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The Power Structure of the Hong Kong Chinese Family

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The project presently involves investigators and national surveys in six Asian countries. The government of **Hong Kong** (now the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) has supported area-wide youth surveys, both household-based and in-school, in 1981, 1986, 1991, and 1996. The 1994 **Philippines'** Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Survey (YAFS-II) was conducted by the Population Institute, University of the Philippines, with support from the UNFPA. **Thailand's** 1994 Family and Youth Survey (FAYS) was carried out by the Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University, with support from the UNFPA. In **Indonesia**, the 1998 Reproduksi Remaja Sejahtera (RRS) baseline survey was funded by the World Bank and by USAID through Pathfinder International's FOCUS on Young Adults program. The RRS was carried out by the Lembaga Demografi at the University of Indonesia under the supervision of the National Family Planning Coordinating Board (BKKBN). The **Nepal** Adolescent and Young Adult (NAYA) project, which includes the 2000 NAYA youth survey, is being carried out by Family Health International and the Valley Research Group (VaRG) with support from USAID to Family Health International (FHI). The **Taiwan** Young Person Survey (TYPF) of 1994 was carried out by the Taiwan Provincial Institute of Family Planning (now the Bureau for Health Promotion, Department of Health, Taiwan) with support from the government of Taiwan.

The Power Structure of the Hong Kong Chinese Family

P. K. Luis

Part I

There are family theories in Western sociological literature. In the past three decades several were imported into Hong Kong.¹ The first one is the Parsonian theory that focuses on the impact of industrialization on the local family.² The second one is called utilitarianistic familism,³ which in construction is very close to the hundreds and hundreds of familisms constructed around the sixties and seventies, basically an ideal-type construction. It is still the most widely cited and admired theory in Hong Kong.⁴ The third one is family strategy,⁵ adopted from Tamara Hareven. More recently, a fourth notion called modified nuclear family was offered⁶ in contradistinction to the notion of modified extended family.⁷ One more strand is most recently imported into Hong Kong,⁸ namely, Jaber Gubrium's ethnomethodological notion that family is but a discursive construction.⁹ None of the imported family theories touches upon one of the perennial sociological problems—power, and in this case the power structure of the family.

In Western family sociology, it usually appears as parental authority or parental control. Put in this way, the problematic is taken away from sociological considerations in broader theoretical perspectives and longer theoretical traditions. While sociologists readily recognize the husband-wife relationship as a power relationship, they are more hesitant to do so as regards the parent-child relationship.¹⁰ That relationships in the family are not treated in a unified approach is quite contrary to the general requirement of theoretical unity. In short, there is a theoretical schism.

In fact, Western family theory is funneling itself into four theoretical approaches, namely, symbolic interactionism, exchange theory, family strategy and life course,¹¹ none of which focuses on the notion of power. The power structure of the family is simply ignored, or at least is relegated to a

¹ For a detailed description, see my English draft on a paper finally published in Chinese in 1998. It is available on the AYARR Web site.

² F.M. Wong imported it in the early seventies.

³ It was a local invention by S.K. Lau, published in *Journal of Marriage and the Family* in the mid-seventies.

⁴ The reason I believe is that there has not been very active theoretical research in this area in Hong Kong throughout the eighties and nineties. Local sociologists were attracted to the impending change of sovereignty of Hong Kong.

⁵ C.H. Ng and M.K. Lee, mainly the former, imported it in the late eighties and early nineties.

⁶ Hoiman Chan and Rance P.L. Lee. 1995. "Hong Kong families: At the crossroads of modernism and traditionalism" in *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 26(1): 83–99.

⁷ It was proposed by M.K. Lee in the late eighties. It is sketchy and I personally think is less than a theory.

⁸ S.K. Lam imported it in his recent M.Phil. dissertation submitted in 1999, under my supervision.

⁹ There is also a view, not related to the ethnomethodological argument, that "family is but a sociological shorthand" offered by C.H. Ng, implying that it is never a social entity in sense that the individual is one.

¹⁰ The feminist sociologists have succeeded in arguing that gender relationship is a major societal cleavage. The husband-wife relationship seen in this light is a power relationship. But it is much harder to put parent-child relationship into the feminist straight jacket.

¹¹ According to David Cheal, the Canadian sociologist.

secondary position. The only lone voice we can hear is Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist.¹² He reminds us of the importance of the notion of power in family studies.¹³ I try to recapitulate his main points.

