

Pathways to Metropolis Conference
Workshop W452 Migration & Transnational Family Care

Transnational child caring among Chinese families in New Zealand

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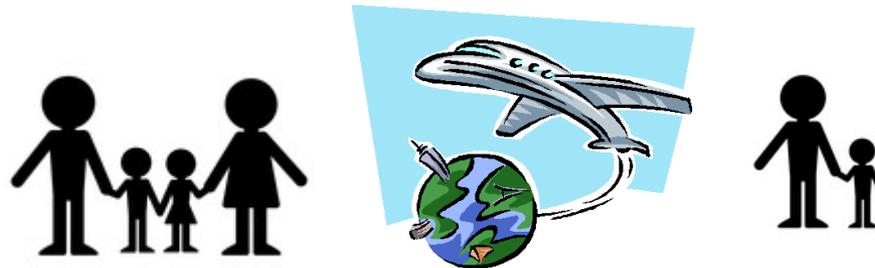
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Transnational care

The exchange of care and support across distance and national borders (Baldassar et al. 2007)

Transnational carers

People who live across and care across national borders



The Study

- Face-to-face interviews with 10 Chinese families living in Auckland
 - Families have children under the age of 6
 - Have a relative usually living overseas to take care of their child in NZ / overseas



Family background

- Majority first came as international students
→ found work → transition to permanent residence → got married → first baby

When I was pregnant with my first child, I called Mum and asked her to come over. Because you know Chinese people need to do postpartum confinement for a month. So she came over to help me with that. It's hard to find someone else to do these things and look after your child properly too.

Family background

- The transnational carers are parents and parents-in-law.

When she was pregnant she asked me to come. Because she was having a child I must come over. Her in-laws are quite old and their health is not too good so wouldn't be good to ask them to come. And I haven't been to NZ so it'll be nice to come over anyway.

I don't think my daughter has thought about other alternatives because she know I will definitely come over. She's having a child it's such a big thing of course I have to come over.

Transnational childcare practice

- Transnational childcare arrangements take many forms, sometimes involving multiple carers and living in different countries/locations.

When my granddaughter was 100 days old, I took her back to China with me. I looked after her till she was about 9 months, and then came back to NZ. I then look after her in NZ till she was about 1½ years old. Then went back to China again and stayed in China for about 1½ years. Then we came back to NZ when she was about 3 years old.

Support within the TCA

- Postpartum care
- Domestic duties
- Support adult children's career development

During her postpartum care, I make her food everyday to keep her healthy and recover quickly.

It means so much to us because when she's not here, our daughter stays at day-care for longer hours. By the time we finish work, pick her up it's about 7 pm.

I don't want my daughter to be a housewife. I want my daughter to have a career. I want her to be independent . In order for her to do that, I need to look after her children so she can work.

Reasons for continuing the practice

- Visa restrictions

Each time I come I need a health check if I stay longer than 6 months. That's why I've chosen to stay just under 6 months and leave the country.

It's a bit annoying how I need to travel back and forth. ... With the 3 year multiple visitor visa, the maximum stay is 6 month even though the total of living period is 18 months.

This time we hope that my in-laws can get their PR granted so they can stay for longer periods in order to take care of my kids.

Other motivators

- Bonding with their grandchildren
- More time with adult children and for them to pay filial respects
- Second child support needed

I can see my grandson everyday. He knows how to speak some words now. He can listen to music and sing songs. Yeah every time I listen to him I am very happy. He calls me grandma in the sweetest way.

Maintaining culture, Preserving family

My parents spend time reading them Chinese stories, also sometimes Chinese idioms. When we watch Chinese TV, they'll ask the children to respond like 'do you know what that means?' and then tell them what it means.

I take [child] every morning to the playground, so she can see other people and new things. The neighbours have cats, so I take her to have a look at them. so she can approach animals and have a caring heart . When I take her out I tell her to greet people, say hello to people. She'll then smile and say hello. Yeah you need to train kids to have manners at a young age

Challenges of transnational livelihood

It's much quieter here compared to China. They have more friends in China . My mother-in-law likes to go out for walks and play a bit of table-tennis but when she's here I guess it's difficult.

Because they don't drive, they can't go far and sometimes we don't have time to take them out.

My Mum is quite busy looking after the baby and doing house chores so she doesn't actually have much time to meet new friends outside.

Concluding Remarks

- A strategic practice to cope with multiple life transitions during the immigration process
- Despite the challenges, three generations are benefiting
- The transnational arrangement is an evolving practice, some transnational caregivers subsequently acquire PR status
- Further research is required