reveals that she used neither weak nor strong ties in looking for a job. In her case, strong ties are not necessarily bad, because the money from her mother and sisters really helped to meet her immediate needs. The experience of migrants is that it is neither static nor

Table 4.1 *The use of ties in different life events affecting Sandy*

<i>Events</i>	<i>Relations</i>	<i>Strength of ties</i>
Her husband found a job	ex-boss, friends, labour department kin, brother	weak strong
She found a part-time job in a restaurant	advertisement outside the restaurant	neither strong nor weak because it is an element of chance
Borrowing money	mother and sisters	strong
Introduction to social workers	friends who met in a migrants' group	weak
Application for social welfare	social workers	weak

Source: own research

easy to drawing upon social relations. Their decisions to shift from one connection to another may reflect the dynamism of a migrant's livelihood strategies, as well as the changing nature of social ties. The changes may also suggest that multiple memberships are difficult to manage. The competing demand of different networks may exert tremendous pressure on a migrant's time, energy, health, and money that migrants struggle to maintain. Therefore, migrants moving from one group to another really depend on their immediate needs and the changes of circumstances. Here, I would like to use Sara Berry's argument to conclude that 'investment in social memberships take[s] time without necessarily enhancing [the poor's] access to or control over others' labour' (1993:200).

4.7 Romanticising equal negotiation

The social capital model places significant emphasis on negotiation. In her model of social capital, Ostrom (1995) suggests that: 'the investment in social capital frequently takes the form of *bargaining* over which rules will be adopted to allocate benefits and costs of collective action' (157, my emphasis). It considers that community members involved in the processes of rule negotiation and interpretation can develop a workable and agreed-upon set of rules. Through negotiation, the diversity of interests is recognised and solved (Ostrom 1995).

However, the processes of negotiation are influenced by an intersection of social relations. As Jackson (2002) points out, the emphasis on negotiation tends to romanticise the unity within communities and disregards the competition between agents in the same space. Diverse and internally differentiated participants represent complex positions and interests. The poor, the uneducated, and the sick may be placed at a disadvantage in articulating their needs.

4.7.1 *Social meanings of gift-exchange*

Here, I will explore the meanings of gift exchange to demonstrate the complex processes of negotiation and to urge for a deeper contextual analysis of the structure of socialisation. In measuring social capital, economists tend to count the numbers of exchanges between participants. The more social reciprocities between individuals that are recorded, the stronger the relations of trust and co-operation are assumed to be in a community. However, this approach has been severely criticised. Bourdieu (1977) argues that this outcome-oriented approach reflects economists' functional and narrow ideas of what 'productive' economic activities are. He suggests that the countless minor

tasks and co-ordinating works involved in maintaining social relations, although difficult to quantify, should not be regarded as 'economic uselessness' (p. 176). Both the process of negotiation and the context of social exchange, therefore, need to be explored rather than assumed. Lopez and Scott (2000) also argue that the structure of relations cannot be reduced to the aggregates of social exchange because power relations may be disguised in the process of exchange. Questions regarding who makes decisions and who exercises authority need to be answered. They worry that 'compulsory networking' may cause a high level of social co-operation (McGhee 2003). Field (2003) shows his concerns for the quality of interaction and 'qualitative differences in the nature of people's networks' (81).

Young (1997:54) suggests that gift exchange is 'basic to the generation of normative structures in most societies, precisely because it establishes relations of reciprocity'. However, how do we explain the everyday practice of giving and receiving gifts? From the institutionalists' perspective, gift exchange simply represents examples of offering and acceptance and forms social contracts that creates and reaffirms reciprocity between individuals. This view, however, fails to address the social embeddedness of agency and cultural embeddedness of decision making in maintaining relations of trust. To explore these dimensions, I invited a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Ma, to list the social events they had participated over the course of a year, and write down the presents they bought, and the related expenditures.

The case study, shown in table 4.2, illustrates that gift exchange is far more complicated than institutionalists have thus far suggested. Besides the number of gifts, many other factors are also considered in the process of gift exchange including the quality of the gift and spatial consideration (especially concerning the maintenance of social ties with family and relatives on mainland China), are significant. Questions, like to whom and when to return to China, are constantly being negotiated within domestic institutions. Gifts are not simply 'things', but carry a deeper social and symbolic meaning. Bourdieu (1977) argues that 'it is all a question of style, which in this case means timing and choices of occasions, for the same act – giving, giving in return, offering one's services, paying a visit, etc. – can all have completely *different meanings at different times*' (p. 6, my emphasis). Mr. and Mrs. Ma's account illustrates the dynamic and negotiable nature of reciprocity which is highly contextualised and subject to interpretation. For example, to cut expenditures, they only went back to China once last, not the usual twice. Mrs. Ma says that her neighbours provide childcare from time to time. She is not expected to buy them gifts or presents, but is expected to bring exotic village food from China and provide childcare in return.

Table 4.2 *Mr. and Mrs. Ma's engagement in social exchange and associated cost in year 2002*

<i>Social events</i>	<i>Cost and expenditure</i>
1. Neighbours provide childcare	Gift is not necessary, but food exchange and providing childcare in reciprocity are expected.
2. Home decoration and moving house	A few volunteers were arranged by social workers to help them move. They prepared a few bottles of cold drinks to show their gratitude.
3. Accepting friends' invitations to dinner in their homes	Gifts are necessary and are based on the degree of acquaintance and the class of their friends. They usually bought biscuits and cakes.
4. Festivals	Expenditure of the Lunar New Year is considerable. They gave <i>lai see</i> (lucky money) to family members, neighbours and friends. It cost them more than HK\$2,000 last year. Although they receive some <i>lai see</i> in return, their relatively small family tend to pay more than they receive.
5. Attending funeral	Their father attended his friend's funeral organized by a clan association. Giving consolation money (called white money) to the mourning family is an unwritten rule. This cost HK\$ 500*.
6. Wedding banquet	Family of four joined villagers in a wedding banquet. Cost HK \$1,000.*
7. Return to China	They bought cash, gifts and jewellery. Paying for meals is not unusual.

* The monthly household income of Mr. and Mrs. Ma is HK\$ 9,000 (approximate £650)
Source: own research

4.7.2 *Limited negotiation*

The room to manoeuvre for the poor, however, is limited. Informal rules about when, what, and how much to pay, especially in formal social meetings are already set. The question about when to pay is largely determined by the social calendar; for example, *lai see* (lucky money) is paid during the Lunar New Year and *white money* (consolation money) within a week of a funeral. Not paying on time is considered inappropriate and rude. What and how much to give is also mainly determined by normative values and social practices. For instance, gifts and cash are both welcome at weddings, but cash is more desirable at funerals because bereaved families need money urgently to pay for various unanticipated expenses. How much one should pay is also interesting. Although it is not formally written down, the standard payment at a funeral, such as in Mr. Ma's case, is about HK\$500. He noted that what you pay is based on 'common sense' or 'common practice', and people do not bargain or discuss it. He said that 'You will know when something's gone wrong when you hear the groom's or bride's relatives complaining that some families had paid far less than expected' (interview with Mr. Ma 15/10/02). Thus, social pressure and gossip constrain the room for negotiation.

In addition, the gift-giving culture is also affected by two other structural factors: seniority and identity. Junior members, according to kin hierarchy, are expected to pay an annual visit to their elders to show respect. This is quite a burden for poor families who have to buy not only gifts, but also pay the travel expenses, buy new clothes for their children, and be ready to pay for meals in restaurants. Poor migrants are also expected to be generous to their relatives on the mainland because they are 'Hong Kong citizens', who are all perceived to be richer and are thus supposed to help their poorer relatives.

4.8 Putting agency within structure

Despite the recognition of social norms in the social capital model, it tends to offer an overly optimistic account of agency whereby individuals are capable of drawing upon social relations without too many constraints. This brings us to the need to examine how migrants act within structures and explore how structural forces influence the exercise of agency. It is not my intention to suggest that constraints determine actions or structural constraints necessarily result in ineffectual agency. By bringing out the structural conditions of agency, I aim to highlight numerous objectives. Firstly, structural forces provide opportunities, as well as impose constraints, on the exercise of agency. Secondly, it highlights the significance of situation, context, and circumstances in shaping a complex life. Thirdly, agents are not homogeneous. As Held and Thompson (1989) argue, 'structuring' and 'being structured' are distributed unevenly in social life, and some people are more able to 'structure' events, while others have to accept an already structured social world (p. 254). Different agents face constraints and opportunities in various ways because of their different positions and histories.

4.8.1 Gendered moral rationality

Gender plays a key role in affecting how male and female migrants make claims on relational resources. My study suggests that female migrants faced more constraints in accessing informal childcare support than their male counterparts because of the gendered perception of childcare. In their experiences, neighbours and group members were more willing to provide assistance and childcare support to male members since they generally perceived men as natural breadwinners, and forcing men to stay at home with their children was seen as harsh. For some male migrants, it was considered socially acceptable to send one's children back to mainland China to seek help from families. Female

migrants, by contrast, were less fortunate. They faced more difficulties in gaining access to support through social relationships. Female interviewees complained that their female kin and girlfriends strongly believed that women were natural care-givers and thus should focus on their own families. Sending children back to their grandparents in China was not socially desirable because they would be regarded as ‘bad mothers’ for failing to put the interests of their children high enough. As a consequence, women were hampered in their efforts to participate in their communities or the labour market unless their children were old enough to take care of themselves, or unless they were willing to work a night shift. This finding is similar to what a study by Duncan and Rosalind (1999) discovered. In highlighting the experiences of mothers as single parents in England, they used the notion of ‘gendered moral rationality’ to conceptualise the gendered differences in making claims on relational resources and the constraints that limit the room to manoeuvre for female members.

In addressing the gendered constraints of participation, social workers in the community currency project relied on the advertisements (box 4.4). They anticipated that the adverts would emancipate the female migrants by providing babysitting assistance while also providing job opportunities for its other members. In the first half year, some

Box 4.4 *Childcare advertisements in community currency newsletters*

The community currency project produced a bi-monthly newsletter for members. Not only did it provide news about the project and new members, but also contained four pages of advertisements. Members were encouraged to advertise their services or request services they needed.

Social workers left a large section in the newsletter for babysitting advertisements. They rang members and encouraged them to seek babysitters via the advertisements. They also contacted members who could potentially provide services. The social workers were fully aware that they could easily match up service providers with service users via the telephone, but they believed that encouraging the use of the advertisements was less labour-intensive and more sustainable in the long term.

In order to develop mutual trust among members, the social workers made sure that the advertisers explicitly included contact details, their fees, location, and hours of availability.

Source: own research

members who were friends of the social workers placed babysitting advertisements in the newsletters. They set fees (in terms of community currency) that were much than the market rates, but none of them received any calls for regarding their services. I was curious about why the female migrants did not make use of this service. Interviewees pointed out that their financial situations were one of the constraints, because many of them did not have enough community currency. More importantly, they felt uncomfortable leaving their children with 'strangers', although the babysitters were all group members. They felt that they had to know a babysitter personally or by word of mouth before they could choose the 'right' babysitters. They were unable to adequately judge competence and trustworthiness of the advertising babysitters.

This case study sheds some light on the migrants' routinised thinking regarding childcare arrangements and the conventional wisdom regarding 'good' practices associated with finding babysitters. These informal institutions have a strong influence on their decision making and undermine the effectiveness of advertisements as a strategy in enhancing mutual interaction. Although the childcare services provided by group members were cheaper than the going market rate, economic incentives were not always sufficient in altering social interaction habits. Placing faith in institutional designs by building new institutions to tackle the downside of informal institutions although well-intentioned, failed to consider the complexity of institutions, especially the roles played by informal institutions, which is ultimately unable to convince individuals to pursue specific collective actions.

4.8.2 *Reshaping masculinity*

My research also shows that men are not necessarily in a better position to claim social resources. The process of economic restructuring has a deeper impact on men's abilities to maintain social relations. The de-industrialisation in the early 1980s during China's open door policy, the replacement of manufacturing by the service industries in the late 1980s, and the persistently high level of unemployment in Hong Kong since the Asian Financial Crisis in 1998 have all undermined men's traditional roles as breadwinners. In box 4.5, Mr. Au illustrates how unemployment affects his sociability.

The social lives of some men depend on money. Unemployment for some men means having to re-think their social activities budgets and re-organise their social lives. This is due not only to the financial considerations, but also because of the changing social identities caused by unemployment. Mr. Au's case (box 4.5) demonstrates that unemployment has transformed his social life patterns. For him, the restaurant

Box 4.5 *Mr. Au, 60 years old, unemployed steel worker*

Before he became unemployed, he used to have breakfast every day in a local Chinese restaurant at 7:00 a.m. He sat in the same seat for the past 10 years and he knew everyone sitting around him because they were all regulars. He read the newspapers and discussed politics with his friends. They all left for work at 8:00 a.m. However, since he became redundant, his life has changed a lot. The first few weeks, he managed to keep his old routines and he continued to go to the restaurant as usual. But what struck him was that everyone was leaving for work at 8:00 a.m. except him. He had nowhere to go. He felt useless and different from the rest. Because he was unemployed, he had to start to watch his money and so he decided to stop going to the restaurant a few weeks later to save money.

Source: own research

was an important social space in which to make social contacts, exchange information, and seek social support. Meeting the same group of male friends every day at the same time in the same place helped him establish strong bonds with the other breadwinners. However, once he lost his job, he could no longer afford meals in restaurants, and worse yet, he no longer felt that he belonged to his social network anymore and so he decided to stop going.

4.8.3 *Class and identity*

Social capitalists claim that investing in bridging, rather than bonding social capital, as, expands the opportunities for the poor to gain wider access to relational resources. However, it does not necessarily improve migrants' livelihoods, especially in situations where class division and mutual mistrust between classes prevails. The process of creating bridging social capital may end up creating more problems than it solves. Miss Lam's case may shed light on the class division in Hong Kong. She is a working-class migrant. After completing the employment re-training scheme, she got a cleaning job for a middle-class family. On her first day at work, to her surprise, she found a pile of cash in the toilet. She thought that this was her boss's way of testing her honesty. She immediately quit her job because she was worried that she might be held accountable for any losses in future and she also hates not being trusted. She chose not to confront her boss to find out what was going on. Although it was her first job with a middle-class family, she began to believe what she had heard from her colleagues in the employment training centre about how middle-class employers discrimi-

nate against employees from the mainland. The strong perception of class division makes cross-class co-operation difficult (diary 29/04/02).

Migrants possess multiple roles and identities in their everyday lives. These roles and identities, however, are not always compatible and migrants may find the competitive demands hard to manage. Ah Fung, for example, is someone I met in an abused-women support group after she had completed all of the legal procedures to divorce her abusive husband. In my analysis, she possesses at least seven different roles or identities simultaneously (interview 15/04/02). She is:

- a. a woman sexually abused by her ex-husband;
- b. a divorcee;
- c. a member of an abused-women support group;
- d. a client of her social workers;
- e. a mother of her two children;
- f. a new arrival from mainland China;
- g. a girlfriend of her new boyfriend.

Her dual roles, as a victim of family violence (role a) and a migrant from China (role f), help her receive social benefits more easily. However, her identity as a member of the abused-women support group (role c) and her new relationship with her boyfriend (role g) has generated conflicts. This is because the support group is a very feminist-oriented group, which campaigns for the independence of women. This culture has placed Ah Fung in a dilemma because she does not agree with the group's strong anti-male attitude; but because of the close relations she has with the group's social workers (role d) and for the future of her two children (role e, as they receive free education in the group), she has decided to stay in the group and tries to not discuss her personal relationship. But her 'affair', which was discussed in a meeting, has generated hostility. She observes that the group has gone downhill because of the rural and uneducated members. She says she may quit when she ultimately becomes financially independent.

4.9 Paradoxes of agency

Giddens's idea of 'duality of structure' suggests that social structures should not be viewed as external to and coercive toward actors. It is social actions that produce and reproduce structures (Giddens 1984). Based on a similar idea, Jackson argues that inequalities are considered 'an active process characterised by agency, as much as structural constraints' (2002:502). Most of the time, however, we tend to romanticise the transformative nature of agency, assuming that individuals want to make changes. Mahmud (2003) has a similar experience when he

analyses the concept of empowerment. He points out that most researchers have an implicit assumption that ‘empowered’ women should be totally independent of their husbands during the making of decisions. His study points out that most female respondents offer ‘unexpected’ responses – they prefer to make joint decisions with their husbands because of the powerful ideology of ‘togetherness’ and because it avoids unnecessary conflicts. This example suggests that agents play a part in reinforcing the existing inequalities. Strong reconciliation norms and a preference for consensus decision making are perceived to be the ‘right ways of doing things’ which helps to reproduce ‘undesirable’ and unintended outcomes.

The exercise of agency can be partial and intermittent as well. This reflects the changing circumstances and constant struggle between individual desire and socially accepted norms. Agents, Jackson notes, are ‘sometimes acting up to, and against, the social structure they live within, and at other times acting in ways which perpetuate gender disparities’ (2002:502). For the sake of their livelihoods, individuals exercise their agency within inequitable relationships (Cleverly 2004). These paradoxes of agency explain why participation is always an ambiguous and unpredictable process. Human actions may well have consequences, which cannot be anticipated by the agents involved. In the process of social exchange, I came across similar findings: migrants exercise their agency by embracing the inequalities, and placing their subordination as part of their livelihood strategies.

4.9.1 *Agents embracing inequalities*

The reproduction of inequalities is manifested in the regular visits migrants make to their hometowns on mainland China. Despite the fact that they live in poverty, some migrants manage to borrow money from friends in Hong Kong to buy gold rings or necklaces in order to show off their wealth and achievements to relatives in China. They complain often complain that their relations are greedy and always expecting them to pay all the bills, but they keep returning to China year after year. These status-seeking efforts suggest that migrants are involved in a process of producing and reproducing differences with the mainlanders by highlighting their unique Hong Kong identities and status, despite the fact that many of them end up in debt (diary 28/09/02).

Regarding gender inequality, social workers tend to blame men for restricting their wives’ participation in group activities. However, female interviewees pointed out that they are the ones who decide not to participate. One possible reason is that they are showing their gratitude towards their husbands for ‘emancipating’ them from their oppressive village lives on the mainland, thus, in Hong Kong, they are content to

be good wives who respect their husbands' opinions. Another reason is the often large age difference between migrants and their partners. Women acknowledge that their husbands often feel threatened when they join various NGO groups because the men believe they may find another man. The painstaking process of migration and the historical experience of resettlement and oppression also reminds them that they should remain apolitical and should not try to create trouble in the host society. This kind of expression of respect towards their husbands and a general avoidance of conflict thus places women in a subordinated gendered position, which results in further non-participation and marginalisation when they cannot enlist their husbands' support (Wong 2005b).

The reproduction of inequality is further complicated by how individuals exhibit various forms of agency over time and space. The exploitative relationship between mothers and their daughters-in-law that is widely cited in the gender literature suggests that a victim of inequality today may turn into an enforcer tomorrow. Another illustration of this dilemma involves the shifting of roles. An established female migrant in Hong Kong refused to allow her son to continue his relationship with his girlfriend on the mainland. Her son failed to understand his mother's opposition because his mother had once been a new Chinese migrant who had fallen in love with his father in Hong Kong. His mother explains that her experience has informed her that cross-border marriage can cause tremendous pain and she did not want him to make the same 'mistake' (interview with Ah Kwai 10/07/02).

