

More Than Culture: How Older Chinese Immigrants Claim Moral Entitlement to Children's Support

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- Support access $\neq$ Support mobilization
- Initiating support mobilization requires care seekers to justify deservingness
- Why do some participants assert entitlement to filial care, while others hesitate to request help?

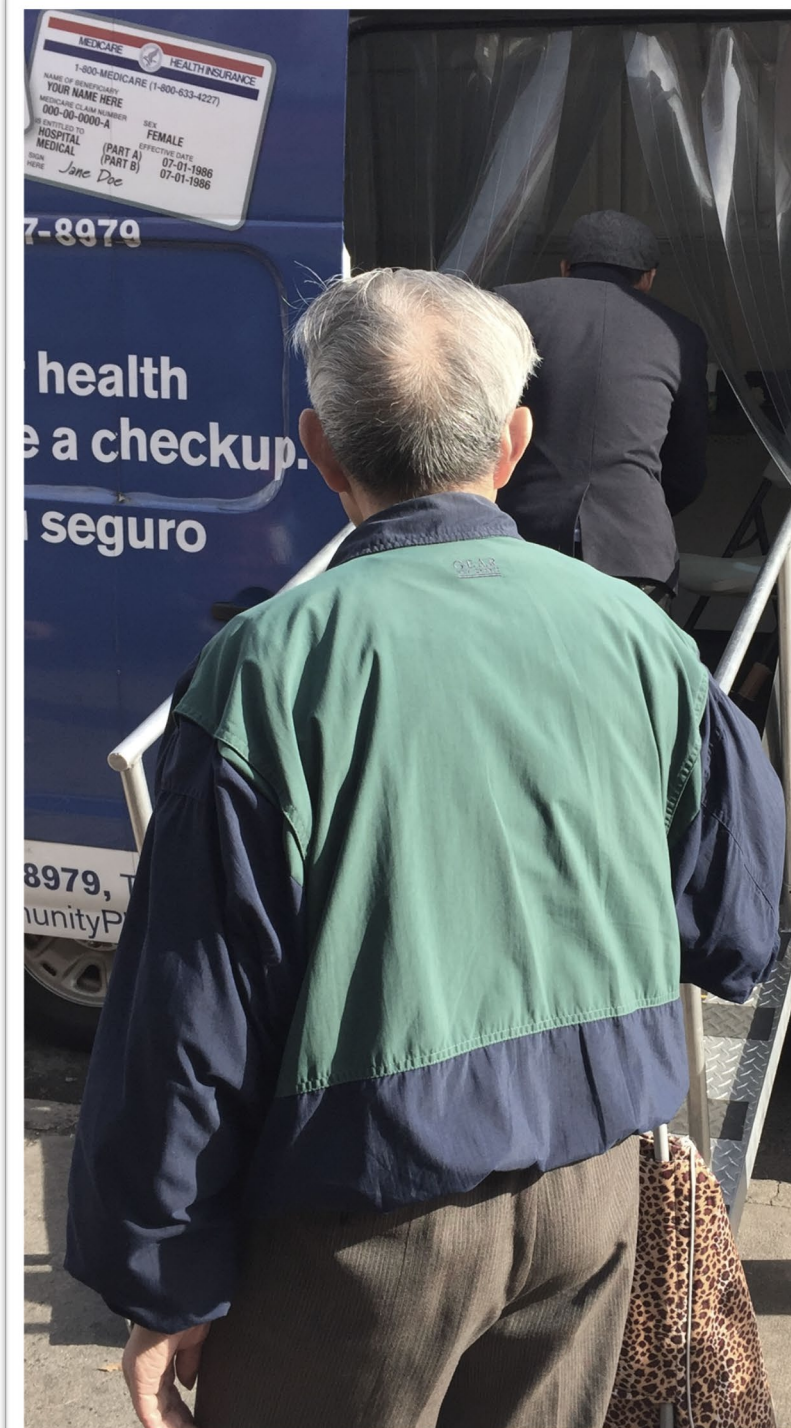


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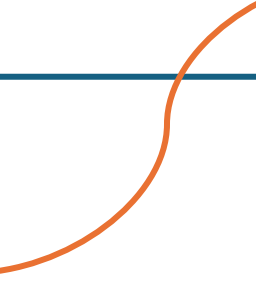
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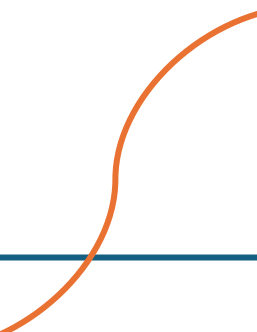
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01

Literature Review



Migration's Impacts on Parent-child Relations

The Cultural Explanation (Assimilation Thesis)

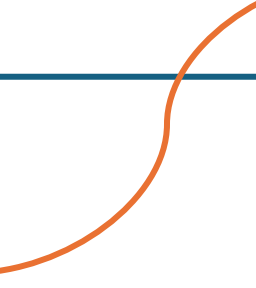
- The functionalist tradition: restorative equilibrium of social order after the disruptive forces of migration (Alba and Nee 1997).
- “Acculturation gap”: consonant, dissonant, and selective acculturation (Portes and Zhou, 1993).
- Immigrant acculturation and its detrimental impacts: “The myth of independence” (Portacolone, 2011) and harmful acculturation (Guo et al., 2020; Teo et al, 2022).