According to Bourdieu, the notion of family is a construction of the state statisticians. The classification of family types (nuclear, extended, etc.) is an obvious example. But sociologists do go further than that, for example, the construction of co-residence history.

Also according to Bourdieu, many family sociologists simply take over the naive constructions of the ordinary people (that is, the people they survey on).¹⁴ He suggests that these naive constructions should be the object of scientific study, and should never be taken over as scientific categories. Scientific categories need to be constructed on top of the naive constructions.¹⁵ We do commit this mistake.¹⁶ For example, we often ask the respondents, “How is your relationship with your father?” We do use their answers (“Very good,” “Good,” etc.) directly as data for statistical analysis. What do these answers imply? They imply naive constructions. But what scientific categories can we construct on top on these answers? We are at a loss.

Bourdieu does hint at how to proceed. First, there is the familiar sociological concern of how the family can maintain the condition of its existence and persistence, that is, the Durkheimian concern. Bourdieu says, “The forces of fusion ... must endlessly counteract the forces of fission.”¹⁷ In other words, the sociologists must watch out for the movement of the family between the two poles – fusion and fission. It is the social dimension.¹⁸ Bourdieu usually calls it the practice. Second, there is the systemic dimension, which is the familiar duality of field and habitus. The field, habitus and practice are the Bourdieuen trio. Bourdieu repeats his old tune, “[T]he family as an objective social category (a structuring structure) [that is, the field—mine] is the basis of the family as a subjective social category (a structured structure) [that is, the habitus—mine], a mental category which is the matrix of countless representations [representations are the practice—mine] and ... which help to reproduce the objective social category. The circle is that of reproduction of the social order.”¹⁹

By a field, Bourdieu means the objective relative positions of those concerned, the structure of capital (economic, social and cultural) and power, the structure that is always structuring their habitus, that is, their dispositions, their mental categories, the subjective structured structure. The social interaction of participants in a field is their practice. The habitus broadly determine the practice, since most social interactions are taken for granted by the participants, “not questioned but always questionable.”

I shall try to check against the 1986 Hong Kong data the viability of taking seriously into empirical study his theoretical idea. To various degrees, the 1986 Hong Kong survey provides data for

¹² Pierre Bourdieu. 1996. “The family as a realized category” in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol 13(3): 19–26.

¹³ The notion of power is Marxian. But Bourdieu distinguishes himself from Althusser, the French structural Marxian.

¹⁴ He calls them preconstructions, prenotions, spontaneous sociology, etc.

¹⁵ A fuller exposition of his view can be found in his books such as *The Craft of Sociology, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, etc. See my comment paper, “Pierre Bourdieu’s Craft of Sociology in His Own Words,” which is already on our Web site.

¹⁶ Some disagree that it is mistake, for example, the ethno methodologists, but it is a separate issue I do not want to go into here.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁸ Here I am using the complementarity of the social versus the systemic, as proposed by David Lockwood, the British sociologist. *The social is the interactional aspect.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the field, the habitus and the practice. The situation of the family, in the case of Hong Kong data, was seen through the eyes of the young adults interviewed in 1986. Our focus here is on the family, not on the young adults. It is nevertheless related to the young adults—we are concerned with the situation of the family as a Bourdieuen field in which they lived. Our task is to lay them out in an analyzable and hence interpretable form.

We need to remind ourselves the Bourdieuen focus: what is to be studied sociologically is the range of possible situations that the Hong Kong Chinese family can land in, rather than the actuality of any particular family.

The first question to ask and answer is of course this one: what is the range of possible structures of power in the family for the Hong Kong Chinese family (as a Bourdieuen field)?

The question about the range of possibilities can be broken down into several empirical questions. These questions have a theoretical hierarchy among themselves. The central organizing question is this: Who is the boss in the family? It borders upon who makes/make major decisions in the family.²⁰ Fortunately, we have this in the 1986 Hong Kong data:

Q1 Who in your family is/are/was/were responsible for major decisions (such as removal) since you were 9 years old?

The answer is recorded on an age-by-age basis. So for an eighteen-year old, his/her answer is an array of 10 consecutive columns (from age 9 to age 18), each of which denotes an age and at which there may be one person or more named as the decision-makers in his/her family.