The paradoxes of agency may also be exhibited in the processes of inclusion and exclusion. Migrants adopt self-exclusion as their livelihood strategy because they feel the pressure of making compromises in social connections, and they break the social bonds to set themselves free. The non-participation of migrants in groups can be interpreted as an attempt at social inclusion, since migrants are worried that their participation will only make them more visible and thus discriminated against. In another case, a decision by parents not to claim social benefits is a way to avoid discrimination by neighbours, but the parents' attempt of 'social inclusion' results in the unanticipated consequence of the exclusion of their children. Without sufficient money, their children cannot afford clean school uniforms and trendy toys. This prevents them from being able to make friends with their classmates. Parents exercising agency may thus end up undermining the agency of their offspring.

4.10 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have criticised the neo-institutional theorising of agency for its narrow focus on economic rationality in explaining human behaviour. The simplistic premises that individuals are necessarily selfish and that they consciously construct social relations with purposive reasons are questioned. This is because the model is not adequately socially informed. The complex reasoning of agency and diverse motivations are not properly examined in this theory. The messiness and unpredictability of social life are not seriously considered. I have also pointed out that the perceived 'right way of doing things' and the logic of appropriateness, rather than the anticipation of future returns, shape our routinised social lives. The concepts of relational agency and the social embeddedness of agency are useful in challenging the atomistic assumption of agency. The evaluation of the impact of structural forces on migrants' network building and livelihoods helps to avoid the over-optimistic account of agency. Placing emphasis on the diversity of social, economic, and historical experience of migration and oppression helps analyse the complexity of decision making. The social categories are deconstructed to highlight the heterogeneity of agency. Intricate processes through which relations of trust and reciprocity are built are also examined to explore the meanings that people are involved in when it comes to social interactions.

The paradoxes of agency also suggest that individuals are not necessarily transformative agents. Since their livelihoods are deeply rooted in the existing structural inequalities, seeking livelihood security, rather than equality, is more important. Individuals are not always conscious that social divisions and inequalities are produced and reproduced by their everyday interactions and practices. In the next chapter, I will consider the role of institutions in shaping individual and collective behaviour.

5 'Getting the Social Relations Right'? – Understanding Institutional Plurality and Dynamics

5.1 Introduction

Social capital cannot be adequately understood without also analysing institutions. Mainstream institutional thinking, as I noted in chapter 1, is predominantly based on the economic model of institutions. Neo-institutional economists argue that the success of contractual relations lies in robust institutional designs, and that social relations and organisations are regarded as mediating institutions which enable and constrain human behaviours (North 1990). This institutional approach tends to focus on conscious construction of groups and rules to achieve intended outcomes. Based on the assumption that individuals are opportunistic and self-interested, it considers the use of sanctions as a necessary enforcement mechanism to govern networks of co-operation.

This economic theory of institution has, however, received severe criticisms. It tends to focus on the macro level of institutional framework (e.g., DFID 2006), and pays insufficient attention to the meso and micro levels which shape the day-to-day access to resources for the poor. In this section, I will highlight the processes that newly arrived migrants draw upon in a variety of institutions to secure livelihoods and how they negotiate within and around these institutions. I will also examine how formalised organisations interact with the intricate web of livelihood networks of poor people.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: It begins by examining the economic institutional analysis in the mainstream social capital thinking and the concept of socially embedded institutions. It then explores institutional complexity and diversity by considering institutions as multi-purpose and negotiable, but at the same time, intermittent and fragile. The third section links institutions to migrants' complex webs of livelihood networks and explores the role of agency in institutions. And finally we will consider the temporality and spatiality of social identities and the roles assumed by migrants during their lifetimes.

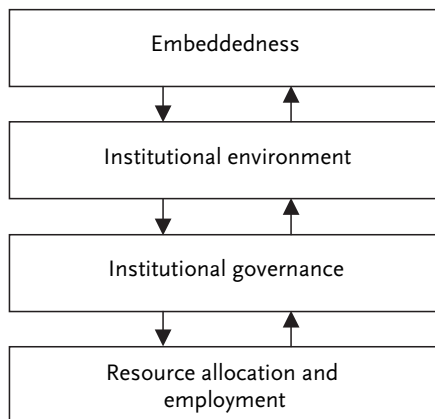
5.2 Economic theory of institutions

To be fair, the institutional approach does contribute by putting social relations back onto the agenda of development thinking and it also brings social embeddedness to the forefront. Its efforts to establish order and increase the predictability of social outcomes are appreciated. It also acknowledges the double-edged nature of institutions: that rules both authorise and constrain individual actions. Unlike the first generation of collective action theory, it offers a more optimistic view of social co-operation and argues that material incentives are not necessarily indispensable if a self-enforcing contractual mechanism is effectively constructed. The role of agency is also considered in rule bargaining, and the poor are offered an additional access to resources by establishing new social networks.

Concerning the socially embedded institutions, the mainstream institutional thinking *does* consider their role in the institutional designs. It recognises, as Berry suggests, that: 'interventions served to create additional channels of institutional membership and access to resources, which were superimposed on existing ones rather than superseding them'(1993). Oliver Williamson is one of a few economists who tries to incorporate the idea of social embeddedness into his analysis of institutions.

His idea of institutional development in figure 5.1 is divided into four layers and each of them is interdependent. The first level is 'embeddedness' which is comprised of informal institutions, customs, tra-

Figure 5.1 A simplified version of Williamson's economic analysis of institution



Source: Williamson, 2000:597

ditions, norms, and religion. This level, as he notes, is ‘non-calculative’ in nature. The second level is the institutional environment, by which we mean the ‘formal uses of the game’, such as property, judiciary, and bureaucracy. The third level is institutional governance, which is more concerned with ‘contract and aligning governance structures with transactions’. The fourth level is resource allocation and employment, which includes prices and quantities (Williamson 2000:597).

He admits that the neo-institutional approach is ‘predominantly concerned with levels 2 and 3 of the four levels of social analysis’ and ‘the institutions of embeddedness (level 1) are an *important but underdeveloped* part of the story’ (p. 610, my emphasis). This criticism provides a strong attack on the mainstream institutional approach which is more concerned with regularised institutions and formalised organisations and devotes much less attention to the existing institutional structures.

5.2.1 *A limited understanding of socially embedded institutions*

Despite the rising recognition of socially embedded institutions, Williamson’s analysis tends to adopt a utilitarian view of socially embedded institutions, which believes that the inclusion of the existing organisations increases social legitimacy, improves project efficiency, economises on transaction costs, and secures effective social co-operation (Clever 2002). The World Development Report 2002, regards the building of bridges between existing formal and informal institutions as ‘an effective means of enhancing the success of formal institutions’ (p. 178). The World Development Report 2003 considers socially embedded institutions because ‘markets need the support of other institutions to ensure the right incentives’ (p. 38-9). These examples demonstrate a conscious process by which existing social and cultural arrangements are drawn upon to shape collective action. Woolcock states it quite explicitly, claiming that not only bureaucratic, but also socially embedded institutions, can be created because ‘the absence, or the weakness, of formal institutions is often compensated for by the creation of informal organisations’ (2001:13).

Serious doubts have been raised about the desirability and effectiveness of this functional approach, which fails to recognise the depth of the social and cultural embeddedness of decision making and co-operation relations (Mehta et al. 1999). The concern is that, without an adequate understanding of the present social arrangements prior to intervention, this approach may have the unintended consequence of destroying many existing social connections. Clever (2002) attacks the design view of socially embedded institutions, arguing that ‘cultural and social structure then becomes another raw material, part of the institutional resource bank from which arrangements (especially distribu-

tional norms and relations of trust) can be drawn which reduce the social overhead costs of co-operation' (p. 14).

Throughout this book, I define social-embedded institutions as social values of trust and norms of reciprocity which are embedded in local customs and conventions. Individuals interact with each other by constantly drawing upon social rules and norms. People rely on precedents and 'common sense' as a guide to 'how they do things' in their everyday lives (Douglas 1987). These institutions shape and mediate individuals' choices, decision making, and the modes of social relations. This perspective helps place individual agents within a broader structure and examines the interplay between agency and structure.

5.3 Gaps in institutional designs and reality

The celebratory accounts of formal intervention in institutions tend to over-emphasise bureaucratic institutional arrangements and play down the role of socially embeddedness institutions in shaping people's preferred institutional environment. The focus of this section is to examine, and illustrate with examples, how the gap between the institutional designs and the existing institutional environment may undermine the impact of participatory approaches.

5.3.1 *Sanctions reduce co-operation*

Fear as institution: apart from the instrumental tools, scholars of institutional crafting also consider 'fear' as an effective way to coerce individuals to comply with generally agreed-upon rules. The element of fear is manifested by placing the role of sanctions high in institutional governance. The underlying assumptions are that sanctions increase the cost of free-riding and people will co-operate because of the fear of punishment. According to these views, sanctions take diverse forms, ranging from informal and social pressure to strict and specific penalties for those who do not comply. The central committee meeting of the female migrant mutual-help group in box 5.1 will illustrate the effects penalties have on motivating individual participation.

The example in box 5.1 indicates that the social worker wanted to apply social pressure and withholding various materialistic benefits as a means of moulding Ah Lin's patterns of co-operation. However, the altruistic nature of some of the committee members and their hesitance to punish a 'free-riding' member dissuaded the social worker from imposing the sanctions on Ah Lin. During the discussion, they stressed the various circumstances, such as distance and family obligations, in the lives of some of the members that made full participation difficult.

Box 5.1 *Using sanctions in the female migrant mutual-help group*

Ah Lin has been a committee member for a year. However, she was always late for the weekly meetings and absent for many important group gatherings. One of the social workers had long expressed her dissatisfaction about her attendance record. During one central committee meeting, this social worker suggested that committee members talk to her. If her attendance did not improve, the committee should consider withholding the benefits she received for being a committee member, such as getting free second-hand goods. Two central committee members in the meeting were very angry with the social worker's comments. They defended Ah Lin by encouraging other committee members to see things from her perspective. They thought Ah Lin was being penalised for living far away from the community centre and raising a large family. Extra support, not sanctions, should be offered, they insisted. No action was ultimately taken against Ah Lin.

Source: own research

This high level of tolerance extended toward non-contributors was expressed in interviews with both central committee and ordinary members from time to time. They revealed a strong tendency toward long-term co-operative relationships. The use of sanctions, from their perspective, would only encourage open confrontation and cause anxiety within the group. Punishments and conflicts would lead to the further breakdown of normal relations and have a negative effect on trust within the group.

Hence, the motivations and the decision-making processes about participation are both complex and diverse. The over-reliance on economic incentives and social sanctions in achieving specific forms of collective actions is not enough to fully understand the altruistic, less-conscious and less-strategic dimensions of human rationality in participatory situations. Individuals are embedded in complex social relations. The perceived right way of doing things, the moral concerns, and a sense of commitment all play a role in building relations of trust.

5.3.2 *Unintended consequences of voting*

One of the aspects that institutionalists stress is the significance of clear roles in its institutional design. They argue that clear roles provide incentives to the shaping of institutions and the achievement of mutually beneficial collective actions because roles 'create a structure of organisation to produce decisions, mobilise resources, facilitate com-

munications and resolve conflict' (Uphoff 2000:15). They also favour the use of majority rules, such as voting, in the process of decision making, and believe that it helps to create general patterns of authority, so that individuals can follow and pursue their best interests.

This instrumental view of social roles does not sufficiently help us, however, to understand the complex picture of authority and agency. The case study in box 5.2 points out that majority voting can actually provoke open confrontation, which ends up damaging the group's long-term development. Members casting their votes may foster a sense of collective ownership, but does not guarantee that the 'best' leaders will be elected to serve the best interests of the groups. Moreover, rather than challenge, social stereotypes, discrimination, and inequalities, democratic voting may actually reinforce these things. Despite her leadership potential, Ah Ching was not highly regarded by the majority of voters, not only because of her dark skin, rural appearance, and uneducated background, but also because she did not fit into the group's perceptions of 'good motherhood'. She was condemned for placing the group's interests above those of her family and children. The members preferred Ah Moon who more closely resembles the lo-

Box 5.2 *Choosing leaders in the female migrant mutual-help group*

To foster democracy, group members annually vote to elect their leaders. Potential candidates must obtain a certain level of support from other members. Ah Ching was considered the ideal leader by the social workers. She was devoted and had a broad network of external organisations. However, Ah Ching was not well respected by the majority of members. They thought Ah Ching's dark skin reflected her rural Chinese background and they were ashamed by the very thought of being led by her. She was also blamed for devoting too much time to group matters and consequently neglecting her family and children. They preferred Ah Moon. From their perspective, Ah Moon was 'whiter' and looked like local-born. She seemed to possess leadership skills and got along well with other members. The election result were a foregone conclusion – Ah Moon won by a landslide. The social workers were shocked by the results. They were afraid that Ah Ching would quit because of the open expression of hostilities. In the end, the social workers called for a second election, which put Ah Ching in the role of co-chair. Some members were extremely annoyed by the social workers' interventions. Although no one quit the group as a result, Ah Ching faced strong resistance during her term as co-chair.

Source: own research

cal people, thus perpetuating the myth that local people are better in terms of leadership and representing migrants' interests. This further places migrants in a subordinate position, which is neither healthy nor conducive to building mutual respect in the long run.

5.3.3 *Are sanctions desirable?*

One focus of institutional analysis is the role that sanctions play in institutional governance. While the role of informal social sanctions is acknowledged, economic institutionalists tend to prefer specific punishments and strict penalties for those who do not uphold their duties. The use of sanctions is largely based on their assumption that human beings are opportunistic and self-interested, thus appropriate sanctions for non-conformance must be developed because 'costly punishment of defectors could increase co-operation in future periods' (Ostrom and Ahn 2003:xxiv). The majority of social workers I worked with in Hong Kong see the attraction of sanctions. They were concerned that free-riders among groups may undermine the process of building collective identities, and members may come away with a mistaken perception that they do not need to contribute since other members will do that on their behalf (interviews with development workers, 7/05/02, 15/10/02). In an effort to deter free-riding, they favour a 'carrot and stick' policy. For example, committee members could claim their travel expenses to attend meetings provided that they come to the meetings on time and do not leave early. Workers also use peer and group pressure to push the less ambitious members.

An analysis of sanctions is based on the assumption that individuals are rational and calculating, and that they tend to conform to rules if the costs of defection are higher than the benefits. Alkire and De-neulne (2002) are aware of the inadequate understanding of mixed and complex motivations of human beings and are thus highly critical of the hypothesis that individuals are law-abiding simply out of a fear of sanctions. My observations support this critique. Migrants do not want to punish free-riding members because the idea of sanctions causes anxiety within the group. They believe that sanctions undermine, rather than reinforce, trust and co-operation. In contrast to the expectations of the social workers, many members are fairly tolerant of non-contributors and point out that some members face may periodically face circumstances in their lives, which make full participation impossible. For example, a committee member lives far away from the group meeting place, and is also caring for her sick husband. They keep these circumstances in mind and allow her arrive late and leave early. They believe that sanctions would only unfairly put extra pressure on her. Keeping the circumstances of various members in consid-

eration allows ample room for on a case-by-case basis (diary 26/09/02). A fixed set of penalties makes the exercise of discretion problematic.

In practice, disputes are discussed and settled outside of formal institutions, and outcomes hinge largely on relations among kin, neighbours, and group members. This method of conflict resolution provides space for negotiation and manoeuvring. Using micro-credit as an example, clan association members often fail to pay loans by the due date, but leaders seldom immediately insist on interest payments. Leaders often keep these cases very quiet and allow for a long period of grace by making excuses for them. Their last resort is to talk to their parents and friends. The informal use of sanctions, including family shame and peer pressure, often proves to be effective.

These examples show a dramatic contrast with the institutionalists' claim that punishments are desirable ways to get people to co-operate. Clan associations leaders are concerned that punishment may also erode trust amongst the members, undermine reciprocal inclinations, and worse still, destroy the social reputations in their communities (diary 3/07/02). Furthermore, punishment does not come without its costs; it usually involves a lot of administrative work to revoke someone's membership. Therefore, the most common practice is to allow a scope of approximate compliance which helps to maintain a harmonious atmosphere. The avoidance of penalties demonstrates that values of conflict avoidance are culturally and socially embedded which shapes the preferred institutional mechanisms 'emphasising reconciliation and an expectation of future co-operation' (Clever 2002:25).

5.3.4 *Relations of trust*

Concerning relations of trust, socially embedded institutions are crucial in shaping preferred institutional arrangements. Taking the community currency project as an example, social workers often provide babysitting services for their members. This achieves two purposes: it emancipates housewife members, and provides jobs for other members. To enhance communication between service providers and users, the parties are encouraged to place advertisements in a members-only newspaper. The ads explicitly state the rates, location, and number of hours requested. Social workers also laid down clear rules and regulations to develop mutual confidence. To their surprise, however, the response of the service has been exceedingly low. The interviews suggest that mothers did not feel comfortable leaving their children with 'strangers', although the babysitters were all guaranteed group members. They were also unable to judge the babysitting competence of the applicants from the ads. Therefore, they stuck to their old practices and

hired the babysitters by word of mouth or a friend's recommendation. The theme of trust recurs throughout my observations, but it is constructed in a complex way. Interviewees suggest that although they trust social workers, they do not automatically link their trust to this particular babysitting programme. This case study shows that social trust is a socially embedded value and principle that shapes the success and failure of regularised institutional arrangements (diary 16/04/02).

5.4 Complexity and diversity of institutions

5.4.1 *Questioning instrumental construction of institutions*

The functional and instrumentalist perspective of institutions is predominant in mainstream institutional thinking. The conscious construction of rules and an investment in the creation of organisations are considered as a 'useful investment for the achievements of human purpose' (Simon 1957:199, quoted in Hodgson 1997:679). Roles, rules, and precedents are useful in lowering transaction costs because they are 'already established patterns of interaction that make productive outcomes from co-operation more predictable and beneficial' (Uphoff 2000:3). The conscious design and manipulation of rules is supported by Ostrom and Ahn who argue that institutions are 'more frequently the result of a *self-conscious choice*. Institutions fit the investment aspect of capital' (2003:xxx, my emphasis).

The tendency to subscribe to a design view of institutions, however, is an example of consequentialism which falls into a 'functional trap'. The beneficial consequences of the adoption of a habit or rule do not necessarily explain why individuals adopt a particular habit or rule. By applying Mary Douglas's idea of 'institutions thinking', I argue that individuals may not be aware of the existence of other options or they may not consider them at all. How individuals organise themselves, and what rules they follow often involve little conscious thought. Social conventions are understood as an unconscious development through continuous daily human interactions and through processes of 'trial and error'. While institutionalists tend to exaggerate the role of visible collective actions in generating the norms of trust and co-operation, I suggest that there are 'unseen' kinds of social capital in 'communities' where social values of trust and norms of reciprocity are embedded in local customs and conventions. People rely on precedents as a guide to 'how they do things' in their everyday lives. In the following, I will cite some examples of spontaneous co-operation between neighbours to illustrate that migrants, in employing social conventions and norms in their daily lives, may be guided by common intuition regarding equity, mutual respect, and the principles of reconciliation.