The Structural Explanation (Ethnic Resilience Thesis)

- The conflict tradition: segmented labor market and racialization (Massey 1999; Telles and Ortiz 2008).
- Parent-child “immigrant bargain” (Chin, 2020; Louie, 2012; Smith, 2006).
- “Reconfigured reciprocity” (Sun 2014, 2021) and “subcontracting” filial care (Lan, 2002).

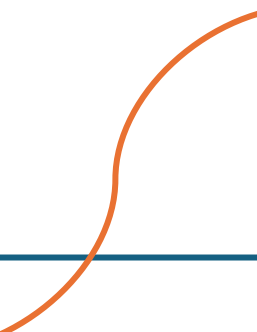
Research Gap

- Migration's impacts on help-seeking
 - Adult children's caregiving practices (Lan, 2002; Yoo and Kim, 2014)
 - Older parents as "care seekers" vs. "care recipients."
- The structural conditions of cultural logics
 - Pre-migration resources, modes of migration, life stage at migration, hostile vs. receptive policies, labor market integration, accumulation of retirement protections, etc. (Dannefer, 2003; Menjivar, 2000; Ye, 2023).
- Transnationalism and later-life intergenerational relations
 - Long-term impacts of earlier separation (Parreñas, 2001, 2005; Dreby, 2010, 2015).
 - Older immigrants' transnational social protections (Levitt et al, 2023).



02

Methods



Data Collection

- In-depth interviews (2020-2022, N=65)
 - 42 older adults born in mainland China (age 60 and above).
 - 23 aging and ethnic organization workers.
 - Purposive and short-string snowball sampling.
 - Interviewed in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English.
- Participant observations (2019-2022)
 - Various senior centers, adult day health centers, ethnic churches, community organizations, senior housing, etc.



Sample Characteristics



Gender: 14 male, 28 female.

Age: 63 - 86 (Median age 72).

Marital Status: 27 married, 5 divorced, 9 widowed, 1 never married.

English Fluency: 8 well, 12 basic, 22 no English.



Education: 3 graduate, 8 bachelors, 7 associates, 5 high school, 13 middle school, 6 elementary school.

Adult children: 37 have at least one child in the same state, 1 has children in other states, 2 have children outside the U.S., and 2 never had children.

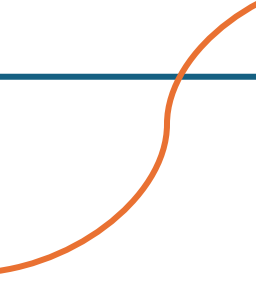
Living arrangement: 21 senior apartments, 15 own housing, 6 with adult children.



Immigration Status: 20 U.S. citizens, 22 legal permanent residents.

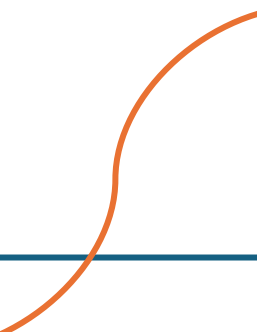
Age at Migration: 6 before age 34, 12 between age 35 and 50, 24 after age 50.

Length of Interview: 40- 380 minutes (average 3 hours).



03

Findings



Structural Conditions

Pre-migration Resources
Life Stage at Migration

Modes of Incorporation



Institutional Integration

Later-life Care Needs

Institutional Means to Satisfy Needs



Filial Entitlement and Care-seeking

Constructing Filial Obligations

Constructing Deservingness of Filial Care

1. Structural Advantages and Asserted Deservingness

	Structural Advantaged	Structural Disadvantaged	Structural Marginalized
Life Stage at Migration	Young adulthood (before age 35)	Young to middle adulthood (age 35-50)	Middle to later adulthood (age 50 and above)
Modes of Incorporation	Student, employment, humanitarian, family	Family, undocumented	Family
Language	Proficient in English	Basic	Varied, mostly basic.
Education	US credentials	Non-US credentials, varied level of education	Non-US credentials, varied level of education
Labor Market	Primary labor market	Secondary and ethnic labor market	Informal work at home and in the ethnic community
Retirement Protections	US savings and investments, social security and Medicare	Disrupted and disadvantaged retirement contribution	Devalued savings from China, minimum protections in the US
Informal Ties	Diverse ties with resources	Homogeneous ethnic ties with limited resources	Isolation or homogeneous ethnic ties in the US, transnational ties
Legal Status	Naturalized citizenship	Legal permanent residency to naturalized citizenship	Visitor visa to legal permanent residency

- Constructing Filial Obligations
 - Advantaged integration and post-migration upward mobility.
 - Delegate instrumental, hands-on care to others.
 - Expect children's emotional companionship and supervisory care.
- Example: 73-year-old Gloria
 - Migrated in early 30s, middle-school English teacher with family support.
 - Retired as a kindergarten principal.
 - Comprehensive support system: Social Security, Medicare, private long-term care insurance, senior center and community participation.
 - Expect gestures of emotional closeness: FaceTime conversations, holiday visits, and responsible oversight if incapacitated.