It is a direct question on the power structure in the family. There are a host of questionnaire items on the actual composition of the family and some familial events that precede and support the range of possibilities available to the family concerned at any point in time. They are the following:

Q2 Co-residence with father and mother (recorded on a year-by-year basis since birth)

Q3 Age of father and/or mother

Q4 Death(s) of father and/or mother (and when if already died)

Q5 Divorce or separation of parents (and when)

Q6 Number of siblings

Q7 Sex composition of siblings

Q8 Own age

Q9 Own sex

²⁰ We need to remind ourselves that the notion of power is still lacking a careful sociological analysis. Decision-making is no doubt an act of the powerful, but there are many other aspects. Furthermore, power is not necessarily a bone of contention among the family members; some members are happy to be exempted from the exercise of power. In fact, the legitimation of power in the family remains to be explicated theoretically. It does not derive necessarily from capital—economic, social or cultural. There is a bundle of theoretical issues here we need to tackle, but for the time being let us leave it aside.

Q10 Own marriage, divorce and separation (and when)

Also, there are questionnaire items on the various forms of capital possessed by the family members, some of which overlap with the earlier list:

Q11 Educational attainment of father and/or mother (Cultural capital, infra- and ultra-familial)

Q12 Financial responsibility to child (Actual wording: Who is/are/was/were responsible for your daily expenses since your birth?) (Economic capital, intra-familial)

Q13 Child care (Actual wording: Who took care of you in daily life from your birth to age 12?) (Social capital, intra-familial)

Q14 Number of siblings (Potential capital holders, intra-familial)

Q15 Sex composition of siblings (Cultural capital, intra-familial)

Q16 Own sib order (Cultural and/or social capital, intra-familial)

Q17 Own age (Cultural and/or social capital, intra- and/or ultra-familial)

Q18 Own sex (Cultural capital, intra-familial)

Q19 Own educational attainment (Cultural capital, infra- and ultra-familial)

Q20 Own school leaving (and when) (Social capital, infra-familial)

Q21 Own work status and occupation (if already working) (Economic, social and/or cultural capital, infra- and ultra-familial)

Q22 Own marriage, divorce or separation (same as Q9) (Social and cultural capital, infra-familial)

We note in passing that data availability varies from family member to family member. There is a strong bias towards the young adult interviewed. It gives rise to some difficulties in analysis and interpretation. One difficulty is that when the respondent-child gets married, which family he/she refers to in his/her answer becomes problematic. We need to censor the data at the time of his/her marriage. Another difficulty is that when he/she says an elder sibling is a major decision-maker in his/her family, it is sometimes still hard to ascertain whether that sibling is actually “elder” among all his/her siblings. In a first approximation, we ignore the sibling order.

We also note that the boundary of the family is not known. We believe it will not give rise to theoretical difficulties since the notion of the field relies on the relative positions in the family rather than membership of the family. While who is a family member is hard to define, who is a major decision-maker of the family is not. There is a clear and distinct power core with an indeterminate periphery.

Since all young adults of the selected households in the age range 18–27 were interviewed and our present unit of analysis is the family, we need to adjust the data. Multiple respondents in the same

household were frequently found.²¹ The data do not allow us to use the weighting method. We resort to simple random selection of one respondent per household.

How are we going to specify and categorize the possibilities in statistical terms? It goes like this: We use the calendar year as the objective basis of dividing up the familial experience. Since the youngest age group is age 18 at the time of interview, that is, 1986, we count backwards ten years to 1977 in which the youngest were age 9—exactly the lowest age about which Q1 asks. For the other age groups, that is, from 19 to 27, we do the same thing, that is, count backwards ten years to 1977. Thus we have data about the familial experience of the cohort of young adults from 1977 to 1986. The data are divided up into ten years. We have ten yearly profiles of the power structure in the family. The 1986 profile is in fact incomplete since the year was not yet over at the time of survey, and we drop it. We shall use the nine complete yearly profiles, from 1977 to 1985.

A brief glance of the actual data shows that any one respondent can at the most experience 2 transitions in power²² in his/her family over the years 1977–1985. There is a fairly wide range of power structures for all families in the same years. There are various ways to group them, reflecting different theoretical ambitions. As a first approximation, we group them according to the following criteria:

1. The father and the mother are the two central categories of classification.
2. Children are considered as one category regardless of their age, sex and sibling order.
3. Other family members are classified as detailed as the data allow.
4. Any power structure having not more than 10 families (out of a valid sample total of 861) exhibiting it will be grouped into the residual category of “Other structures.”