Mrs. Ma, in box 5.3, may expect 'returns' in her maintaining of relations of reciprocity with her neighbours, but according to her, this is the way to be neighbourly and she has a strong desire to develop harmonious relations with their neighbours. Maintaining neighbourly relations follows a strong gender line in her case. Mrs. Ma's husband helps their neighbours carry out energy-demanding jobs, such as moving, and he performs tasks that demand craftsman skills, such as mending the water pipes. His relationships with other male neighbours extend to broader social spaces in, for instance, local pubs. Mr. Ma believes that when men have been slightly drunk, they are less inhibited when it comes to sharing their feelings, and are more willing to apologise to neighbours, (interview with Mr. Ma 21/10/02). The social lives of women are quite different. Their activities are more domestic by nature, such as food exchange, although they sometimes also go out shopping together.

5.4.2 *Are explicit rules desirable?*

The success of contractual relations, the institutionalists argue, lies in explicit and standardised rules. This claim is mainly based on the functional view of rules. In Williamson's work, he suggests that rules help 'craft order, thereby to mitigate conflict and realise mutual gains' (2000:599). In addition to their restrictive nature, rules have a clarity function, which informs individuals what they can and cannot do, so that people can follow rules more effectively to achieve the desired transactions. In Schlicht's view, rules also help shape an individual's preferences because they 'lead to feelings of entitlement and obligation which are generated by perceiving regularities' (1998:271). The celebratory accounts of bureaucratic rule-boundedness and formal arrange-

Box 5.3 *Mrs. Ma, 48 years old, arriving in Hong Kong in 1995*

Mrs. Ma and her husband tend to repeat this old Chinese cliché during interviews: 'Everything is fine as long as the family is in harmony; otherwise, quarrels lead to the family's disintegration'. They apply this same philosophy in regard to their relationships with their neighbours. Her husband has helped his neighbours to mend leaks in water pipes and also helped them move. He sometimes asks male neighbours out for a drink. She shows a different socialising pattern. She enjoys food exchange with her neighbours, shares information about their children's educations and issues regarding the community, and sometimes they go out shopping together.

Source: own research

ments are therefore not uncommon in the institutional analysis. The use of rules, however, has caused deep concerns about whether rules are necessarily inclusive, and whether more rules represent higher levels of effectiveness when it comes to institutional control.

In his discussion on the impact of explicit rules, Bellamy (2003) shows his deep concern for how rules have disproportionately caused negative impacts on the livelihoods of the poor. He is also concerned that rules may become too rigid for the poor to bend, and become inflexible and inappropriate when circumstances change in ways that the rule-makers cannot always foresee. Another limitation of standardised rules is that they treat everyone the same, which can easily result in bias and injustice. In Bellamy's words, they may 'harm those who ought to be treated differently or, worse, give a certain legitimacy to practices that exploit those differences' (2003:230).

The use of rules, however, has caused deep concerns about whether rules are necessarily inclusive, and whether more rules represent more effectiveness regarding institutional control. Social workers in box 5.4 believe in equal participation, thus they want to apply the same rules to all of the members (interview 15/10/02). However, they fail to recognise that some players in the group may be less able to participate due to limited endowments, family obligations, or different social backgrounds. It is understandable that social workers do not want to stigmatise migrant groups by offering them extra support, but, nonetheless, rule-bound decisions easily become mechanical and unsuited to the needs of the poor. This dilemma poses a challenge to the very concept of building bridging social capital for the poor. While members of diverse backgrounds share the same social space, serving the needs of the disadvantaged without stigmatising them needs to be addressed.

5.5 Permeable boundaries and on-going negotiations

Stressing the importance of clear boundaries in solving the dilemma of collective actions is very common in the literature of common-poor resources management. It leaves the false impression that boundaries only matter to natural resource management people or environmental conditions. In this section, I want to suggest that boundaries are relevant to the urban context, and in practice, NGOs rely on the framework of clear boundaries to create social capital.

The idea of boundary is conceptualised in two ways: geographical and group. While area-based boundaries make use of geographical proximity, cultural symbols, and other community features and problems to create a collective sense of belonging, group boundaries are intended to create close networks amongst members in order to offer

Box 5.4 *Rule making in the abused-women support group*

This group depends very much on rules when it comes to management. Here are two examples:

Issue 1: The circumstances under which members who join group actions are entitled to claiming their lunch expenses always cause controversy at the monthly membership meetings. There are those who insist that some members deliberately participate in lunch-time events so that they can take advantage of the free meals. Fearing an increase in free-riding, the central committee considers 12:00 noon as the dividing line for the provision of free lunches. Anyone involved in activities that finish before 12:00 noon cannot claim a free lunch – only those who stay on later. This causes grievances to arise because those who live in urban centres can easily go home for lunch. Those who live further away have no choice but to have lunch out. This exerts great financial burdens on those poorer members who only attend the morning sessions.

Issue 2: Strict rules have been established so that members can only claim their travel and lunch expenses if they participate in the monthly membership meetings and only if they stay until the meetings are adjourned. This rule is intended to keep members in attendance until the end of the meetings, but since the meetings usually end at 6:00 p.m., it usually causes great deal of inconvenience for those who have heavy family obligations and/or who live far away.

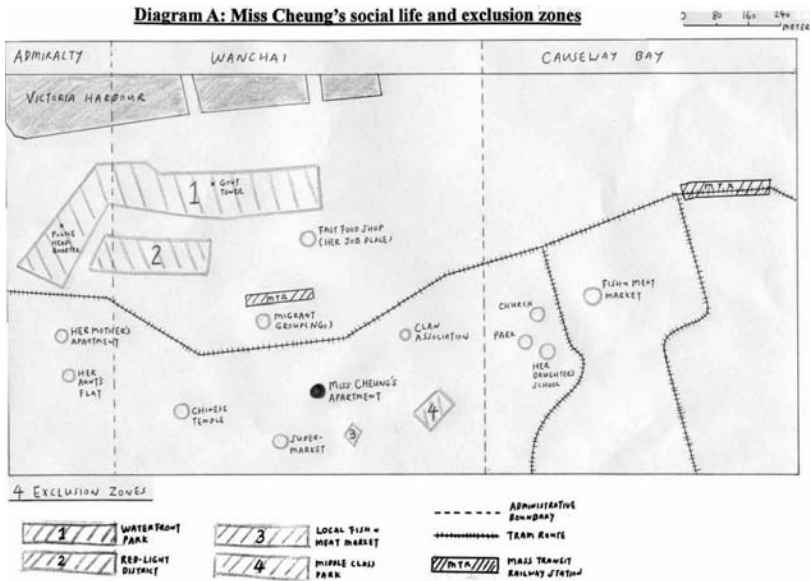
Source: own research

mutual help. Geographical and group boundaries are not mutually exclusive, and they have been widely applied among development agencies because they indicate where their target groups are located, which saves time and resources. Donors are also in favour of clear administrative boundaries because they make supervision more manageable and make it fit into the notion of social inclusion.

The vision of clear boundaries in the institutional approach, however, provides an inaccurate picture of the complex social arrangements and livelihood networks of the poor. In the following section, I want to use Miss Cheung as an example to illustrate the permeable and on-going negotiable nature of network boundaries.

This case study is drawn from my previous work (Wong 2004). Miss Cheung has been living in Wanchai for five years since her reunion with her husband. Map 5.1 is based on her everyday routines and interactions with people within and beyond her 'community'. The diversity

Map 5.1 Social life map of Miss Cheung



and complexity of institutions in her everyday life which form a dense web of livelihood is summarised in table 5.1. She actively participates in various ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ types of institutions such as a migrant group and a clan association, a church and a temple, a super-

Table 5.1 Miss Cheung's involvement in multiple institutions in her daily life

Multiple institutions	Nature	Persons in contact
Domestic institutions	Parents Kin	Mother Aunt
Economic institutions	Employment (fast food shop) Fish and meat markets, supermarket	Employer, colleagues Sellers, parents
Social institutions	Migrant group (NGO) Clan associations Group meetings in local parks	Social workers, group members Elders, administrators, group members New arrivals, parents of her child's schoolmates
Education institutions	Schools	Teachers, parents of her child's schoolmates
Religious institutions	Church Temple	Church leaders, church goers Temple leaders, temple goers

Source: own research

market, and a local fish and a meat market. Her involvement in multiple institutions expands her social networks and meet her various needs. For example, in local parks, she exchanges information with parents about their children's studies, schools, community news, and food prices (observations 5/05/02, 6/05/02).

Her complex involvements in institutions reveal two features: firstly, migrants participate in overlapping social groups which allows them to obtain access to multiple memberships and identities. In Williamson's observation (2000), maintaining social networks in multiple institutional settings are the everyday activities of poor households. The complex interactions of bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions show that migrants' social lives extend from their family to friends, to social workers in migrant groups, and to local elites in clan associations.

The second feature is the highly permeable element of social boundaries, the negotiable nature of institutions, as well as the changing importance of institutions along the course of migrants' lives. The child-care arrangement involves a constant process of negotiation for her. Her daughter's school is far from where they live, but it is the only one that accepts migrant children. Although most of the members in the migrant group live very nearby, she does not feel close enough to any of them to ask them to babysit for her. Instead, she takes her daughter to her mother's house every afternoon before she goes to work in a fast-food shop. Her mother lives 750 metres away from her (normally 20 minutes walk). After work, she has dinner with her mother and returns home with her daughter. She sometimes visits her aunt who lives near her mother. Her social life also extends beyond her 'community'. Her daughter's school, the church, and a fish-and-meat market are all within the area known as Causeway Bay. The church offers her daughter free education, so she takes her there twice a week after school and then she goes shopping in the market. The food in this market is more to her liking than the local one, and she also finds it less hostile to migrants. She often meets parents of her daughter's classmates, so she can discuss her daughter's school life and community issues. The importance of these institutions in her complex life also changes according to the circumstances. For example, when the typhoons begin to hit Hong Kong, she has to change her routine – she stops going to the church and the park, and goes shopping in the local market (diary 5/05/02).

Miss Cheung's story also shows us a distinct pattern of territorial exclusion. Places within her 'community', which she tries to avoid going to, include local parks, the Wanchai red light district, and the local fish-and-meat market. The reasons for this are mixed: class differentiation, fear of the police, and conflict avoidance. For example, she avoids

going to the park along the waterfront in the north (see map 5.1) because it is close to important government buildings and police headquarters where demonstrations sometimes occur. She feels insecure here because of the frequent random searches performed by the police there. Her explanation for avoiding another park to the south is quite different – it is located in a middle-class area where she feels discriminated against by the more prosperous migrants (interview 6/05/02). Another two ‘no-go’ areas include the red light district (in the middle left of map 5.1), and the local fish-and-meat market. Although food in that market is cheaper than elsewhere, she complains that the shopkeepers here are more prejudiced against Chinese migrants.

This case study shows that Miss Cheung’s multiple identities maximise her access to various socio-economic networks. Securing multiple memberships, however, requires migrants to constantly negotiate to take advantage of their multiple identities, and not all migrants can do this. The participation of most migrants in social groups is intermittent and fragile, and is subject to the ebbs and flows of people’s lives. Some of them were forced to quit groups when they had to get jobs to make ends meet or to stay at home when their domestic burdens became too much. They also faced various structural constraints, such as membership fees, a lack of the ‘right’ kinds of language skills and a lack of time.

5.5.1 Institutional crafting undermines existing networks

The institutional approach tends to establish particular groups to shape specific types of interactions and co-operation in order to achieve rapid and visible results. This simplistic single-purpose view of institutions, nevertheless, overlooks the unintended impacts of institutional development (Bijisma-Frankema and Woolthuis 2005).

The aim of the caring group scheme shown in box 5.5 was to build bridges between members who lived in the same areas but did not normally interact. Its design was to use common community characteristics and concerns to foster a sense of solidarity and to build close networks of reciprocity. This was a well-intentioned idea, which had resulted in some positive outcomes, but it, unwittingly, also placed some group members at a disadvantage. They considered mutual visits a natural expression of love and friendship. They met at home, in local parks, or restaurants and became involved in various activities, such as cooking, watching television, gossiping, and discussing group activities. These activities were held spontaneously in informal social spaces to suit possible conflicting lifestyles. The introduction of the care group programme, however, upset their own modes of interaction. They had to reduce their mutual visits, not only because of the travel subsidy

Box 5.5 *Caring group scheme in the abused-women support group*

Social workers have pointed out that one of the communication problems between migrants and local people in the abused-women support group was that members only met people of similar social backgrounds. Cross-visits between social groups was weak. In order to break the communication barriers, members were divided into three 'caring groups' according to where they lived. Members of each regional group had to choose their leaders, organise monthly visits and activities, such as visiting sick members and celebrating members' birthdays, and then reporting on their activities in the monthly general meeting. To encourage mutual visits between members of the same regional caring groups, they were allowed to claim travel expenses.

Three months after the plan was instituted, I called for a focus group discussion to evaluate the programme. The responses were mixed. Some migrants and local people appreciated the programme, noting that it helped them find new friends in their own communities. Others, however, felt obliged to stay in the same group, which meant being with people they did not have anything in common with. The changes in rules covering travel subsidies had actually had some negative impacts on social interactions. According to the new rule, members could not claim travel expenses if they visited friends who did not belong to the same care groups. In order to reduce their expenses, some migrants in the focus group were forced to reduce the numbers of visits to old friends. One member said that she was afraid of upsetting the organisers and arousing gossip if visiting her own friends beyond the care group boundaries was regarded as 'illegitimate'.

Source: own research

policy changes, but also because they were afraid of being accused of making 'illegitimate' visits outside of the official care group boundaries and further arousing gossip and upsetting the organisers. This case study suggests that crafting new institutions to achieve specific types of co-operation can actually destroy, instead of creating, social networks between members. This is not to suggest that the barriers to communication in the abused-women support group should not be eradicated. However, without an adequate understanding about existing norms and patterns of interaction between members, any new institutional intervention by formalising the participatory space, such as the

care group scheme, can inadvertently damage the lives of some of the poor.

5.5.2 *Ad hoc, intermittent and fragile institutions*

Institutionalists also assume that institutions are relatively stable and long-lived. In his discussion of the nature of institutions, Hodgson claims that socially habituated behaviour is regarded as ‘a way of thought or action of some prevalence and *permanence*, which is embedded in the habits of a group or the customs of a people’ (Hodgson 1997: 679, my emphasis). This generalised assertion is flawed because while some institutions exhibit more stability, others are more erratic and fragile. In my observations, the institution of neighbourly relations is very dynamic, fractured, and short-lived. Contrary to the predictions of institutional economists, relations based on reciprocity are stimulated by a few individual incidents, organised on an ad hoc basis, and fade away when circumstances change. The intermittent nature of an institution is illustrated by Ah Kwai’s involvement in a campaign against housing demolition (see box 5.6).

Box 5.6 *Ah Kwai, 40 years old, arriving in Hong Kong in 1997*

Her husband spent all his savings purchasing a flat on top of a pre-WWII private building. Authorities informed them that their flat was illegally constructed and had to be demolished with no compensation offered. It affected not only her family but also seven or eight other neighbours. She and her neighbours initiated a campaign against the demolition plan, which caught the attention of the media and various NGOs. Ah Kwai became more and more involved. She opened her flat to host public meetings, accepted interviews from the media, and wrote appeals letters to various local Legislative Councillors with the her neighbours’ assistance. She remembers that the communal spirit and the strong sense of neighbourhood had never been so impressive before. The government finally backed off and allocated public flats to the residents affected, but insisted there would be no monetary compensation for their ordeals. She was not satisfied with the deal they got and she wanted to step up the campaign. To her surprise, her neighbours accepted the arrangements and gradually moved out. She felt isolated and was forced to abandon her campaign and accept the resettlement.

Source: own research

Prior to the incident, she barely knew her neighbours, but the campaign altered the relationship between the neighbours. Facing the common enemy of government authorities brought the involved neighbours together. The high level of trust and co-operation that emerged among the neighbours was, in her words, 'beyond imagination'. They mobilised their limited resources and use various tactics to seek public attention. They worked with various social activists, initiated press conferences, and contacted various Legislative Councillors. The campaign was effective enough to get the attention of the media. The authorities responded quickly, which managed to divide the coalition because the neighbours each responded in their own way to the government's offer. This played a significant role in the decline of neighbourhood spirit. After she and her family moved to another area, she barely kept in contact with her former neighbours and showed no further interest in housing advocacy in her new neighbourhood (interview with Ah Kwai 15/04/02). This example illustrates that relations of trust can be initiated by a single incident, that institutions of co-operation may be ad hoc, and that the level of cohesion may be short-lived.

5.6 Placing institutions within livelihoods and agency

Do the poor have adequate access institutions? Is inclusion effective? Will inclusion create exclusion which further undermines the means of survival of the poor? I will address these questions in this section. I will also put the discussion in its proper, and explore the links between institutions and migrants' livelihood networks. Agency is also considered in an examination of how agents' preferences, values, and perception may shape institutional development.

5.6.1 *Formalising rights to secure access*

A possibility for securing access to resources is through the explicit promotion of 'rights' (Mohan and Hickey 2004). In my case studies, three NGO groups adopted three different approaches to rights advocacy. The female-only neighbourhood group in Mongkok, which stressed migrants' rights (also known as 'ethnic citizenship'), highlighted their status and needs as new arrivals in the host society while demanding extra help. Meanwhile, the anti-family-violence support group in Tsuen Wan focused on migrant citizen rights in Hong Kong, suggesting that the migrants should enjoy the full rights and responsibilities granted by the Basic Law, on the same level as native-born Hong Kong citizens. The mutual help community-currency group in Wanchai adopted a mixed approach, celebrating both the ethnic status

of migrants and Hong Kong citizenship. It considered these two identities compatible and useful in maximising migrants' control over social and political resources.

The active and participatory advocacy of rights is based on assumptions that, through visible and public manifestations in collective action, migrants can extend their status as members of various social and political communities and exercise their voices. This approach is credited for addressing the politics of community participation and celebrating the transformative capabilities of efforts that structural inequalities. However, whether people can draw upon these rights to further secure access to social relationships depends on various subjectivities, institutions, and structures. Subjectivities are concerned with how these rights are understood among the concerned members. As Bottero and Irwin (2003) argue, people are not always conscious about the exercise of their rights because 'personal life is hierarchically ordered [so] that people tend to see themselves as "ordinary", and thus downplay the significance of hierarchy in their lives' (p. 471). Claiming one's rights is also mediated through institutions. This means that exercising rights does not happen in a vacuum but is culturally and socially embedded in social relations. In the following sections, I will analyse the processes about how rights are negotiated and how the exercise of citizenship is constrained.

5.6.2 *Costs of participation*

The public manifestation of collective action is considered very important in the rights-based approach because it is regarded as an essential means of fostering a sense of collective identity (Melucci 1995). However, this perspective of collective action does not adequately analyse whether individuals are willing and able to use collective action to advance their interests and enforce their rights. For instance, on one occasion when the abused-women empowerment group was involved in a demonstration outside the Housing Authority, their action was recorded on VCD and subsequently sold as part of an empowerment fund-raising programme. A co-ethnic friend of a female participant bought this VCD and showed it in her mainland hometown. Villagers were shocked to see how 'rebellious' she had become since moving to Hong Kong. This perception led to further problems upon subsequent visits to her village. This example demonstrates that visible collective action does not necessarily serve the best interests of the poor since it risks damaging the already-limited social networks that they have produced over the years. As discussed earlier, the access migrants have to resources is linked to their social reputations. Once they are labelled as 'troublemakers', they begin to encounter difficulties in finding jobs. In

order to secure stable livelihoods, they find it necessary to keep up a good 'social face' and maintain a moral reputation in accordance with people's expectations of them. The socially embedded nature of livelihoods hampers their abilities to exercise their rights.