- Asserted Deservingness
 - Earned returns on investment in children's development.
 - Gendered entitlement: fathers' financial investment/ material and mothers' moral/ emotional investment.
- Example: 69-year-old Hubert
 - Migrated at age 27 as a refugee, English and construction apprenticeship in Hong Kong, GED and engineering certificate in the US.
 - Retired state employee (with pension), landlord, and art collector.
 - Invested in businesses, real estate, the stock market, and collectibles.
 - Set up a family trust, purchased houses, cars, and education for his sons.

2. Structural Disadvantages and Contested Deservingness

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- Constructing Filial Obligations
 - Limited integration and post-migration blocked mobility.
 - Need help in accessing the market, state, and healthcare institutions.
 - Expect children to be reliable and responsive intermediaries.
- Example: 85-year-old Hugh
 - Migrated at age 44, with a 5-year-old and a 9-year-old.
 - A former surgeon deskilled after migration.
 - Worked as a full-time caregiver for parents, a nursing assistant, and a volunteer at a local food pantry and YMCA.
 - Expect children's practical help, seeing routine visits performative and superficial.

- Contested Deservingness
 - Parental sacrifice for children's development.
 - Contested entitlement due to earlier separation and reflections on children's challenging adaptation.
- Example: 69-year-old Diane (Leveraging the Bargaining Chips)
 - Migrated at 49 years old, middle-school-educated factory worker before migration, sponsored by her sister-in-law;
 - The parents worked in Asian supermarkets and restaurants, whereas their daughter became a financial manager at JPMorgan.

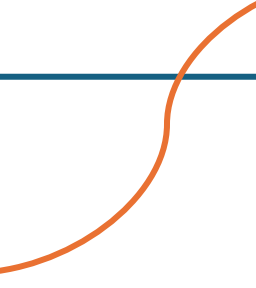
- Example: 74-year-old Ada (Losing the Bargaining Chips)
 - Migrated at 45 years old, no formal education, worked in a Hong Kong wig factory.
 - The parents left their 21-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter with US relatives and traveled back and forth to make money.
 - Felt she “owed” her children, helped raise her grandchildren, but couldn’t mend the emotional gap.
 - Turned to the ethnic community and formal services for help.

- Example: 70-year-old Elizabeth (Withholding the Bargaining Chips)
 - Migrated at 37 years old, a famous OBGYN before migration.
 - The mom worked as a waitress, cable factory worker, and physician assistant, and the father changed his career from a postdoctoral engineering researcher to a construction supervisor.
 - Two daughters struggled to fit in initially, but “with perseverance”, became a doctor and a high-level corporate manager.

3. Structural Marginalization and Suppressed Deservingness

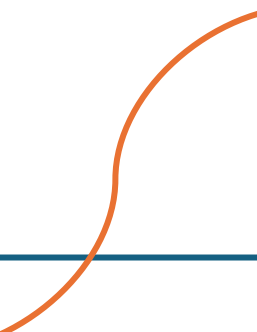
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- Constructing Filial Obligations
 - Devalued retirement protections from China and institutional outliers in the US.
 - Need help with settlement and health-related issues.
 - Expect filial care, yet lower expectations due to children's new immigrant status.
- Suppressed Deservingness
 - Financial support, childcare, and household support.
 - Acculturation pressure into American independence and the nuclear family norms.
- Example: 73-year-old Camelia
 - Migrated at 58 years old, helped raise grandchildren, lived in daughter's house in the suburbs, limited contacts with coethnic peers.
 - Pride in acculturation efforts and achievement: learning English, converting to Christianity, volunteering in mainstream nonprofit organizations, and living by herself in senior buildings.



04

Discussions



Limitations and Contributions

- Limitations
 - Impacts of legal status on older immigrants' help-seeking behaviors.
 - Older immigrants' help-seeking from children of different genders, sexualities, and birth orders.
- Contributions
 - The social construction of filial obligations and deservingness of care.
 - Structurally-induced inequalities are amplified through cultural narratives of entitlement and deservingness.

Implications

- Service substitution vs. complementarity (Tennstedt et al, 1993).
 - Formal support doesn't necessarily weaken family bonds, but can strengthen them.
- Immigrant integration and aging support through the life course lens (Treas and Gubernskaya 2016).
 - Immigrant settlement support should start early in life rather than only in later life.

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Thank you, I look forward to your questions and comments!

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