It results in a very simple classification:

- (1) Father only;
- (2) Mother only;
- (3) Father and mother only;
- (4) Father and child(ren);
- (5) Mother and child(ren);
- (6) Father, mother and child(ren);
- (7) Child(ren);

²¹ Out of 1302 valid cases, 1 household was found to have 5 respondents; 18 households, 4 respondents; 79 households, 3 respondents; 213 households, 2 respondents; 672 households, 1 respondent. It results in a sample of 873 households.

²² His/her own marriage is technically counted as one of the possible transitions, since it causes data censoring.

- (8) Persons outside the list;²³
- (9) Other structures; and
- (10) Marriage of the respondent-child.

The success of the classification in capturing the reality of the Hong Kong family can be seen in that categories (8) and (9)—the residual categories—are found to be insignificantly small; the sum of the two is never more than 7% of all the families for all the years. It implies that the power structure of the Hong Kong Chinese family is predominantly organised around the parents, and to a less extent involving the children. (See Chart 1.) There is a very limited range of possibilities. Of course, they can be further differentiated with the help of Q2 to Q10. For example, we can take the sex of the child who is a decision-maker into account. Even then, we can still expect a very limited range.

The father no doubt is the big boss for many families. Yet it is far from any claim of overwhelming patriarchy. Being the boss of a family at economic hard times like the sixties was not an enviable position. It needs to be seen in a proper historical context. It needs to be discussed with reference to research findings of the period, for example, Jane Salaff's *Working Daughters of Hong Kong*.

On the one hand, sharing power with children (categories (4), (5) and (6)) is quite rare. On the other hand, relinquishing power to the children (category (7)) seems to be relatively more prevalent. My gut feel is that we can find a cultural explanation in the propriety of generational responsibility and parental power relinquishment.²⁴ It concerns the notion of generation,²⁵ which in Bourdieuen jargon is the habitus. It is obviously overlooked by sinologists.²⁶ In all the literature about the Chinese family I have read, none seems to have mentioned this point. Here I might have captured a glimpse of some theoretically significant ideas that have so far escaped their notice.²⁷

If we take away category (10) "Marriage of the respondent-child", which is simply a data sink, the stability of the relative distribution of categories (1) to (9) over the years 1977–1985 is remarkably pronounced. (See Chart 2.) It appears as if except perhaps parental deaths there is very little change

²³ The list is as follows: Mother, father, paternal grandfather, paternal grandmother, maternal grandfather, maternal grandmother, paternal aunt, paternal uncle, maternal aunt, maternal uncle, elder sister, elder brother, amah, self, spouse. Besides these clear designations, all unlisted persons can be classified into either other relatives or simply others (that is, non-relatives). At the questionnaire design stage, it was decided not to include younger sister and young brother in the list, in the belief that they were very likely to be involved in family decision-making. But we were proved to be wrong, and they were classified into other relatives. Manual records still exist, but we do not have time to dig them out.

²⁴ I can immediately quote some dispositional statements made by the older generation in their daily conversation: "When the son grows up, he has his own world." "My son has married, and I give the responsibility of the family to him and his wife." "My children have grown up, and I feel free." "My children have grown up, I can travel, I can enjoy myself." All these statements can point to a relinquishment of power.

²⁵ The notion of generation is demographically imprecise, but it can be sociologically very precise if it is treated as a mental category, a structured structure. It is quite unfortunately in this light that the notion has gone out of favour among Western sociologists since the seventies.

²⁶ In the fifties and the sixties Francis Hsu, the sinologist, discusses the Chinese family structure in terms of a father-son diad. It concerns the notion of generation, but it is under the assumption of patriarchy—a sociological construct which does not seem to be supported by the analysis of this paper. His notion of father-son diad has been taken up by S.P. Yuen to explain the emerging modern society in the Pearl River Delta (near Hong Kong) in the nineties. In my view, his attempt is far from being successful. What is in need is a theoretical reconstruction of the notion of generation.