Migrant groups generally do not have registration fees, but that does not mean that the processes of participation are somehow free. Poor members try to avoid lunch-time activities because they cannot afford to buy their lunches out. Attending group and public meetings places undue pressure on the poor because they do not have the proper clothing to attend. Interviewees noted their embarrassment at having to put on the same clothes for every event (interviews 24/03/02, 15/04/02). The high overhead costs, in part, explain why, and how, resource-poor migrants come to be excluded from effective access to various institutions. Thus, poverty is a matter of both relational problems and redistributive problems. Before trusting relations can be properly established, there is the prerequisite of material and social support that is necessary for effective social association among poor people.

Group participation also costs the poor considerable amounts of time, resources and energy which may put them under stress and create competing demands. To fit into the ideal form of participation for workers, migrants must assume many different responsibilities, such as providing counselling for new arrivals and accompanying new members when they apply for social welfare, for example (diary 8/05/02). All these duties put extra burdens on migrants, hamper their abilities to construct new and maintain old social networks, thus further placing their already-limited social capital under extra strain. These diversions from the pursuit of their own livelihoods and their heavy family and social obligations may do more harm than good. Jackson (2002) is therefore deeply concerned about the exploitative potential of development agencies in extracting time and labour from the poor, which may actually further undermine their well-being.

5.6.3 *Institutional inclusion and exclusion*

Gender inclusion has long been an objective in development programmes, but the focus tends to emphasise women. Thanks to the tenacious advocacy of gender activists, the inclusion of men in development thinking has gradually gained momentum (e.g., Bujra and Baylies 2000; Chant and Gutmann 2000). In Hong Kong, forming social groups and building networks for male migrant adults has received increased attention in the agendas of development agencies. Three strategies are generally adopted to incorporate men into their programmes: firstly, women and children's programmes are used to include husbands and fathers; secondly, jobs programmes target the unemployed;

and thirdly, empowerment and sharing groups are intended to help migrants face issues of discrimination.

The first strategy is intended to provide receptive spaces for men via second-hand goods bazaars and various outings. However, these programmes have not dealt with gender stereotypes which still leave men feeling embarrassed or disinterested in certain situations. Jobs programmes are an attempt to deal with men's role as breadwinners and to address the problems of masculinity identified in the previous strategy. This approach fits into the results of most local research which highlights the fact that male migrants name employment as their prime concern. They face great difficulties in their efforts to secure a job, including unrecognised qualifications, language barriers, long working hours and low pay. However, high initial response rates often result in high drop-out rates because participants feel betrayed that many of the NGOs are unable to guarantee them jobs. Moreover, most of these programmes are merely introductions to job-seeking procedures and interview skills (diary 28/03/02). Empowerment programmes may, however, help migrants voice their discontentment and their everyday experiences of discrimination and difficulties. These programmes seek to generate group identity and solidarity through a process of sharing and common experiences, but high drop-out rates suggests that men feel frustrated by having to share their problems without any guarantees of meeting their practical needs.

These strategies are not at all new; they basically follow earlier experiences, which sought to include women in formal organisations. However, their success is limited because they fail to acknowledge gender differences and the very different social realities facing men and women. Bureaucratic institutional arrangements do not necessarily fit into men's social lives and livelihood networks because their associational lives may change drastically over the course of their lives, and their involvement pattern remains intermittent. Social workers who have researched drop-out cases discover that the men quit for a number of reasons including the fact that some return to China, while others may have become sick or may have found jobs (interview with Chueng Wan Loi 28/07/02). Men's concerns are diverse, and the shift from one group to another is an attempt to accommodate conflicting demands. Their social lives are more often associated with informal settings, for example, they begin to bet on the horses with their neighbours at various Hong Kong Jockey Club betting outlets, rather than through formal group participation (diary 3/10/02).

The inclusion programmes do not tackle the existing culture of masculinities and gender relations. The failure of empowerment programmes does not suggest that men are less willing to express their inner feelings, but they do feel that sharing these feelings is a waste of

time because the immediate problems of unemployment, for example, remain unresolved. The stereotypes of men as breadwinners are further reinforced by the attitudes of their wives and parents. The accommodation of men's practical and strategic needs, while simultaneously tackling gender stereotypes, has been a huge challenge to most development agencies. The attempt to include men also faces another dilemma – inclusion can occur simultaneously along with exclusion. This is particularly true for young adults. While social workers try to rally them to form groups, it simultaneously exerts considerable amount of pressure on some of the participants who have families back in China or who still rely on their old networks in their hometowns in China. Group participation in Hong Kong and regular trips to China create tensions through the competing demands on both sides, which including issues of time, money, energy, and conflicting loyalties. The inclusion of marginal groups, should thus be treated with great care. There is a need to identify their networking patterns, and to observe the impact that inclusion has on their social relations.

5.7 Conclusions

This chapter has challenged the mainstream economic bias in the analysis of institutions by examining social capital and its utilitarian and simplistic view of institutions. It has also raised serious doubts about institutionalists' heroic claims regarding their proposed institutional solutions and the uncontested accounts of formal intervention in institutions. Institutional designs to achieve 'democratic governance, new forms of trust, [and] new mechanisms entailing more anonymous relations' are also questionable (Platteau and Abraham 2002). The effectiveness of participatory approaches, I have argued, hinges on our deeper understanding of the socially embedded institutions and their interplay with bureaucratic ones. Institutions of co-operation amongst the poor are very diverse, which is evidenced in less-regularised neighbourly behaviour and more structured group activities. The over-reliance on bureaucratic institutional arrangements denies the role of socially embedded institutions in shaping people's preferred institutional environments. Recognising the interdependence between these institutions is a crucial step in acknowledging 'the depth of social and cultural embeddedness of decision making and co-operative relations' (Clever 2005b).

The continuous presupposition of the universal claims of institutional design principles in creating social capital also needs to be approached with great caution. Fukuyama has expressed his deep concern that 'some institutions cannot be readily transferred to other socie-

ties lacking social capital' (2001:12). The transferability of institutions is questionable since institutions are historically specific, socially and culturally embedded, and contextually sensitive, and the nature of institutions is also ambiguous, contested and negotiable on an on-going basis. The complexity and diversity of institutions therefore pose serious challenges to the school of institutional crafting.

The discussion of institutions cannot be isolated from agents' livelihood networks and subjectivity. The complexity of the institutional context within which the poor participate, therefore, urges more serious investigation. The over-zealous inclusion of the marginal into formal participation also raises issues about the processes of mediated participation and the structural constraints on the representation of the poor. The role of agency in institutional thinking is ambiguous and contested. In her institutional analysis, Ostrom allows a considerable amount of space for agents to negotiate. She argues that: 'the investment in social capital frequently takes the form of bargaining over which rules will be adopted to allocate benefits and costs of collective action' (1995:157). However, this perspective offers a rather 'under-socialised' view, ignoring the structural constraints on the representation of the poor. There is another group of institutional analysts who represent an 'over-socialised' view. For example, Aoki suggests: 'an institution *controls* agents' individual action-choice rules by co-ordinating their belief' (2001:13, my emphasis). Narayan also believes that: 'groups *determine* attitudes, beliefs, identities and values, as well as access to resources and opportunities' (1999:1, my emphasis). This perspective considers rules and roles as fixed and deterministic, which implies that individuals have no choice but to comply. While agents' preferences, values, and perceptions shape institutional development, the deeply embedded institutions also mediate individuals' choices and decision making. In the next chapter, I will explore the dimension of power in the relations of trust and co-operation, and further examine the nature of institutions, such as institutional change and evolutionary approach.

6 Rethinking Authority and Power in the Structures of Relations

6.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have discussed how the mainstream economic approach of institutions tends to restructure individuals' incentives (i.e., agency, in chapter 4) and to redefine rules and roles (i.e., institutional arrangements, chapter 5) in order to enforce collective action. This chapter will focus on the issues of authority, examining how structural properties and arrangements help some poor people to obtain access to social capital while denying it to others. It also aims to enrich the current debate regarding power in the social capital literature. There is an increasing use of discourse of 'power blindness' to challenge the current social capital theory (e.g., Edwards, et al. 2003; Fine 2001; Field 2003; in general, and Molyneux 2002 with regard to gender inequalities). While these critiques have pinpointed the potential problems of the theory, my concern is that the discourse is rather general and lacks a deep analysis. Using the framework of authority, I argue, will substantiate the discussion since it highlights which dimensions of power are stressed and which sidestepped. In doing so, I will touch upon Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'symbolic power' (1977), which suggests that community elites may draw upon traditions and cultural symbols to legitimise their authority. Iris Young's idea of 'asymmetrical reciprocity' (1997) will also be explored to challenge the assumption of equality of contract.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: I will first examine the concept of authority in the neo-institutional approach. Then, I will question the assumption of the 'equal relational contract' within the framework of authority by exploring the social divisions within migrant communities. The third section will highlight the political dimensions of bureaucratic institutional arrangements, and examine how new rules and roles are not politically neutral, but can be manipulated by the powerful to limit the access of the poor to social capital. In this section, the complexity of authority will also be examined. Since more and more institutionalists are advocating the building of institutions upon existing social organisations, the fifth section will focus on the complexity of socially embedded institutions, and examine how traditions,

rituals, symbols, and collective identities are manipulated by local elites to consolidate their rules. The simplistic idea of institutional evolutionism will also be challenged. Finally, by further examining the role of agency, I will suggest why individuals are not necessarily transformative agents and how power inequalities are routinely produced and reproduced.

6.2 Interrogating authority in the institutional approach

A perceived need for a clearly defined structure of authority lies in the monitoring and co-ordination failures in controlling the free-riding behaviour of individuals. Developing tight contractual relations and structures of governance shapes the behaviour of individuals and regulates social exchange. Social roles, rules, and sanctions are considered the basis of the normative regulating mechanisms since rules 'create and recreate the general patterns of authority in a society' (Ostrom and Ahn 2003:xxiii). An authority structure then sets out to 'co-ordinate individual decisions and regulate their implementation' (Platteau and Abraham 2002:109). A high level of interconnections and relations of trust exhibits the power of reciprocity because barriers between institutions are dissolved and people can work towards collectively agreed-upon common goals. To ensure a highly effective structure of authority, there is a tendency to regularise local level management through formal committees with elected leaders and committee members. Meetings are held periodically, visible collective action is encouraged, and memberships are clearly defined. Rule-based procedures are carried out in a non-discretionary manner, decision-making processes need to be quick and efficient and impersonal exercise of sanctions is strictly enforced (Chu 2003).

6.2.1 Strengthening local organisations

There is a rising recognition of the role of existing local organisations and local authorities in institutional arrangements. Ostrom and Ahn (2003) encourage the use of 'the networks that participants have created, and the norms that they have adopted' because the types of rules individuals will find protective depends upon 'the kinds of norms and patterns of reciprocity that already exist' (p. xxiii). Development agencies such as the World Bank (e.g., 2002, 2003) and IFAD (2001) also strongly recommend building social capital based on local organisations and maintaining a close partnership with local elites in order to increase project efficiency and social legitimacy.

Since collective action agreements need to be supported by credible enforcement mechanisms, more institutional arrangements are built upon existing structures of authority and assigned a major role for local elites who can exercise 'authority'. Mansuri and Rao (2003) suggest there is a general understanding in the school of institutional crafting that:

... elites are likely to have strong interests in the common pool resources, they have *strong incentives* to protect them and elite capture need not be a problem if such elite organisations deal only with non-privatisable benefits (p. 23, my emphasis).

However, whether this is based on evidence or merely on assumptions is highly debatable. Institutionalists reveal their instrumental view of power in building bridging and linking social capital for the poor in that they encourage the poor to forge 'alliances with sympathetic individuals *in positions of power*' (Woolcock 2001:13, my emphasis). Bonding social capital, from the institutionalists' view, is less desirable because 'family ties become too strong and crowd out the weaker ties of community' (Fukuyama 1999:37). Building bridging social capital is necessary since it 'generate[s] broader identities and reciprocity' whereas 'bonding social capital bolsters our narrow selves' (Putnam 2000:23). The co-operation with powerful local elites is illustrated in Uphoff's case study in Sri Lanka. He suggests that 'people who are in positions of leadership and authority or who occupy high social status can support structural and cognitive forms of social capital' (Uphoff 2000:11). Connections to people in positions of power can, he argues, not only increase project efficiency, but also improve the effectiveness of contractual relations.

Critics, however, have raised concerns about the utilitarian approach and the uncritical reflection of the co-operation with local organisations and community leaders. They suggest that traditions and local customs are not politically neutral which can become the local elites' instruments in justifying their legitimacy (Williams et al. 2003). Without a deeper understanding of local politics and the internal power structures within local organisations, interventions only reinforce the existing inequalities.

In his analysis, Field (2003) shows his concerns about how 'powerful groups try to limit or undermine the social capital of those who are less powerful' (p. 74). In her comparative study of community involvement in solid waste management in India and Pakistan, Beall (1997) illustrates an alarming result: community participation does not 'necessarily lead to equitable partnership', but 'reinforce[s] structural inequalities which have deeper roots in the wider societies' (p. 960). She also

reminds us that the poor do not necessarily benefit from social co-operation, and 'differences in access to resources and the power structures involved cannot be ignored' (p. 957).

6.3 Asymmetrical reciprocity

The notion of contractual relations in the institutional approach is based on the idea of a negotiation of common values. Norms of exchange and reciprocity are generated through a dialogic process, and consensus is achieved through the reconciliation of 'naturally different' interests (Young 1997:39). It is also claimed that making the poor negotiate in local self-governing institutions helps in 'evolving a sense of collective identity and building social capital, which over time can lead to empowerment' (IFAD 2001:219).

Despite good intentions, it is not certain how this new structure of relations ensures that the voice of the poor will be heard. Young (1997:44) uses the term 'asymmetrical reciprocity' to argue that 'the notion of symmetry in relations obscures the differences in social position that makes relations asymmetrical'. The unequal distribution of economic resources and differently structured positioning in hierarchy, she points out, create sources of tension between individuals and groups which make egalitarian negotiation and discussion impossible.

The intentions were to help the poor members to make a living and to initiate more interactions with members of different backgrounds.

Box 6.1 sheds light on the low incidence of price negotiations and the low number of actual partnerships between migrants and local people in setting up a business. In a focus-group discussion, the migrants expressed a strong sense of inadequacy when it came to actually participating. They considered their second-hand goods as not as valuable as those of their local counterparts, so they did not expect to make any profits. They also thought that they lacked marketing skills and did not know how to present their products in an attractive manner. Migrants with part-time weekend jobs suggested that they could not afford the time to bargain, which they considered 'a time-consuming process'. The rural Chinese immigrants who did not speak Cantonese (the lingua franca in Hong Kong) struggled to articulate their needs. They were afraid to bargain because of their strong accents. The psychological and language barriers prevented them from price bargaining and meeting local people. One migrant spoke in Mandarin (her mother tongue) because 'I do not want to sound foolish in front of them (the local people)'.

This case study appears to suggest that participatory space does not necessarily provide a level playing field, nor that the voices of the var-

Box 6.1 *Social interactions in the community currency project*

Members of the community currency project met on a monthly basis in a bazaar where goods were sold and traded. Social workers encouraged both sellers and buyers to negotiate prices and hoped that the bargaining process might generate interactions and foster relations some relations based on trust. To encourage the involvement of its members, social workers suggested that they start their own businesses and sell snacks and goods at the bazaars. This was intended to help poor members earn some income and to initiate more interactions with members of different backgrounds. They put more effort into assisting the Chinese migrants because they knew that the migrants lacked sufficient knowledge to establish businesses.

I participated in a number of the bazaars and observed the interactions between the migrants and the local people. The migrants usually picked up something that caught their eye, checked the price tag and then immediately put it back down if they considered it too expensive. The actual trading and bargaining that went on was actually fairly limited. Migrants failed to strike any bargains with the sellers and they avoided staying too long at any one stall. Most of these stalls were owned by local people while less than 10 per cent were run by migrants. Business partnerships involving migrants and local people were very rare.

Source: own research

ious groups will all be heard on an equal level. The unequal distribution of economic and human resources and the differently structured positionings within a social hierarchy constrain individuals in disadvantaged circumstances from engaging in meaningful community participation. This example also underlines the limitations of the neo-institutional perspective that assumes that social agents are atomistic and free in negotiating workable sets of norms and values in groups. As Berry (1993) clearly points out:

To recognise the fact of negotiation is not to espouse a voluntaristic or instrumental theory of social causation. Outcomes of negotiations are influenced both by the power and resources which people bring to bear on them and by the process of negotiation itself. *Culture and ideology are continually redefined through practice, which they also shape.* Negotiations can also lead to multiple, contradictory outcomes, which do not correspond to the intentions of any of the negotiators (p. 206, emphasis added).

6.3.1 *Internal divisions*

Another problem with the notion of symmetrical reciprocity is its assumption that group members share similar identities and interests, which will automatically include and benefit all of the group's members (Platteau and Abraham 2002). This perspective fails to appreciate the internal division and competing norms within 'communities'. In the context of Hong Kong, migrants exhibited three distinct identities based on their diverse backgrounds and differences, with regard to accent, education, and age. Other factors, such as someone's urban or rural background, employed or not, dependent on welfare or not, led to further internal comparisons and discrimination (see box 6.2).

Not all of the migrants wanted to expose their migrant identities in Hong Kong. This was especially true for those with Hong Kong and Chinese urban identities. They felt that they had managed to successfully integrate into mainstream society. Their participation in various 'rights campaigns' would inevitably make them more visible and put them in a vulnerable position where it became easy for them to be discriminated against. They, therefore, adopted self-exclusion as their

Box 6.2 *Different ethnic identities of Chinese migrants*

1. **Chinese/rural identity:** They come mainly from rural areas; their skins are darker and they have strong accents. The age differences between wives and husbands and their children can be large. They encounter difficulties because of their social backgrounds and physical characteristics when they try to hide details of their migrant identities or try to alter their identities.

2. **Hong Kong/urban identity:** They may be as poor as the first group, but their urban background prior to their immigration allows them to feel superior to the first group. They have a stronger Hong Kong identity and thus often accuse the first group of bringing shame to the migrant population as a whole because of their reliance on social benefits and their general lack of education.

3. **Hong Kong-Chinese/urban identity:** They are mainly the 'coping poor'. Their families are more intact, the husbands have stable jobs, and they do not rely on social benefits. They also have more knowledge and resources, so they use their dual identities flexibly in various circumstances.

Source: own research

livelihood strategy in an attempt to be socially included by mainstream society. Nevertheless, the pursuit of social independence is not without its costs. In the case of those migrants who did not claim their citizen's right to social benefits, they tried to dodge discrimination, but paradoxically, their exercise of agency led to the unanticipated result of exclusion for their children. Because they did not have the money for new school uniforms and toys prevented them from making friends with their classmates.

