**The change and continuity in mothering practices and discourses across three generations of women in China: from an ‘iron girl’, to housewife, and to full-time mother**

This paper aims to explore how mega-narrative/discourses about both motherhood and women’s participation in work discursively shaped mothers’ mothering practices in China and, at the same time, how individual mothers challenge and transgress these mega-discourses in their everyday life, sometimes with an inevitable psychic price to be paid.

Although ‘mothering practices’ is the key theme in this paper, differing from much existing literature on motherhood, this paper refuses to view mothering practices as an isolated interaction between women and children. Instead, Morgan (2011)’s definition of family practices has been adopted here, providing a broader view of motherhood: a type of practice that is embedded in women’s other roles, relationships and their own life trajectories. Furthermore, Morgan’s definition of practices also seeks to link everyday practices with discourses by focusing on both actions and meanings people individually and collectively associate with their practices.

Three generations of women from 12 families were interviewed with an adapted Biographical-Narrative-Interpretive Method (BNIM)(Wengraf, 2001) which provided a great opportunity to investigate the interaction and interweaving relationship between individual agency and social contexts (including discourses) due to the huge societal change experienced by three generations of women (from a communist and socialist society where mothers were encouraged to work for their country in 1950-60’s China, to a capitalism society where ‘housewives’ were ‘persuaded’ to ‘go back home’ and to leave job opportunities to men in the 1980s and 1990s, and to today’s intensive mothering ideology which judges women’s success in the impossible task of raising a modern child in an individualised society). In addition, the adapted BNIM provides a ‘grounded’ approach to explore how ‘discourse’ about motherhood and women’s participation in work is evident in their recount of their life histories as well as capturing each individual’s struggle with and/or resistance to these social texts. The separation of ‘lived life’ and ‘told story’ in the BNIM method is a particularly useful tool in deciphering the hidden lines and/or omissions from stories told by these women which makes the power of mega-discourses more evident. In the presentation, the cases of women’s individual stories and stories of three generations of women from the same family will form the major part and the particular analytical framework will also be highlighted in the paper to demonstrate how the researcher reaches her conclusions.

The Chinese historical, cultural and social context provides a specific and local background for this paper. However, the division between local and global is never clear or unquestionable in today’s global village. The global discourses on both motherhood and women’s participation in work and their relationships with the Chinese local contexts will also be addressed. Hopefully, a specific local and cultural context will contribute to our understanding of a diverse global society.

References:

Morgan, D. H. (2011). *Rethinking family practices*: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing*: Sage Publications Ltd.