²⁷ The reason seems to be that there has been a complete lack of survey data about the power structure of the Chinese family—a point I need to verify.

over the years. We should interpret this phenomenon in detail. The effect of data censoring due to marriage of the respondent-child should also be investigated.²⁸

Table 1 is the transitional sub-matrix for category (1) “Father only”. The statistical significance of the actual numbers for any particular year can be ascertained by regarding Table 1 as an outcome of some underlying transitional probabilities.²⁹ For the meantime, we are satisfied with an aggregation over the whole period from 1977 to 1985. Table 2 is the aggregation summary of power transitions regarding the three major categories (1) “Father only”, (2) “Mother only”, and (3) “Father and mother only”, over the years 1977–1985.

Table 2 refines my earlier observation that Chinese parents seem to prefer relinquishment to sharing of power with their children by adding some further observations on the different arrangements of relinquishment and receivership. Take category (1) as the first example. Abdication to his children is the most prevalent arrangement (41 transitions to category (7)), followed by relinquishment to a joint receivership comprising his wife and his children (10 transitions to category (5)), and democratization of power (7 transitions to categories (4) and (6)). I repeat: There are three arrangements, namely, abdication to children, relinquishment to a joint receivership involving children, and democratization involving children. Similarly, category (2) “Mother only” can be analyzed. Obviously, the mother is not much different from the father. Category (3) “Father and mother only” shows a greater tendency of democratization, and yet abdication to the children is still the most frequent transition.

Between the father and the mother, there seems to be a very small but balanced exchange of power positions; either loses little to or gains little from the other. It can be a sign of possible tensions between them. They are an antinomy. The feminist argument is perhaps relevant here. It implies that the power structure in the family is organised around a conglomerate of different kinds of discourse. Any coherent theory of it needs to integrate these different kinds of discourse in a coherent way. Yet the overall impression remains: power transitions are mainly occurring in the direction from the older generation to the younger generation, not between husbands and wives. It seems that once the husband and the wife settle into a power structure they are locked into it until the death of the one in power or the one in power abdicates to the children, relinquishes one's power to a joint receivership involving the children or democratizes it by involving the children.

All these observations need sociological explanation. As far as data are concerned, Q12 to Q22 come in at this point. The interweaving of power and capital will flesh out the field. The main task here is sociological, with some statistical help. We need to argue why a certain category of power structure occurs in terms of the various kinds of capital that are available to the family and vice-versa why a particular configuration of capital in the family generates certain categories of power structure in the family. There is always the need for a theoretical construction to explain, because data alone do not take us very far into explaining. In short, these statistically treated matrices will form a very rich source of insights into the dynamics of power in the Hong Kong family.

So far I have devised the methodology for studying the field, I still need to work out how the habitus and the practice can be discussed.

²⁸ My gut feel is that categories (1) to (9) should be affected fairly evenly by it.

²⁹ Although the actual numbers of different kinds of transitions are small, but the issuing source of these transitions, that is, category (1), is a large denominator that makes statistical testing possible.

Part II

We recall Pierre Bourdieu's old tune: "[T]he family as an objective social category (a structuring structure) [that is, the field—mine] is the basis of the family as a subjective social category (a structured structure) [that is, the habitus—mine], a mental category which is the matrix of countless representations [representations are the practice—mine] and [my copy has the word in this space unclear—mine] ... which help to reproduce the objective social category. The circle is that of reproduction of the social order."³⁰

A little more reading into his writings will help us to grasp his idea more firmly. Bourdieu defines, "[H]abitus [is] systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor."³¹ An original endnote explains, "The word *disposition* seems particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions). It explains first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition*, *tendency*, *propensity*, or *inclination*. [The semantic cluster of "disposition" is rather wider in French than in English, but as this—translated literally—shows, the equivalence is adequate. Translator.]"³² Bourdieu explains further, "Because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simply mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings."³³

But can we turn the notion of habitus into a list, a table of contents? Can we concretize it? We are in fact questioning the possibility of turning the habitus from the individual's subjective experience of the social world into an object of sociological study. Bourdieu answers surely in the positive: It is possible, it is the first objectification.³⁴ But how does the sociologist objectify the habitus? He/she either interrogates the individual concerned directly and puts on record the answers he obtains (this is the boring task of interviewing with a questionnaire) or uses records of what the individual concerned says or does in response to other interrogators (including himself/herself as a self-interrogator).

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu. 1996. "The family as a realized category" in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol 13(3): 21.

³¹ *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 72.