6.4 Political nature of new rules and roles

The institutional approach regards social roles, rules, and sanctions as the basis of the normative regulation of individuals and collective actions. Lopez and Scott (2000:29) note that 'The key mechanism of institutional regulations has been developed through the concepts of social positions and role expectations ...social institutions regulate actions by defining the social positions that people can occupy and the behaviour that is associated with these positions'. Institutional theorists have been accused of focusing too much on getting the institutions right, and on the 'narrowest of technical senses' to overcome contractual or informational problems. Formal rules are also intended to replace informal ones because the latter may 'prevent further market development' (World Bank 2002:179).

This perspective, however, does not adequately allow for the political dimension of rules and roles (Field 2003). Questions such as who determines the roles, who uses sanctions, and who makes the claims, need to be addressed, because institutional designs are not simply technical issues, but also involve the distribution of power. The IFAD 2001 report highlighted the fact that institutions 'intermediate between the competing demands of different social groups. Inevitably, those who control institutions, usually the better-off, gain most in this process' (p. vi-vii). In this section, I will examine how role expectations are related to power, and how individuals juggle conflicting expectations. I will then challenge the apolitical establishment of rules and roles, and argue that powerful social groups may take advantage of new bureaucratic institutions at the expense of the poor.

6.4.1 Conflicting role expectations

While discussing the social embeddedness of institutions in the previous chapter, I also mentioned that mainstream institutional designs are in favour of creating new sets of rules and roles. How the poor respond to the change in role expectations and manage both new and

Table 6.1 *Miss Lin's complexity of role expectations*

<i>Role partners</i>	<i>Expectations</i>
1. Husband	expects her to visit his family as her first priority, and be reverent to his elderly parents in Hong Kong
2. Mainland family and relatives	expect her to remit money to improve their living standards
3. Restaurant employer (where she works part-time as a cleaner)	expect her to work hard, accept long working hours and low pay, with no long holidays
4. School teachers	expect her to help her two children with their studies
5. Social workers and other migrants in NGOs	expect her to have strong commitment to their groups and be involved in their activities
6. Hong Kong government	expects her to go through the process of social adjustment smoothly and not become dependent on welfare benefits

Source: own research

old roles, then, is worth investigating. In intricate webs of relations, individuals occupy different social positions, which simultaneously involve various behavioural expectations. While some of these expectations will be shared by most role partners, others are not. Take Miss Lin for example. She moved to Hong Kong to re-unite with her husband in 1996. The change in her status from a mainland Chinese citizen to a Hong Kong resident was followed by a complex transformation of role expectations (see table 6.1).

Social roles are not as static as institutionalists believe. They are involved in constant negotiations in their complex web of social relations. Miss Lin noted that social workers' expectations of a deeper involvement in their groups conflicted directly with her husband's wishes. Her low salary at the restaurant prevents her from regularly remitting money to her family back in China. Moreover, role expectations are not neutral in terms of power, but are seen in relation to the distribution of power. Lopez and Scott (2000) argue that 'individuals may juggle the various expectations that make up their role set, as these may often conflict with one another' (p. 31). With limited social networks and resources, the poor are placed at a disadvantage when it comes to role negotiation.

6.4.2 *Who benefits from newly crafted institutions?*

New rules may bring changes, but they do not necessarily make the institutional arrangements any more egalitarian. Clan associations in Hong Kong have over the past few years been severely criticised for being 'traditional and bureaucratic', especially in the distribution of

welfare benefits amongst their members. Senior and wealthier members are accused of receiving more benefits than the younger and poorer members. To improve their images within their own communities, leaders have imposed a series of reforms to make their organisations more transparent and democratic. For example, they introduced the 'first come, first served' principle, which is regarded as fair and unbiased. The poor, however, do not necessarily benefit from this new policy because various members of clan associations told me that they continued to remain excluded from benefits. Because most of the senior and wealthy members are also committee members, they readily have quicker access to the most updated information so that their families have a head start in obtaining benefits. (diary 21/10/02). This example supports Lawson's argument, which states that 'rules as resources are not equally available, or do not apply equally, to each member of the population at large' (1997:97-8). Institutional reforms do not guarantee a more even distribution of resources, and worse still, they allow the privileged to further pursue their own self-interests.

Sanctions play a key role in the institutional designs because they punish free-riders, increase the cost of deviant behaviour, and finally make contractual relations more equal. These instrumental and technical views of sanctions, however, obscure two crucial political agendas: who has the right to impose sanctions, and what are the underlying political motivations. Lopez and Scott (2000) warn that 'A powerful social group may be able to impose its preferences on the less powerful by using its power to sanction non-conformity. In these circumstances, the institutions of a society will express the values of the powerful – who may not even form a majority' (p. 33). The privileged who control sanctions then get to exercise authority to define what is admissible behaviour. They can also influence 'unwanted' agenda items. For instance, a mid-ranked committee member may want to initiate a debate about the role of migrants in a committee meeting of his clan association. He believes that the association faces the problem of an ageing membership and needs new blood urgently. He suggests recruiting more new arrivals from the mainland because they retain a strong hometown identity. However, the prevalence of anti-migrant sentiment prevents this issue from becoming an item for discussion at the meeting (interview with Chan Han Lam 9/07/02).

In conclusion, newly crafted bureaucratic institutions are not apolitical. New rules are both authorised and legitimised, and may allow the rich, the powerful, and the educated to represent and articulate the needs of the disadvantaged. Sanctions may also help to reinforce normative control (McGhee 2003). Therefore, it is possible that 'inequitable norms are negotiated, reproduced, reinforced, through which authority is exercised and sanctions imposed' (Clever 2004). How in-

dividuals respond to the inequality of power will be discussed later in the section on agency.

6.5 Complexity of authority

The concept of authority in the institutional approach is also problematic. It generally assumes that assigning new roles ensures the structure of authority in institutions, thus resulting in sustainable governance. This is evident in Uphoff and Wijayaratna's Gal Oya Project (2000) which suggests that choosing and assigning farmer representatives in groups is crucial because 'new roles made it easier for farmers to reach decisions about collective actions' (p. 1878). Nevertheless, this approach over-simplifies the complexity of authority in social practice. Authority does not derive from a single source, and different individuals may call upon a variety of attributes to 'justify [their] institutional positions or influence' (Clever 2002:19). For example, Cleaver suggests at least five elements that may help secure authority: economic wealth, professional knowledge, kinship and marriage, official position, and personal characteristics such as honesty, strength, and eloquence. Authority is thus highly contextualised and contested. I noticed that businessmen easily secured senior posts in clan associations because of their wealth. Wealth, however, is not the only selection criterion. University lecturers, lawyers, and local councillors were often invited to join because of their professional backgrounds and their social status, which thus enhances the image and functioning of the associations (diary 5/09/02).

While council committee members discuss and form rules, it is the clan association staff who implement them. This gives them considerable social power within and beyond clan associations. In my fieldwork experience, obtaining permission to observe or participate from members of staff was crucial. On one occasion, when I had discussed the possibility of teaching an English class for Chinese migrant children, the first response from the clan association leaders was not to consult the general committee, but staff members. On another occasion, a vice-chair agreed to show me profiles of the general association membership, but the reluctance of the staff slowed down this research process. The power of the staff lies in their strong networks in local communities since they contact members and non-members on a daily basis. Leaders rely on them to do opinion survey at the grassroots level. Their language proficiency, not only in Cantonese, but also in their hometown dialects, is another asset in gaining the confidence of the elders and other senior leaders. Most of them are above 40 years of age and have served in the same associations for decades. As a result, an

intricate relationship has gradually been established between clan association leaders and staff members – they are less employee and employer and more like partners. This gives staff a considerable amount of discretionary power. In their efforts to secure better livelihoods, migrants often tend to seek the support of, and make connections with, staff, rather than leaders or senior members.

6.5.1 *Gender and authority*

In discussing ‘asymmetrical reciprocity’, I have mentioned that differences in social positions as a result of gender, race, ethnicity, and class may affect access to resources of the poor. In some literature, however, these social factors tend to be regarded as ‘fixed’ structural categories which are not fully examined in different contexts. Taking gender as an example, its relationship with authority is complex in nature.

Generally speaking, there are few female representatives in the various decision-making bodies of clan associations. In my case study, for instance, only 15 out of a total of 107 members in the central committee of the Fujian clan association were female, and none of them had attained the position of chair or vice-chair. This is because gender stereotypes remain strong in the group – while men are expected to be the breadwinners, women are supposed to be housewives who stay at home. Women are also discriminated against when it comes to the inheriting of a family business. The culture of donation puts women at a disadvantage because they are unable to make large financial contributions, thus limiting their influence in the decision-making processes. Moreover, the organisational norms pose constraints on women’s participation. For example, Fujian clan association central committee meetings normally do not start very early since the leaders do not finish work before 8:00 p.m. This causes much inconvenience for the women who have to manage their careers as well as most of the domestic responsibilities (diary 22/10/02).

Nevertheless, not all clan associations exclude women from leadership positions. In the other two case studies women in the Chiuchow and Yunnan clan associations were elected vice-chairs, for example. One of them is the wife of the founder of the association while the other is twenty years older than the chairman and has earned esteem within the association. Their success, however, does not necessarily guarantee that the interests of women, especially poor migrants, will be articulated. In interviews, they tend to underestimate the difficulties other women may face, since they regard the social structure to be fair and consider hard work as the way to overcome gender inequalities. They usually wear jewellery and expensive clothes when they attend social events thus creating a huge distinction between themselves and

ordinary female members. Although they are keen on strengthening women's social networks by setting up women's groups in the clan associations, participants are generally from a middle-class background, and ordinary members are unable to engage in any conversation with them since they are 'too posh' (interview with Siu 4/09/02).

6.6 Symbolic power

Bourdieu (1977) suggests that ruling classes strengthen their control by manipulating rituals, traditions, and cultural symbols to naturalise their legitimacy. He argues that the use of culturally embedded practices helps to develop a sense of collectivity, so that orders and solidarity are reasserted. In his words, 'the naturalisation of the ideological and practical effects of the mechanisms assure[s] the reproduction of the relations of domination and control' (1977:196). Institutions become the instruments of the powerful to maintain their authority because individuals are totally 'unaware of the very question of legitimacy' (p. 168). In his model of the 'symbolic mode of dominance', he highlights three key features: firstly, the emphasis of the social calendar and rhythms creates a collective sense of time and place; secondly, the ritualisation of collective practice legitimises unity and reasserts solidarity; and thirdly, language, dialect, music, and other cultural symbols turn out to be 'institutionalised instruments for [the] maintenance of the symbolic order' (p. 165).

His analysis is particularly useful in exploring complex power relationships in 'communities'. While socially and culturally embedded institutions enable some groups to exercise power, they may constrain others, however. In my research, collective rituals play a very important role in clan associations. I have extensively noted their annual events as found in the various clan association newsletters. The festivals, banquets and celebrations found in the clan associations that bind members together, are summarised in table 6.2. During these formal gatherings, cultural symbols, such as traditional music (see photo 6.1), dancing, hometown foods and *lai see*, are drawn upon in order to develop a sense of nostalgia and reinforce collective identities. In Bourdieu's argument, these social events provide a 'social calendar' which governs the behaviour of members regarding what to do and when to do it. Respect for collective rhythms, he argues, implies 'respects for the rhythm that is appropriate to each action' (1977:162).

Ritual symbols are presented in an informal and religious way. For example, the central committee of the Ku Ying village-based clan association transported a Buddha statue from their hometown and placed it at the entrance of their association to create a collective belief (see

Table 6.2 *Collective events and features in clan associations*

<i>Events</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
Founding anniversary	Various	Banquet, dancing, singing
Mid-Autumn Festival banquet	Mid-Sept. to Mid-Oct.	Dancing, singing, eating home-made food
Lunar New Year banquet	Mid-Jan to Mid-Feb	Dancing, singing, eating home-made food, exchanging <i>lai see</i>
Commemoration of the Founding of the People's Republic of China	Held annually on Oct 1	Banquet, speeches by senior Chinese officials
Funerals	Various	Helping poor, single and elderly members to organise funerals, fund raising, giving money to bereaved families
Wedding banquets	Various	Playing hometown music, photo-taking, married couples and families give money to clan association as donations
Returning to China to worship ancestors	Usually during Qingming festival around March	Meeting village leaders and old friends, worship ancestors, organising banquets
Liaison with mainland and overseas organisations	Various	Reception of overseas and mainland organisations and clan associations, arranging accommodation and sight-seeing, gift exchange
Credit rotation	Monthly	Credit rotation has become less popular. Few clan associations continue this practice. Practice has changed from credit generation to sustaining financial needs of clan association
Committee meeting	Monthly	Discussing issues dealing clan associations and local communities

Source: own research

photo 6.2). Speaking in dialect fosters the sense of 'home' while regular cross-border travel to worship ancestors reminds members of their roots. In Berry's observation (1993), collective activities, such as funerals (see photo 6.3), marriages, and initiation rites, create golden opportunities for the powerful and the rich to gain respect and create obligations among their kin and neighbours by offering donations and contributing food and gifts.

6.6.1 *Building on differences*

Whereas rituals and religious status help to create a sense of commonality, other symbols, such as clothing, decorations, and ornaments are

Photo 6.1 *Fujian traditional music team*



Source: Newsletter of Hong Kong Ku Ying Clan Association, Vol.1, Dec, 2001, p.14

Photo 6.2 *Buddha statues in a village-based clan association*



Source: Newsletter of Hong Kong Ku Ying Clan Association, Vol.1, Dec, 2001, p.12

Photo 6.3 *Funeral*

Source: Newsletter of Hong Kong Ku Ying Clan Association, Vol.1, Dec, 2001, p.16

deliberately deployed by the ruling class to reinforce the social differences between themselves and ordinary members. For instance, leaders' wives wear jewellery and expensive dresses to attend social events. By emphasising donations to clan associations delivers a message that if ordinary members cannot help a group financially, they should contribute their physical labour instead. Using role models is also a strategy that helps build collective identities by idolising a few distinguished members. In the case of the Chiu Chow clan association, for example, Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka Shing is often cited in connection with social virtues like working hard for clan associations that will eventually pay off. The strategy of 'building on differences' is also effective in building solidarity. Clan association leaders often compare their own associations with others. They may try to demonstrate their humility on the surface, but I argue that in a deeper sense, they encourage association solidarity by reminding members of their group's 'inferiority' compared to others. In other words, the leaders encourage sticking together as a way of becoming a superior association (diary 15/10/02). The highlighting of a group's negative aspects is in considerable different from the general practices employed by NGOs. Their empowerment programmes, for example, accent the positive images of the groups.

Nevertheless, I am aware of the limitations of Bourdieu's analysis of dominance. Field (2003), for example, notes that Bourdieu tends to regard 'the powerful group' as a homogeneous entity. This fails to address adequately the complexity of authority and the diverse locations of decision making. The role of agency in his analysis is also interesting. Take the agency of the 'ruling class' for example. From Bourdieu's perspective, the powerful are seen as calculating as they manipulate

rituals to reproduce the relations of domination and control. I do not deny that some leaders are motivated by strategic considerations but I argue for a more complex picture of rationality. In interviews, I asked the leaders why they preserve particular traditions. They pointed out that they had been practising these rituals for a long time, and they thought that the elderly would get annoyed if they stopped performing the rituals. They also admitted that they would be considered 'bad' leaders if they did not maintain these old rituals (interview 11/06/02). This illustrates that various decision-making processes are largely socially embedded. While the sense of 'keeping the status quo' is very strong, they are not always calculating how they can use the symbols to reinforce collective identities.

6.6.2 *The reinvention of traditions*

Another shortcoming of Bourdieu's perspective is his inadequate analysis of tradition. Cleaver (2005a) argues that individuals may simultaneously be accepting and challenging a variety of traditions. In one case study, a young Chinese migrant strongly criticised the practices of her own clan association. She complained that leaders and senior members expected ordinary members to show respect when addressing them. She was also critical of the unfair policy of welfare distribution within the group. Most benefits, she believed, were going to senior, rather than junior members. Despite her deep dissatisfaction, she continued to participate in the women's group of her association, worshipping the Buddha statues, and encouraging her husband to keep his connections with influential senior members (interview with Mrs Lam 21/08/02). This shows that the use of traditions can be both flexible and dynamic in nature.

The distinction between discourses of 'tradition' and 'modern' becomes blurred, when 'traditions' are constantly invented and reinvented. Changing circumstances can lead to traditional arrangements being adjusted to suit new purposes. For example, the 'Chiu Chow Cultural Festival' was jointly organised by the government and the Chiu Chow clan associations at the millennium. It was regarded as a mutually beneficial project; while the clan associations could take this opportunity to modernise their images and receive public funding, the government could use it to foster tourism. Both traditional and modern forms of interaction were drawn upon. Traditional dancing and Chinese Opera, along with Karaoke and a fun fair, were presented.

Not every individual or group, however, is equally capable of reinventing traditions, and this may place certain migrants at a disadvantage. Old residents are more capable of drawing upon 'community wisdom' to make claims, while new arrivals from mainland China may

lack sufficient knowledge to make their counter claims. In accounts describing the severe drought in Hong Kong in the early 1970s, the elderly, in interviews, emphasised the strong community spirit, suggesting that members queued up co-operatively to fetch water and helped one another. They then turn around and blame new migrants for being selfish and seeking social benefits without making any contributions to the society. New arrivals do not know enough about the past of the 'community', to adequately defend their own positions.

The process of modernising traditions can easily trigger disputes and power struggles because not everyone agrees with the pace and direction of change, and some may want to preserve traditions and avoid any change. In a general meeting, for example, a young leader proposed setting up a website for the clan association to increase transparency, but this suggestion was strongly rejected by the elders, and he was accused of being too 'Western'. The open rejection and public humiliation of this individual, I argue, was intended to deter other young leaders from making 'radical' suggestions. Meanwhile, unwanted agenda items are often suppressed and put aside during debates (McGhee 2003).

6.7 Challenging simplistic institutional evolutionism

Community leaders tend to rely on consensus rulings to build solidarity and harmony. Open conflict is regarded as an undesirable threat to their legitimacy. However, increasing numbers of institutional scholars argue that when groups expand, the cost of seeking consensus in terms of time arises. This is compounded with the various pressures of modernisation and the growing diversity of interests, which, they predict, will lead to the rules for making decisions being inevitably transformed so that consensus-seeking will no longer work and will be replaced by majority rule. For example, Bellamy expresses his pessimistic view:

That danger seems particularly great in advanced societies, where market pressures produce a high degree of technology innovation as well as considerable social and geographical mobility. At the same time, enhanced functional differentiation, combined with greater ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism, undermines the relative homogeneity on which communitarian law relies. There are no longer enough shared practices and understandings to sustain the communal approach (Bellamy 2003:235).

Platteau and Abraham (2002) share similar ideas. They suggest four reasons why ‘old’ institutional rules no longer work in the context of decentralised rural development: expanding economic opportunities, growing resource scarcity, rising aspiration and educational levels, and increased heterogeneity among community members (p. 104). They predict that communities will undergo ‘rule evolution’: firstly, rules for decision making *must* lay more emphasis on majority voting at the expense of consensual procedures; secondly, rank-based hierarchy *must* give way to more democratic modes of governance; thirdly, sharing norms *must* be relaxed (p. 128, my emphasis).

Their comment reflects the currently dominant idea of institutional evolutionalism, which states that institutions evolve via a standard and unilinear pattern, and simply transform themselves from bad to good institutions, from weak to robust, from inefficient to efficient, and most often, from traditional to modern. Cleaver (2002) argues that this approach mistakenly regards institution building as an active and conscious process of institutional designs and crafting, and rule evolution as a process of institutional strengthening (p. 14).

6.7.1 *Complex processes of institutional change*

However, my observations regarding the institutional practices in clan associations, do little to support these claims. Despite the rapid transformation of Hong Kong society, the principle of consensus seeking remains strong among clan associations. A wide and slow consultation process still prevails. For instance, small and village-based clan associations are invited to send representatives to attend the monthly general meetings of larger province- and city-based clan associations. Apart from face-to-face negotiations, telephone consultations are also conducted before meetings in order to avoid confrontations and embarrassments. Staff members are also consulted before new plans are implemented. If a consensus cannot be reached, leaders tend to postpone the discussion to allow more time and space for negotiations. Despite the long decision-making process, in most cases, it proves effective in reducing conflicts (diary 5/09/02).

Majority voting and sanctions are generally regarded as undesirable because they officialise the existence of disagreement. Since most clan association leaders are themselves business partners, and their families know each other very well, dense relational webs blur the distinction between their private and public lives. As Platteau and Abraham (2002) argue, ‘any disagreement among the elite about a rule or a decision is bound to spill over into the sphere of private relations’ (p. 112). The tight intertwined nature of the private and social spheres means that ‘any open manifestation of disagreement at the level of commu-

nity affairs creates a negative externality on the level of interpersonal relations' (p. 118) Strong norms of reconciliation shape interpersonal relations not only amongst leaders, but also amongst ordinary members. Community leaders and the elders are keen to arbitrate and settle domestic disputes, especially those involving family violence and divorce. They see their interventions as a way of restoring already-shaken Confucian family values in Hong Kong. Mediation usually works along gender lines: in a divorce case, for example, female leaders will talk to wives and males to husbands. However, these reconciliation attempts are not always effective since some couples insist on taking their cases to court (diary 15/10/02).

The processes of institutional evolution are, therefore, complex and fluid. Changes are made according to circumstances and needs. They do not necessarily guarantee more efficient procedures because long consultation processes take time; or more optimal ones because '... maintaining social consensus and solidarity may be equally as important as optimum resource management outcomes' (Cleaver 2002:17). It is also essential to mention that the poor are not necessarily better off as the result of a consensus ruling. The lengthy community meetings and long processes of renegotiating norms exert a considerable burden on the poorest people who are generally time and resource poor. They are often excluded from the process of decision making because they simply cannot afford to participate.

6.7.2 *Flexible membership*

Restructuring the system of membership is also viewed as an active response of clan associations to external changes. The Yunnan clan association, for example, is a young and small association established in 1983. Yunnan is located in China's interior and the number of Yunnan immigrants in Hong Kong is small. They need to recruit more members if the Yunnan clan association is to increase its influence in Hong Kong. Thus, the application form clearly states that if applicants 'once lived or worked in Yunnan' (for no matter how long) or simply 'love Yunnan', they can automatically become members. The annual membership fees were also reduced from HK\$30 to HK\$20. This strategy of flexible membership is also adopted in its team building activities. A few Yunnan clan association members are also involved in playing outdoor bowling. They wanted to form a team but they did not have enough members, so the team captain recruited some good players from elsewhere, even though they had no Yunnan background at all. Thus, one's ability to contribute skills replaces place of origin and dialect as the criterion for membership.

Another case study involves the Chiu Chow Mutual Help Society, which also has a flexible membership policy that does not seek to exert influence, but instead sustain their already established social services. The mutual help society has a clinic with a doctor and a nurse to provide services for its members. Although the charges are only half of the average doctor's appointment, the service remains unpopular because of where it is located. The Society has had to spend nearly HK\$1 million annually just to keep the clinic running. This expenditure has become a heavy financial burden on the institution. The central committee realises that its lack of popularity is due to its location, which is not convenient to public transportation; and also because most of their members no longer live in the area. In order to sustain the service, they have decided to extend the service beyond their membership, to their 'neighbours'. When I ask a staff member what 'neighbours' meant, he replied that basically anyone is welcome. These two examples have thus demonstrated that flexible 'membership' is a strategic response to changes in circumstances.

The forms of co-operation have also changed over time. For example, the practice of micro-credit rotation where members could raise money for investment purposes or personal use was once popular among clan associations. However, after the economy boomed and the flow of credit became less restrictive and banks became more willing to lend money, the role of credit rotation basically became obsolete. Some clan associations may have preserved the practice, but its role has changed – the interest now generated is used to subsidise association operations (interview with Mr. Choi, 4/09/02, Mr. Ng, 11/11/02). Another example referred to earlier is the Chiu Chow Cultural Festival which was jointly organised by the government and the Chiu Chow Clan Association in 2000. It shows that patterns of co-operation have been transformed by, rather than replaced by, the government. Some migrants may benefited from the change because government and clan association services are not mutually exclusive, and that gives them more options from which to choose.

6.7.3 *The dark side of authority building*

Building relations of trust is a key element in contractual designs, and there is a general belief that a high level of trust is necessarily good. Critics, however, caution that trust, as a socially embedded value, may conceal power inequalities. Wintrobe, for example, suggests that: 'the elites of ethnic groupings will find it in their interest to exploit ethnic loyalty ... to alter the distribution of tangible assets' (1995:xii-xiii, my emphasis). Community leaders, in my case studies, always reminded members that everyone in the community is like family, and that they,

the leaders should only be seen as volunteers who want to improve the 'family'. This gives the impression that they are working altruistically and solely for the community, and that members should appreciate their efforts and forgive their mistakes. This situation gives some people the opportunity to exploit this 'blind faith' for their own interests. As Berry observes, customary claims can be used to 'mask individual accumulation' (1993:120). For instance, the deputy chairman of a clan association, a retail businessman sells traditional moon-cakes from his hometown to clan members during the Mid-Autumn Festival. A staff member finds out one day that he charges higher prices to make a profit on this food. She complains to the chairman but he ignores her complaint and warns her not to make any more trouble. She wonders whether the chairman is perhaps also involved with 'the dirty business', but she does not dare mention it again, for fear of losing her job (diary, 6/07/02). This case illustrates that a high level of trust actually means less transparency, while mutual supervision is undermined, making corruption possible.

Collective identities can easily conceal the use of power because they 'tend to promote conformism to discourage disagreement or debate and to mask divisions within the groups' (Ferguson 2003:82). Clan associations emphasise consensus building and delivering an image of solidarity to the public. This tendency can easily lead to the suppression of differences and dissension. In other cases, the re-positioning of clan associations may generate unexpected consequences of exclusion. Whether clan associations accept games like mah-jong is a good example. Clan association leaders want to include more elderly members by allowing them to play mah-jong on clan association premises. However, female and younger members are not included. The women are unhappy and do not want to bring their children to the clan association because they are worried about their children learning to gamble. The increasing number of elderly members also reinforces the image that clan associations are just 'old men's clubs', which makes them unattractive to younger members. How to include one group without excluding the others is never an easy matter.

6.7.4 *Agency and authority*

Social activists believe that the difficulty of tackling exploitation and exclusion, lies in the lack of consciousness of the poor which allows these processes of inequality to be routinely produced and reproduced. Bourdieu's notion of 'symbolic power' suggests that local elites manipulate cultural symbols and the ritualisation of practices as 'institutionalised instruments' to legitimise their rules. As a result, subordinates fail to notice the power inequalities and they actually 'help' reproduce the

symbolic mode of domination (Bourdieu 1977:196). In the previous section, I mentioned Iris Young's idea of 'asymmetrical reciprocity', arguing that social hierarchy obscures the nature of inequality. Bottero and Irwin (2003) put it more explicitly:

Hierarchy is embedded in social relations; 'social location' and 'culture' are united in the structured nature of everyday social practices, hierarchical practices ... Personal life is hierarchically ordered that people tend to see themselves as 'ordinary', and thus downplay the significance of hierarchy in their lives (p. 471).

Increasing consciousness to deal with power inequalities has become a top priority of many development agencies. They believe that individuals are transformative agents. Once their consciousness is raised, and this is added to the notion of institutional transformation and the improvement of institutional incentives, unequal structures will ultimately be altered. Therefore, raising consciousness has been a key objective in empowerment programmes. Despite many good intentions and much optimism, there are two concerns about their effectiveness: firstly, the dominant 'project-based, time-bounded' framework of development may not suit the change since increasing awareness takes time, and the decision-making processes are shaped by our experience and everyday interactions. Secondly, increasing awareness may not necessarily improve the livelihoods of the poor, and may actually become a burden.

Challenging domination is not without its costs. It exerts extra pressure on the already limited time and resources of the poor. Their livelihoods are deeply embedded in social relations. It means that access to resources is linked to their social reputations. Once individuals are labelled 'troublemakers', they end up being blacklisted, and face many difficulties in finding jobs. In the case of the construction industry in Hong Kong, 'word of mouth' and relations with foremen are paramount to securing jobs, for instance (diary 25/09/02).

An IFAD report (2001) pinpoints the cruel reality that 'collective action was possible because of existing patron-client relationships' (p. 198). In interviews, migrants reiterate the fact that if they lose their jobs, not only they, but also their children and their relations on the mainland will suffer. As a result, they tend to secure stable employment rather than pursue equality. This is the reason why clan association staff members, whom I mentioned in the previous section, did not pursue the reporting of the case involving profiteering to higher authorities. Williams et al. (2003) has argued that the real problem that the poor encounter is not one of consciousness, but of 'finding ways of

making a living within existing unequal economic and political relationships' (p. 177).

Institutions are highly interrelated; change within one institution, without change in the others has little impact on the overall structure of authority. The poor are also trapped in this dilemma. The interdependence of institutions exists along with various structural inequalities. The question of how to adopt a more holistic approach to institutional improvement, while, at the same time, tackling institutional inequalities, needs further exploration (Wong, 2005c).

6.8 Financial, human and physical constraints

Poor migrants are also constrained by a lack of financial and human capital in obtaining access to social capital. Financial resources are defined here, not only in terms of cash, but in kinds, labour, materials, gifts, and time. They affect an individual's effective access to institutions, mediate their involvement in public action and shape their perceived ability to confront inequalities. Migrants may use their time and labour to compensate their lack in cash. In my observations, female migrants provided domestic assistance to their neighbours while male migrants offered to help friends in energy-demanding tasks such as moving. Thus group participation entails numerous extra burdens. To fit into the social worker's ideal of participation, for example, migrants in the mutual-help group in Mongkok had to provide counselling to new arrivals and accompany new members as they applied for social welfare. All these duties prevented them from building new, and maintaining old, social networks.

Human resources affect how people articulate their needs in public fora and participate in collective decision-making processes. Few migrants have received a proper education before leaving the mainland. The majority are constrained by their strong accents,⁵ high levels of illiteracy, and a general lack of communication skills. These disadvantages restrict them from effective performance in public discussions. Migrants' human capital is further restricted by poor health and physical immobility. Despite targeting poverty, the elderly, the disabled, and those suffering from under-nourishment continue to be marginalised from participation, in part because of their general invisibility.

The high concentrations of migrants who have moved into Hong Kong's old city centres, such as in Mongkok and Kwun Tong, over the past three decades might have offered them a dense web of social support, but new government policies since the 1990s that attempt to spread the new arrivals into more remote areas, such as Tin Shui Wai, have restricted them from seeking immediate help from their old

networks, in part because of the long distances and increased public transportation costs. They may attempt to build new networks, thanks to the efforts of various NGOs in the newly developed areas, but building new friendships, while maintaining the old ones, has created competing demands for the available resources. The border between Hong Kong and the mainland is relatively open, and exchanges between borders have become a regular event. Middle-aged migrants may return to the mainland during festivals, such as the Lunar New Year, while the younger migrants may cross the border on a weekly basis. This high level of mobility between borders enables migrants to also turn to social networks on the mainland. The increased permeability, however, also means that gossip quickly spreads across the borders.

6.9 Conclusions

I have criticised much of the new institutionalist literature for neglecting the complexity of authority in the emergence and development of institutions. While authority is considered significant in ensuring cooperation, evoking trust, encouraging compliance, and tackling free-riding, it can, however, be developed under unequal conditions. Two key and interrelated issues have thus far not been adequately addressed: firstly, how individuals respond and adapt to changes in authority structures, and secondly, whether the design of the authority structure has taken into account cultural practices, social traditions, personal networks, and the perceived 'right way of doing things'.

While it has become clear that social capital 'does very little to challenge the status quo' (Fine 2001:198), there is a need for greater emphasis on a deeper analysis of power within the institutional framework, especially that which explores the mechanisms by which inequalities are routinely produced and reproduced. The school of institutional crafting fails to adequately address the power dynamics in their institutional designs because of the instrumental use of institutions. It risks reinforcing the existing social inequalities because institutions may provide local elites with enhanced power and normative authority by taking advantage of them in the name of custom. The strong belief amongst NGOs in challenging unequal power structures by increasing consciousness, transforming institutions, and improving institutional incentives, however, may also exert a considerable burden on the poor. It also fails to take their complex livelihoods and the social-embeddedness of agency into account because the poor may rely on clientage to cope with the instability of resource allocation.

Therefore, I suggest that we need to examine the interplay between bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions, the relationship

between agency and livelihoods, and how normative aspects of social structures impede agency. We also need to explore the political and historical processes as well as the contexts of institution building, plus we need to examine the power relationships within 'communities' and investigate who represents and articulates the needs of the poor. In doing so, we can avoid the 'double victimisation' of the poor through modern, as well as traditional, institutional arrangements.

7 Conclusions and Policy Implications

7.1 Introduction

Hulme (2000) suggests that the concept of social capital ‘has provided an opportunity to move beyond the confines of participation and to address broader issues of values and institutions’ (p. 6). This book has, however, argued that social capital building does not automatically improve the livelihoods of poor people. It has offered evidence to explain that the neo-institutional approach to social capital is inadequate for understanding three key aspects: individual motivation in utilising social capital, the institutional dynamics that makes institutional crafting problematic, and the structural complexity that enables some poor people to gain access to social capital while denying others.

In order to accommodate the non-economic motivations for collective action and the idea that social perceptions of reality are relative and plural, this book has stressed that the need for a better framework to conceptualise social relationships and collective action. In this final chapter, I will first re-emphasise the significance of the ‘pro-poor’ social capital perspective by identifying some ‘gaps’ between the mainstream institutional designs and actual social realities. I will then analyse the notion of ‘unseen’ social capital, regarding its nature, characteristics and its differences from ‘seen’ social capital. The concluding section will highlight policy implications that policy makers and practitioners can deduce from this research.

7.2 Understanding the ‘pro-poor’ social capital perspective

This book has called for the building of an alternative social capital perspective with a poverty specificity. The sense of urgency arises from the context that, while the ‘Design Principles’ seek to re-engineer social relations by institutional crafting and achieve beneficial collective action by contractual engagement and authority building, and have become increasingly popular at the policy level, the effectiveness of the proposed prescriptions in enhancing poor people’s livelihoods remains doubtful.

After closely scrutinising many individual lives and social interactions among migrants and local people in the three NGO groups in Hong Kong, this study has exposed a gap between the assurances made in the 'Design Principles', on the one hand, and the real impact on the ground, on the other. This book has demonstrated that imposing the threat of sanctions to motivate less-active members in the female migrant mutual-help group is not necessarily effective in fostering norms of mutual trust and co-operation in groups. The application of explicit and standardised rules and the pursuit of visible collective action in the abused-women support group can increase the barriers that further hinder participation by poor members. Worse still, the caring group scheme in the abused-women support group has illustrated that building new institutions to achieve specific modes of relations can actually reduce trust and interactions between migrants and local people.

This analysis suggests that the gap between the institutional designs and social reality lies in an inadequate understanding of the roles of agency, institutions, and structures in mediating the processes about how social capital is formed, accessed, and distributed in the politicised participatory space. Agency does matter because it highlights social actors' perceptions and subjectivities about obtaining resources via social relationships. Policies using economic incentives and the element of fear to induce co-operation reflect the neo-institutionalists' assumptions about the strategic and instrumental nature of human motivation in community participation. This perspective, however, fails to develop a deeper analysis of the complex motivations underlying participation. Examples have been provided to show that migrants and local people can be motivated by moral concerns, a sense of commitment, and the 'right' way of doing things. Without taking these diverse motivations into account, the means of gaining economic benefits and the threat of penalty risks intimidating these individuals and discouraging them from participation.

The example of 'childcare advertisements' in the community currency project reveals the role of informal institutions in influencing migrants' childcare arrangements, which consequently limited the success of the scheme in enhancing the mutual help between the two social groups. This explains why faith in newly crafted institutional arrangements in achieving the desired moulding of social interactions is misplaced. As Berry (1993) argues, new institutions are superimposed upon, rather than supersede, existing institutions. The interactions between the formal and informal institutions and between the new and old institutions can result in divergent and unpredictable outcomes and lead to unintended consequences. Thus there is a need to take a different perspective regarding institutions. Using the social theories

by Douglas (1987) and Mehta et al. (1999), this book has provided enough examples to demonstrate how institutional arrangements are forged in practice through daily interactions and how existing customs, norms, and practices are used, adapted, and changed to fit new purposes and circumstances.

The dynamic relationships between agency and institutions are also influenced by social structures. The case study that focussed on migrants avoiding price negotiations and minimising their contacts with local people in a market trading in second-hand goods has illustrated how they cope with everyday social hostilities by internalising the norms of conflict avoidance. Their participation is further constrained by structural factors, such as the lack of human capital as well as by social deprivation. Consequently, the subordinate positions of migrants in the host society are reinforced, rather than challenged.

Using the 'pro-poor' social capital framework as an alternative, this book has illustrated the complex and dynamic processes of how migrants, consciously and unconsciously, utilise social capital in their everyday livelihoods through various institutional, social, rights-based, financial, human, and physical arrangements. However, it has shown that multiple channels do not necessarily provide migrants with more opportunities to improve their livelihoods. Quite the opposite: they become a double reinforcement of disadvantage. For instance, multiple identities result in conflicting expectations and multiple group memberships compete with families and social obligations. Relocating migrants to new towns makes the maintenance of their existing social networks more costly. Increased permeability between borders also ensures that gossip spreads faster, which exerts tremendous pressures on migrants to conform to the social expectations in both Hong Kong and on the mainland. The paradoxes of inclusion and exclusion have constrained their transformative potential in challenging unequal social relationships. For the sake of stable livelihoods, migrants work hard to secure social co-operation, but in return, this further reinforces their marginalised positions.

7.3 Applying the 'Agency-Institution-Structure' framework

Drawing on the 'Agency-Institution-Structure' framework, table 7.1 summarises the processes of negotiation that are shaped by local institutional arrangements and social organisations, migrants' own perceptions of their 'rights', their financial and human capital, and their physical environments. The analysis has demonstrated the complexity of the mechanisms that access resources and the mixed, and sometimes paradoxical, outcomes for poor individuals. For example, institutions

Table 7.1 *Social capital building among Chinese migrants in Hong Kong*

<i>Resources</i>	<i>Mechanisms</i>	<i>Outcomes</i> (+ve = positive impact -ve = negative impact)
(1) Institutional		
(a) Mutual-help groups	fostering norms of reciprocity and opening new spaces for participation	+ve: offering mutual help and practical needs -ve: rule-based management and sanctions place less well-endowed individuals at a disadvantage
(b) Multiple institutional engagement	using multiple identities to achieve diverse group memberships mixed motivations, can be both conscious and unconscious, and be shaped by the 'right ways of doing things' and moral concerns	+ve: multiple access to resources -ve: intermittent group participation owing to fragile livelihoods -ve: structural constraints, e.g., membership fees, lack of human capital
(c) Clan associations	(c1) migrants gain access through their accents and places of origin (c2) leaders using traditions, rituals and social symbols to legitimise their rules	(c1) + (c2) +ve: offering mutual help and meeting practical needs -ve: local elites manipulate social space, and reproducing power inequalities
(2) Social organisations		
(a) Family and kinship	(a1) making claims through 'blood' or kin ties (a2) gendered moral rationality	(a1) +ve: receiving cash, information and network support -ve: support is limited and unsustainable -ve: great pressure to conform (a2) +ve: male migrants find it easier to get childcare support -ve: female single-parent families receive insufficient support, so hindered from breaking out of poverty trap

<i>Resources</i>	<i>Mechanisms</i>	<i>Outcomes</i> (+ve = positive impact -ve = negative impact)
(b) Neighbourhood	(b1) reducing friction through space and time coordinations (b2) minimising daily contacts	(b1) and (b2) +ve: preserving neighbourly harmony -ve: deprived of neighbourly support
(3) Rights and entitlement		
(a) Stressing migrants' rights	(a) + (b) + (c) * exercise rights via visible and public manifestation in collective action	(a) + (b) + (c) +ve: potential to challenging inequalities -ve: visible collective actions risk damaging migrants' community reputations and social networks
(b) Highlighting migrants' Hong Kong citizenship	* through a sense of collective identity	
(c) Use both rights as new arrivals and Hong Kong citizens	* treat migrants as a homogeneous entity	(a) +ve: receiving extra support in the first few years of adjustment -ve: making migrants' identity too visible, fear of more discrimination
		(b) +ve: enjoying the rights and responsibilities granted and protected by the Basic Law -ve: deprived of special rights that new arrivals can enjoy
		(c) +ve: maximising access to resources -ve: migrants confused by 'mixed' identities
(4) Financial capital		
- in terms of cash, materials, gifts, labour, and time	* building relations of trust by constant (re)investment in social relationships * migrants using their labour and time to compensate for their lack in cash	-ve: limited financial capital prevents migrants from public participation and from access to multiple institutions

<i>Resources</i>	<i>Mechanisms</i>	<i>Outcomes</i> (+ve = positive impact -ve = negative impact)
(5) Human capital		
- in terms of education, qualifications, literacy, communication skills, and ability to make decisions in public	* migrants using their language, literacy, and communication skills to participate in public decision-making	-ve: Migrants' strong accents, low level of literacy, lack of communication skills, poor health and restricted physical mobility which inhibits them from articulating their needs in public fora
(6) Physical environment		
(a) Location of residence	(a1) migrants keeping in contact with their friends and relations by telephone (a2) building new social networks in the new towns	(a1) and (a2) -ve: long distance and high transport costs make the maintenance of old social networks difficult
(b) Permeability between borders	(b1) seeking support through cross-border movement	(b1) +ve: seeking extra support from both sides -ve: gossip spreads quickly across borders, monitor migrants' social behaviour both in Hong Kong and in the mainland

Source: own research

can be both inclusive and exclusive; social organisations can offer help to the poor but they can also exert tight social controls; while the rights-based approach can help increase control over one's resources, it can also be seen as a threat to their livelihoods. My study suggests that the poor are constrained by limited financial and human capital most of the time,. In order to secure stable livelihoods, they – wittingly and unwittingly – reproduce inequalities, along gender and identity lines, in their daily interactions. As a consequence, the multiple channels and arrangements are a double-edged sword: while they offer the poor a dual defence in their abilities to access resources, they can also victimise and marginalise them.

Not only has my analysis highlighted how individuals exercise agency and access various resources and channels for their survival, but it has also examined how structures help some groups gain social capital while denying the others. This dual enabling and constraining

nature of the interactions between agency, institution, and structure illuminate the complex and dynamic processes through which the multiplicity of arrangements can have both positive and negative impacts on the livelihoods of poor migrants.

7.4 Unpacking 'unseen' social capital

The current social capital debate has been narrowed down to the question of 'how to get the methods right'. However, the 'how' questions are closely related to the 'what' questions – what are the social relations and what makes social capital change, endure, or disappear. The concept of 'unseen' social capital helps to re-conceptualise the meaning and the nature of social relations in our everyday lives. In contrast to 'seen' social capital, 'unseen' social capital does not view social relations as raw materials which can be manipulated and exploited to mould 'desirable' patterns of co-operation. It assumes that human beings are not necessarily strategic agents who utilise social relations for purposeful reasons. Social capital is formed with mixture of conscious, unconscious and moral concerns. Everyday social relations are fluid and permeable across borders. They are culturally specific, and authority is diversely located. 'Unseen' social capital is embedded in submerged networks which are less visible, less functional, and less organised. Collective action can be stimulated by a single event and manifested in a one-off, ad-hoc act of solidarity. Its intermittent and fragile nature and partial agency, however, makes it difficult, though not impossible, to confront oppressive social structures.

This book has argued that 'unseen' social capital offers a better sociological lens with which to examine the dynamics of agency, institution, and structure. It is used to distinguish it from the 'seen' social capital conceptualised in the mainstream social capital approach. 'Seen' social capital generates from 'ideal' forms of co-operation, which are characterised as functional, visible, organisation-based, and demonstrated in public manifestations on a well-organised and regular basis. It is designed for a special purpose as well as to achieve certain purposes. 'Unseen' social capital, by contrast, offers a different perspective on social relations. It discards the functional approach of viewing social relations as 'raw materials' to be manipulated and exploited. It highlights the nature of everyday co-operation between individuals. It is embedded in networks of social relations, norms, and practices. It is informal, subtle, and less instrumental in nature, and can be formed, altered or destroyed, and can be subject to livelihood priorities and circumstance changes. The motivation of individuals in building 'unseen' social capital is mixed, influenced by both conscious and unconscious reasoning,

and guided by moral concerns. The sense of mutuality is generally developed beyond formalised group settings. Activities of reciprocity are also spontaneous and less-organised.

7.4.1 *Contrasting 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital*

'Seen' and 'unseen' social capital are compared from six perspectives: nature, incentives, institutional understanding, livelihoods, methodological approach, and the downsides. These are summarised in table 7.2.

Table 7.2 *Comparing and contrasting 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital*

	<i>'Seen' social capital</i>	<i>'Unseen' social capital</i>
1. Nature of social relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - universally applied - apolitical - homogeneity of groups, even distribution of social capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural and context specific - political - heterogeneity of social positioning, resulting in unequal access and distribution of social capital
2. Incentives of cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bounded rationality (maximisation within constraints) - strategic and conscious act of using social relations - pursue private interests - subjectivity is largely disregarded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - relational nature of agency - diverse motivations, combining conscious, unconscious and moral concerns - not necessarily for private interests - subjectivity shapes individuals' preferred institutional environment
3. Conceptualising institutions of trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - single purpose - predictable - authority is located within group boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - multiple purpose - messy, unpredictable - authority is multiple located, decision-making process outside formal group settings, presence of informal authority

	<i>'Seen' social capital</i>	<i>'Unseen' social capital</i>
4. Livelihood priorities and changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - changing livelihoods of individuals not taken seriously - social relations: relatively fixed and static - visible collective action, organisation-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dynamic livelihoods - social relations are fluid and plastic, permeable across boundaries - invisible submerged networks: spontaneous, intermittent and fragile
5. Methodological approach and design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - aggregate of organisations, density of networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - explore the meaning and history of co-operation
6. Downside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack flexibility in face of circumstance changes - destroy existing social connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strict social control, restrictions on individual freedom - partial agency reinforces social inequalities

Sources: some of these conceptual categories are inspired by Mehta, et al. 1999, Cleaver, 2002, Ostrom and Ahn, 2003. The 'unseen' social capital are supported by my fieldwork observations and interviews

7.4.1.1 *Nature of social relations*

Unlike 'seen' social capital, 'unseen' social capital is culturally specific and contextually dependent. In contrast to the universal application of 'design principles' which pays scant attention to local socio-economic conditions and the history of co-operation, 'unseen' social capital is constituted 'out of a complex of existing institutions and relations that are themselves shaped by particular political, social and historical arrangements' (Dietz 2002:21). It is also intertwined with individuals' social circumstances and changes.

Taking the experience of Chinese migrants during their resettlement in Hong Kong as an example, the process of migration is not necessarily a process of disintegration. While migrants bring with them social traditions, cultural values, and behavioural patterns derived from mainland China, they simultaneously adapt themselves to the exigencies of an urban and westernised Hong Kong society (Lau 1982). These processes involve interactions, adjustment and clashes of values, changing roles and expectations, as well as the constant 'reinvention' of traditions and practices. The 'social work system' in Hong Kong, for example, does not exist in China. Without a strong tradition of co-operation between the migrants and social workers, this background affects how

'seen' and 'unseen' social capital is shaped. Migrants joined formal groups because they believed that social workers had 'special powers to influence the government to fulfil the needs' (Hong Kong Family Welfare Association 2001:14). Strong resistance from newly arrived migrants, however, arose when they were mobilised by social workers to participate in public demonstrations which they did not like. Instead, they preferred organising activities themselves after groups meetings and without the knowledge of their social workers.

'Unseen' social capital takes power seriously while 'seen' social capital has been criticised for being apolitical (Fine 2000; Field 2003). In the discussion about the role of negotiation in creating participatory social space (section 3.1) and the use of rules in authority building (section 3.5), we have demonstrated that power inequalities can be concealed and reproduced by the process of negotiation and rule-based management. Migrants are constrained by norms of conflict avoidance in bargaining with the local people in public. Rules are set and used by social workers and well-established migrants to shape 'desirable' patterns and outcomes of interactions amongst members. The political nature of negotiation is highlighted by Berry (1993):

Outcomes of negotiations are influenced by power and resources which people bring to bear on them and by the process of negotiation itself. Culture and ideology are continually redefined through practice, which they also shape (p. 206).

The heterogeneity of groups and competing interests between members suggest that 'unseen' social capital can be created, accessed, and distributed unevenly. The differential capacities and social positioning of individuals, for example, affect how they negotiate the value of their services and work within the community currency project. Some individuals, such as the disabled and the elderly face more constraints in making social connections. This compels us to re-examine the materialistic and psychological conditions of participation. The lengthy group meetings and long process of negotiation exclude the poorest from the decision-making process because they do not have sufficient time, energy and resources to participate.

7.4.1.2 *Incentives of co-operation*

What drives people to co-operate has generated fierce debate (Alkire and Deneulne 2002; Gamson 1992). Neo-institutional scholars believe in bounded rationality, claiming that rational individuals purposefully and consciously draw upon social relations for their own interests within constraints. The strategic nature of agency is highlighted by Ostrom and Ahn (2003): '... an agent *assesses* that another agent or group of

agents will perform a *particular* action' (p. xvi, my emphasis). This understanding of human rationality as something that is individualistic and axiomatic in nature assumes that people make decisions independent of any of their many relationships (Lawson 1997). In order to maximise the benefits of co-operation and minimise the costs of free-riding, specific social norms, values, and rules are carefully crafted in the 'design principles' in order to create expectations about how individuals should behave. The use of sanctions, for example, reflects a strong assumption that people co-ordinate their activities out of a fear of punishment.

To be fair, there are examples from the case studies to support the rational choice model. For example, Miss Cheung (refer to table 5.1, chapter 5), maximised her social capital by actively engaging in multiple organisations and memberships. However, the model is inadequate when considering a diverse and mixed range of motivations, and fails to offer a more complex model of human interactions. As discussed earlier, I draw upon social theories, such as Douglas and Cleaver, to reject the view of individuals as necessarily rational and essentially economic resource appropriators. We reconceptualise human beings as both conscious and unconscious social agents who analyse and act upon circumstances that confront them, and their actions are simultaneously embedded in social and cultural values.

In contrast to the axiomatic view of human behaviour, individuals are embedded in complex social relations and involved in multiple networks, roles, and obligations. Mason's notion of the 'relational reasoning of agency' is useful here in the construction of a more complex picture of social connections and livelihoods. She argues for recognition of the complex ways in which people are connected and 'think connected' (2000: 22). She also urges the inclusion of the relational and contextual aspect of agency and consideration of the impact of the existing and pre-existing structures of interaction on individual's social 'choices'.

Migrants in interviews often mentioned their connections with others. This relational nature of negotiations with others is especially intense at the family and kinship levels, which is evidenced, for example, when they bargain with senior kin about childcare and the maintenance of neighbourhood networks. Individuals are not always interested in making connections and get involved in reciprocal arrangements solely for themselves, but also for others. For instance, one migrant, although a Buddhist herself, took her two children to a local Christian church because the church offered free education.

7.4.1.2.1 Altruistic and moral concerns

The assumption that people follow rules out of fear of sanctions is inadequate to fully comprehend the altruistic and moral dimensions of human incentives. The altruistic nature of group members is shown by their lack of desire to punish other free-riding members. They tolerate the presence of non-contributors because they keep in mind that various members may encounter circumstances in their which makes full participation impossible. This attitude explains why the 'reporting system' in section 3.3 has received much resistance since it exerts undue pressure on those who have heavy family obligations.

People do not always make decisions consciously, but are also guided by routines, habits, and the 'right way of doing things'. Migrants in the community currency project, for example, took it for granted that they should not bargain in public since they perceived it as inappropriate behaviour. The unconscious dimension of decision making also explains the failure of the 'reporting system' since group members regarded helping each other as a 'natural' act, so they did not count or monitor how many new arrivals they had contacted or helped. These attitudes are what help shape how organisations are run. The practice of consensus may seem inefficient and time consuming, but in the context of ordinary members' lives, it is an appropriate and accepted way of running organisations.

7.4.1.2.2 Subjectivity

Subjectivity shapes people's preferred institutional environment, and thus influences the success of institutional interventions. Human subjectivity reflects certain values and principles about relations of co-operation and trust which may contradict the 'design principles'. Let's take 'investment in neighbourhood' as an example. Pro-social capitalists encourage the poor to 'invest' in their neighbourhoods because an increased intensity of neighbourly interactions is expected to foster a sense of mutuality and help deter free-riding behaviour. However, a large proportion of migrants is concentrated in very densely populated urban areas. For instance 10.4 per cent of newcomers live clustered in the Kwun Tong district in East Kowloon, while 9.5 per cent live in Shamshuipo in West Kowloon (HKSAR 2001). These post-war neighbourhoods, with their six to eight storey buildings with no lifts, are very densely populated (about 10 to 15 square feet per person) and of mixed tenancy (three to four households per flat is not uncommon) (Law 1996). In our observations, however, people actually reduced their interactions with their neighbours in order to preserve harmony. This is because they were sharing their flats with three or four other fa-

milies. Friction easily arose as a result of the congested living conditions and the sharing of facilities. The best way to maintain good relationships with neighbours, from their perspective, was to avoid unnecessary contact.

7.4.1.3 *Conceptualising institutions of trust*

7.4.1.3.1 *The multiple purposes and unpredictability of institutions*

The 'design principles' encourage the establishment of particular groups to shape specific types of interactions and co-operation in order to achieve rapid and visible results. This single-purpose view of institutions is reinforced by an assumption that institutions are relatively predictable, stable and long lasting. For instance, Hodgson claims that socially habituated behaviour is regarded as 'a way of thought or action of some prevalence and *permanence*, which is embedded in the habits of a group or the customs of a people' (1997:679, my emphasis).

Designing a particular programme to achieve specific objectives, without examining the existing patterns of interaction between its members and without understanding the multi-purpose nature of institutions is problematic. Members in the abused-women empowerment group, for example, were divided into three caring groups according to where they lived. Each group chose its own leaders, organised monthly visitations and activities, and reported their activities in the monthly general meeting. To the social workers' surprise, the interactions among members actually decreased, rather than increased. This was because members' mutual visits depended on friendship. They met at home, local parks or restaurants, and became involved in a variety of activities such as cooking, watching television, gossiping, and discussing group activities. These activities were arranged spontaneously in informal social spaces to suit migrants' competing livelihoods. They also fulfilled multiple purposes. For example, while adults sought emotional support from each other, their children play games together. Since the establishment of the caring groups, the visiting members from other area groups no longer receive subsidies. Members stopped making 'illegitimate' visits by crossing the official care group boundaries (Wong 2004).

While some institutions exhibit higher levels of stability, others are more erratic and fragile. During negotiations, these features can lead to 'multiple, contradictory outcomes, which do not correspond to the intentions of any of the negotiators' (Berry 1993:206). I have observed that the institutions of neighbourly relations are for the most part dynamic, fractured, and short-lived. Relations of reciprocity can be ignited by a single incident and organised on an ad hoc basis, but they disap-

pear as soon as the circumstances change. The intermittent and fragile nature of ‘unseen’ social capital makes long-term co-operation hard to sustain.

7.4.1.3.2 Complexity of authority

As was already discussed in section 2.4, ‘design principles’ promote a good authority structure via elections, majority rulings, and a clear demarcation between the group itself and the administrative boundaries. Assigning posts, duties, and responsibilities helps to authorise formal power, define a clear source of authority, and make the process of decision making more accountable and effective.

This perspective, however, fails to consider the presence of multiple authorities and the influence of informal authority. Negotiations and disputes are often discussed and settled outside of formal institutions. Outcomes of decisions hinge on relationships between group members, but also among their families, kin, and neighbours. Authority does not arise from a single source. It is more diversely located, highly contextualised, and contested. Different individuals can draw upon a variety of attributes to justify their institutional positions and exert their influences. In her analysis of rural livelihoods in Tanzania, Cleaver (2002) finds five elements that help secure authority: economic wealth, specialist knowledge, kinship and marriage, official position, and personal characteristics.

‘Unseen’ social capital does not necessarily derive from formal participation. In some cases, non-participation may be more effective for the poor in obtaining informal access to resources and power. For instance, one member quit the female migrant group when she had to take care of her husband who had cancer. Although she was no longer an official member, her personal connections with the social workers meant that she received constant support and resources from the group. This poses a dilemma for institutionalising gendered participation: while institutional inclusion does not necessarily ensure that the excluded women gain access to resources, institutional marginalisation does not mean that they are completely excluded from decision making processes either (c.f. Timberlake 2005).

7.4.1.4 Livelihood priorities and changes

The fluid and flexible nature of ‘unseen’ social capital reflects the changing nature of social networks and priorities of people’s livelihoods. This is particularly crucial to the very poorest who need flexible networks to meet their immediate needs and changing circumstances (Long 2001). In section 5.5, we used Miss Chan as an example to demonstrate how her needs and social roles changed over time and

space. By getting involved in a number of institutions and participating in numerous memberships, she was able to keep her mainland China social ties while simultaneously establishing new networks in Hong Kong. She defined her social boundaries broadly and kept her networks as fluid, negotiable, and open-ended as possible. She did not like the 'report system' because she did not want to commit herself to one particular organisation.

Building 'unseen' social capital thus lies in individually differentiated livelihood priorities and circumstances. In our observation, co-operation between migrants is often informal and subtle. As full-time housewives, they might stay at home to supervise their children's homework in the afternoon, but this did not necessarily affect their networking. They sought emotional support by making regular phone calls to one another and discussing group activities. They went sometimes out for tea. On a few occasions, some members needed urgent help with a move to a new abode, which meant that people showed up and offered help without the knowledge of the social workers. The construction of these 'invisible submerged networks' is spontaneous and less-organised, changes across the course of people's lives, but is also fragile. This finding is similar to that of the Tsuen Wan Caritas Community Centre's findings that daily co-ordination of activities by female migrants was co-operative and not necessarily confrontational (1999).

7.4.1.5 *A methodological approach to explore social capital*

Mainstream methodological approaches can become an obstacle to the exploration of 'unseen' social capital. In most social capital literature, the success of collective action is largely judged by the visibility of collective action and the numbers of organisations. Social capital is measured by the numbers of associations, the densities and frequencies of social exchange between members, and the aggregate level of trust. Organisations are regarded as robust and effective if they have clear a definition of boundaries and membership, the election of leaders, detailed record keeping and rule-based procedures. The problem with this methodological approach, as Hulme (2000) argues, lies in the pre-definition of the unit of associations.

'Unseen' social capital, however, is predominantly manifested in daily interactions and conducted via on-going relations of reciprocity. The location of their everyday co-ordination is commonly outside the structured groups and disputes are settled outside formal judicial proceedings. People co-operate and interact in complex and diverse situations, and the location of collective action may shift and change over time and space. Collective action can be partial and spontaneous; trust declines and re-emerges over time; co-operation evolves in non-linear and intermittent patterns. To capture 'unseen' social capital, the methodolo-

gical framework should adopt much longer time charts to examine reciprocity as it occurs over entire lifetimes, and should be based on a culturally, historically, and socially located analysis. The process approaches, which include ethnography and intensive observation, help to explore the subjective understanding and contextual meanings of trust, co-operation, and human relations.

7.4.1.6 *The downside of 'unseen' social capital*

While 'seen' social capital may not lead to beneficial collective action, 'unseen' social capital can actually reinforce social inequalities and further marginalise the poor. The relational nature of agency suggests that the decision-making processes of individuals are embedded in complex social relations. These tight community networks, however, can result in strict social control, conformity, excessive demands on group members and restrictions on individual freedom (Portes 1998).

Family is one of the social spaces where 'unseen' social capital ripens and develops. However, the family is not always a place of harmony and inclusiveness. A study of Chinese families by Lam and Song (2002) shows that strong family collective responsibilities provide a source of support, but this can also generate considerable pressures and high expectations. Most of the time, it is not the poor who do not want to maintain these relationships, but it is their family or kin members who are neither able, willing nor ready to offer help (Neale 2000). Meanwhile, a divorced female migrant felt uncomfortable and embarrassed about returning to her hometown since she got divorced, and was thus regarded as a personal failure, which consequently brought shame to her family. Whether the family can actually serve as a 'safety net' for the poor, as the World Bank (2000) claims, depends on whether people behave in a socially acceptable way. The help offered by family members and kin is often not continuous.

Individuals may use their 'unseen' social capital to challenge unequal structures, but the exercise of agency may be partial and constrained. This reflects the constant struggle between individual desires and socially accepted norms. Their livelihoods are dependent upon the powerful, which also constrains their capacities. Jackson notes that agents 'sometimes act up to, and against, the social structure they live within, and at other times act in ways which perpetuate gender disparities' (2002:502).

7.4.2 *Interplay between 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital*

The exploration of 'unseen' social capital has shed light on the limitations of the 'design principles' in building social capital for members within groups. It has also explained the gaps between a designed plan

and actual practice. Firstly, the process of institutional interventions is inadequate when it comes to taking the existing relations of co-operation into account. Secondly, it does not pay sufficient attention to subjective, preferred institutional environment. Thirdly, social relations, which are deeply embedded in social networks, and inter-personal relationships and cultures, are not robustly analysed. Fourthly, it needs to consider the interdependence of new and existing institutional arrangements in shaping people's co-operative actions.

In table 7.3, some examples demonstrate how 'unseen' social capital is manifested in the everyday lives of migrants.

The contrast between 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital is not meant to reinforce the duality. I do also not claim that 'unseen' social capital is more desirable than 'seen' social capital. The main argument here is that what matters for improving poor people's livelihoods is the inter-

Table 7.3 *Illustrating 'unseen' social capital by everyday lives of mainland Chinese migrants*

<i>Elements of 'unseen' social capital</i>	<i>Examples</i>
1. Nature of relations	
<i>(i) Cultural and contextual specificity</i>	Chinese migrants combine 'traditional' institutions (mainland kinship) and 'modern' institutions (social work system in Hong Kong) in building social capital during resettlement.
<i>(ii) Political</i>	Power inequalities are reproduced in the process of negotiation and rule-based management.
<i>(iii) Unequal access to social capital</i>	Lengthy group meetings and lengthy negotiation exclude time- and resource-poor migrants.
2. Incentives of cooperation	
<i>(i) Relational nature of agency</i>	Migrants think 'connected' in the case of childcare and neighbourly relations.
<i>(ii) Diverse motivations</i>	They show altruistic and moral concerns in social reciprocity.
<i>(iii) Not always self-interest motivated</i>	They build social capital for others, like their children.
<i>(iv) Subjective preference for institutional environment</i>	Migrants living in congested flats avoid unnecessary interactions with neighbours to preserve social harmony.

<i>Elements of 'unseen' social capital</i>	<i>Examples</i>
3. Conceptualising institutions of trust	
(i) <i>Multiple purpose</i>	Caring group scheme, designed to foster interactions in the abused-women empowerment group, leads to gossip and reduces reciprocity between members.
(ii) <i>Intermittent nature of social relations</i>	Relations of reciprocity can be ignited by a few incidents, but disappear when circumstances change.
(iii) <i>Complex locations of authority</i>	Negotiations are often discussed and disputes resolved outside formal group settings.
4. Livelihood priorities and changes	
(i) <i>Dynamic livelihoods</i>	Some migrants involved in numerous institutions with memberships changing over time and location.
(ii) <i>Permeable social boundaries</i>	Migrants build social capital across regional borders.
(iii) <i>'Invisible' social networks</i>	Full-time housewives call their friends to discuss group matters while staying home to look after their children.
5. Methodological approach to capture social capital	
(i) <i>Ethnography</i>	Long-sustained participant observations, interviews, diary keeping, and social mapping help explore the contextual meanings of trust and changes of collective action over time and space.
6. Downside	
(i) <i>Family bonding considered too strong</i>	It restricts migrants from public space involvement.
(ii) <i>Partial agency</i>	Migrants reliant on the rich to secure stable livelihoods, reproduce social inequalities.

Source: own research

play between 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital. The intricate dynamics between 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital in shaping people's livelihoods offers a better understanding of how institutional arrangements are forged in practice through daily interactions. It also shows how existing customs, norms, and practices are drawn upon, adapted, and changed to fit new purposes and circumstances. As Platteau and Abraham (2002) stress, the newly crafted bureaucratic arrangements do not completely replace socially embedded institutions. The existing institu-

tions remain influential in shaping people's values, beliefs, modes of interaction, sources of legitimacy, and power structure. The livelihoods of the poor are thus shaped by the legacies of old institutions and prevailing social rules and ethics.

7.5 Policy implications

The exploration of 'unseen' social capital demands a further re-assessment of the role that individuals, groups, community, the market and the state play in creating social capital. The revived interest in the role of community is a response to the failure of both the market and the state achieve collective action by themselves. However, communities do not exist independent of the market or the state. They need external assistance from the state and the market to provide financial and technological support and to resolve inter-community disputes. The call for synergy, therefore, has become popular in the common-pool resource management literature because, as Paavola and Adger (2005) suggest it 'combines local relative advantages with the relative advantages of the state [and market] in the environment governance' (p. 358). This 'win-win' situation, nevertheless, needs closer scrutiny. This co-management may be achieved but under unfavourable terms for local communities. The state and the market may assist local elites to capture social capital and turn it into political capital for their own good.

7.5.1 *Re-examining redistributive issues*

Bringing social capital into the poverty discussion reinforces the view that poverty is largely a matter of relational problems. Once the 'right' institutional environment is created, people will be willing and able to build social networks and draw on available social resources to alleviate poverty. This perspective, however, has side-stepped the distributive issue of poverty. Based on my observations in a local church in Hong Kong, church leaders regard the solving of their basic needs as their first priority. Households are offered HK\$1,000 cash and HK\$500 in food coupons per month by the local church. The church leaders have stressed that, if the problems of newcomers cannot be successfully resolved, one cannot expect them to participate in church activities.

This example illustrates that local leaders recognised that poor people are constrained by limited endowments and material assets. The availability of resources is a pre-condition for an effective social life, which cannot be replaced by social capital (Cleverly 2004). Therefore, we need to pay more attention to the impact of a lack of material assets by the poor on participation and on the constraints which prevent them from exercising agency. To facilitate meaningful participation

amongst poor people in public fora, offering them adequate material and social support should be considered a prerequisite. Another issue is the redistributive effect of networks. Examples in Hong Kong have shown that social capital is not redistributed equally amongst all community members. The poor put more effort into community participation, while the privileged take more of the credit. From this perspective, institutional inclusion and reforms do not guarantee a more equitable distribution of resources, and often allow local elites to further pursue their own self-interests. Institutions provide the already-powerful with enhanced normative authority. We need to rethink distributional and power problems in terms of pro-social capital policies.

7.5.2 Implications for policy makers

This book has significant implications for policy makers. In order to achieve successful social capital building, the 'pro-poor' perspective should be on the top of their agendas. Before they intervene, the contextualised understanding of the culture of relations regarding trust and people's preferences for institutional arrangements should be more fully investigated. The 'agency-institution-structure' framework should not serve as a blueprint, however. Instead, it should track the changes involved in institutions and structures as well as people's subjectivity. It can then monitor the impact on people's lives. The process of intervention involves a high degree of uncertainty. A longer time frame for evaluation is therefore essential. Policy makers should also be prepared to improvise policies to meet people's real needs.

Therefore, this book argues that effective interventions on social capital building lie in our understanding of: (1) the history and culture of social co-operation; (2) the existing relations of reciprocity; (3) people's livelihood priorities; (4) individuals' preferred institutional environments; and (5) the interplay between new and old institutions. A deeper exploration of the existing institutional environment is essential before interventions can commence. Investigation should not simply focus on the quantity of social interactions, but also on the qualitative nature of the modes of co-operation. During interventions, a 'mix and match' approach is adopted to combine new and existing institutional arrangements. The intervention programmes should occur in a longer time frame and be flexible enough to cope with changing circumstances. Tracking and monitoring the institutional changes is necessary for the examination of how benefits and costs are distributed within groups and communities.

7.5.3 *Implications for researchers*

Social capital intervention is generally regarded as problem-solving by nature and tends to offer quick-fix solutions to ‘problematic’ groups, organisations, and communities. Policy makers feel obliged to do things for the disadvantaged and the marginalised, such as the (re)building of their social connections (Field 2003). However, owing to the pressures on both time and resources, researchers may rush to recommend intervention strategies without first gaining a deeper understanding of the norms and cultures of social co-ordination. This easily ends up producing inappropriate policies by over- or under-estimating the levels of social capital that particular social groups in particular areas have at their disposal. Despite good intentions, these policies can actually destroy the already-limited social networks that the poor can access and use, instead of building new ones.

Researchers need to challenge the ideal forms of collective action. In turning the notion of ‘getting social relations right’ into policy implementation, the underlying ‘ideal’ modes of collective action and ‘desirable’ forms of intervention are implicit amongst the minds of the development planners. In most social capital literature, the success of collective action is largely judged by the visibility of collective action and the quantity of organisations. Social capital is measured by the numbers of associations and the numbers of social exchanges between members. Organisations are regarded as robust and effective if they have a clear definition of boundaries and membership, elect their leaders, maintain detailed record keeping, and have rule-based procedures. Based on these criteria, everyday co-operation among the migrants in Hong Kong is largely invisible or non-existent. However, as I have shown in my research, the examples of their co-operation and mutual help can be found everywhere in their general everyday social interactions as they are conducted through ongoing relations of reciprocity. The location of their daily co-ordinations is mostly found outside of the structured groups, while disputes are mostly settled outside of formal judicial proceedings.

The desirable forms of organisations tend to disregard the roles of subjectivity in shaping membership and authority. Individuals may perceive themselves as members of numerous conflicting communities. The ‘right way of doing things’ affects our social interaction patterns, our preferences for consensus decision making, our respectful attitudes to the powerful, and our tendency to trust and to be trusted. I have used clan associations as examples to illustrate that the practice of consensus rule may look inefficient and may be time consuming in bureaucratic terms, however, in the context of ordinary members’ lives, they are highly compatible with an accepted way of running organisations.

7.6 Conclusion to the conclusion

The possibility for successful institutional intervention hinges policy makers learning to understand the messiness of social processes, and the diversity and flexibility of institutions that characterise the livelihoods of the poor. We also need to accept the limited predictability of 're-programming' people's social lives. The acknowledgement of social complexity is both a threat and an opportunity for social intervention. A failure to address these issues will only perpetuate the problems in existing social capital building programmes and reforms, and the ultimate losers will be the very people these programmes are meant to serve. A more complex model of the livelihoods over the course of a lifetime is, therefore, needed to properly analyse how social capital changes with changing circumstances, localities, and time. Beverley Skeggs (2004) once suggested that: '... we need to change perspectives to ones that bring these processes to light rather than keeping them in the dark' (p. 187). The formation of social capital is dynamic, and constantly being re-shaped, reproduced, and challenged. We should, therefore, aim to capture the complexity of the social capital building by understanding the process about who and what is being made invisible, rather than to fix it in order to measure and quantify it.

The difference between 'seen' and 'unseen' social capital may not seem very relevant to ordinary people since they do not compartmentalise their everyday lives in the same way as researchers do. However, community members can help policy makers and researchers to do the 'seeing' of their own 'unseen social capital'.

Notes

- 1 Woolcock (2001) differentiates three types of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital highlights the strong ties between immediate family members, neighbours and friends whilst bridging social capital aims to make connections with people of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Linking social capital makes ties with those with financial influence and political power. Woolcock suggests that bonding social capital is not as ‘inclusive and outward looking’ as bridging social capital, and that underlines the need to choose the ‘right’ type of social capital for different social environments.
- 2 Local Hong Kong people were not necessarily born in Hong Kong. Most of them are established migrants from China who settled in Hong Kong in the 1940s and 1970s.
- 3 It is not certain if, and how, the economic booming in the mainland China over the past two decades has had any impact on Hong Kong people’s identity building.
- 4 The poverty line is set by NGOs at half of the median incomes of the general population in Hong Kong.
- 5 The majority of people in Hong Kong speak Cantonese, and speaking Mandarin is generally regarded as rural, ‘Communist’ and outsiders. Most migrants from the southern part of China can speak Cantonese, but their strong accents inhibit them from concealing their migrant identities.

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Annex 1

Hong Kong: Basic background and statistics

History: China was defeated by Britain in the Opium War in 1841, and Hong Kong became a British colony. Sovereignty was reverted to China on 1 July 1997 and the former British colony became the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China.

Total population: 6.9 million

Geographical area: 1,100 square kilometres

Annual population growth: 1.7%

Official languages: Cantonese and English

GDP per capita: HK\$189,443 (£14,570)

Gini coefficient: 0.43 (compared with Tanzania: 0.38 and Rwanda: 0.29)

Housing type: 32% public housing, 14.3% subsidised-sale flats, 53.7% private permanent housing

Annual average intake of Chinese migrants: 55,000

Sex of migrants: Male: 32.6%; Female: 67.4%

Unemployment: 7%-7.5% (1999-2003),
5%-5.5% (2006)

Age of migrants: below 10: 22.2%
10-19: 17.7%
20-29: 14.5%
30-39: 29.2%
40-49: 7.6%
50-59: 4.6%
over 60: 4.1%

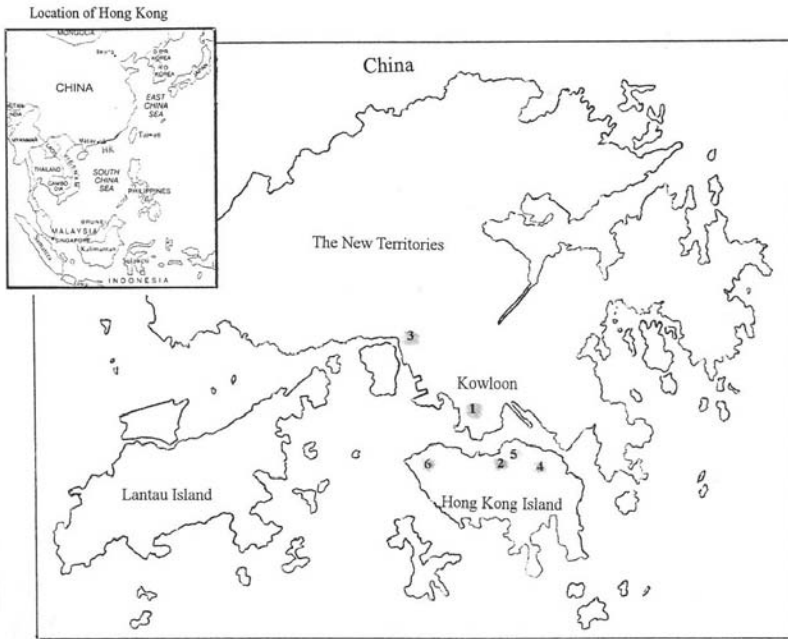
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Map of Hong Kong

Map I: Map of Hong Kong (showing the location of the 6 organisations)



Migrant groups

1. The female migrant mutual-help group in Mongkok
2. The community currency project in Wanchai
3. The abused-women support group in Tsuen Wan

Clan associations

4. The Fujian clan association
5. The Yunnan clan association
6. The Chiuchow mutual-help association

Map of China

Map II: Map of China

(showing the regions which are connected to my selected clan associations)



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Glossary

Ah Chann	a derogatory term used by Hong Kong people for mainland migrants, implying they are illiterate
Dai Luk Por	a derogatory term for mainland female migrants, implying lower status
Fu Chai	the name by which development workers addressed me in the female migrant mutual-help group; 'Fu' is my second name and 'Chai' means young teenager!
Lai see	cash gifts, literally 'lucky money', generally for the Chinese New Year and weddings, sometimes called 'Red Packet'.
White money	consolation money contributed towards funerals

List of Abbreviations

CIIF	Community Investment and Inclusion Fund
DFID	Department for International Development
HKCSS	The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
HKSAR	Special Administration Region of Hong Kong
IFAD	International fund for agricultural development
KCR	Kowloon-Canton Railway
MTR	Mass Transit Railway
NPCSC	National People's Congress Standing Committee
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OWP	One-way permit quota system
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Currency equivalents

The official monetary unit in Hong Kong is Hong Kong dollars (HK\$). The nominal exchange rate between Hong Kong dollars and pounds sterling was $\pounds 1 = \text{HK\$}15.48$ on 11 May 2007. This exchange rate will be applied for all currency conversions in this book.

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