³² *Ibid.*, endnote 1, chapter 2, p. 214.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³⁴ Bourdieu believes that sociological practice implies two objectifications. First, both the subjective experience of the social world (that is the habitus) and the objective conditions of that experience (that is, the field) need to be objectified (that is, to be made into objects of study) in the first instance by the sociologist as scientific objects. Second, the sociologist needs to objectify his own epistemological and social conditions that enable him to objectify the subjective experience of the social world and the objective conditions of that experience. In his more difficult language, he explains, "Of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism. The very fact that this division constantly reappear ... would suffice to indicate that the modes of knowledge which it distinguishes are equally indispensable to a science of the social world that cannot be reduced either to a social phenomenology or to a social physics. To move beyond these two modes of knowledge, while preserving the gains from each of them ... [it] is necessary to make explicit the presuppositions that they have in common as theoretical modes of knowledge, both equally opposed to the practical mode of knowledge which is the basis of ordinary experience of the social world. This presupposes a critical objectification of the epistemological and social conditions that make possible both the reflexive return to the subjective experience of the world and also the objection of the objective conditions of that experience." *The Logic of Practice*, p. 25.

Although the individual does not necessarily give a verbal or written answer to the interrogator (since the interrogator is not necessarily an interviewer with a questionnaire in hand), the interrogator often ascertains it verbally or writes it down. The same holds for the interrogator of the interrogator. In other words, the answer is being increasingly inscribed into a discursive form as this interrogation of interrogators accumulates. At some point in time it turns a full circle and comes back to the individual who is first interrogated. He/she confronts his/her own answer face-to-face as a discourse from others, and he/she needs to reconfirm it. At that point, his/her answer is necessarily verbal or written. Finally, the sociologist can assume fairly confidently that on some social occasions and in some social moments the habitus will appear in front of him/her as a discourse. As a discourse, the habitus is objectified.

Bourdieuian habitus is Durkheimian moral order

Habitus appearing as a discourse brings along a structure unto itself because discourse needs to develop itself in an order of recognition. The discursive structure of habitus consists of a centre of moral principles and a periphery of pragmatic rules. The moral principles present themselves socially as discursive topics in daily conversations, in popular media, in formal as well as informal debates, in school textbooks, in religious teachings, in laws, in modern as well as ancient writings. They are perennial topics that the humankind is constantly concerned with. In short, they are principles that we may agree or disagree making the society we live in possible. They constitute a moral order. The pragmatic rules fill up the gaps left by the moral principles to flesh out the skeleton of the moral order into a full-fledged moral order. They are invoked only because the moral principles fail. They are second principles. Whenever the individual is questioned about his “thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions” (which are products of the habitus), if he/she cannot explain them as a matter of moral principles he/she will resort to explaining them as a matter of rules of thumb arising from pragmatic needs to act. Needless to say, in his/her acts of thinking, perceiving, expressing and acting he/she acts as if these principles and rules are taken-for-granted, “not questioned but always questionable”. We note that Bourdieu does not make this distinction. In fact, he seldom mentions the Durkheimian notion of moral order. I have developed his notion of habitus a little further: Habitus appearing as a discourse is a Durkheimian moral order in the full sense.

One can study the moral order (or better still in the full sense of it) directly—provided that data are available. In a direct way, one identifies and examines the range of relevant principles that appear in recorded discourses—and in particular questions included in survey questionnaires and answers thus solicited.³⁵ When data about the habitus are not available but instead data about the practice are available, one needs to distill the underlying “principles of generation and structuring.” It is an indirect identification of the moral order from records of social interactions where it has left its traces, its footprints. Its empirical possibility lies in a numerical asymmetry between habitus and practice. The former is numerable, finite and in most cases just a few in number, while the latter is—as Bourdieu says—“countless.” The former is capacity while the latter is production. Being a capacity, it must be susceptible to linguistic description, and as such it must be susceptible to a finite description. Numerically, the former is overwhelmed by the latter. The former is in fact embedded in the latter—habitus scatters all over the place of practice. Its empirical possibility is further enhanced by the fact that the room for manoeuvre habitus can possibly enjoy is in reality very limited—it is historically and socially conditioned. Chances are therefore fairly high that one can capture the discursive existence of habitus from records of practices.

³⁵ My paper "Promiscuous husbands and loyal wives" already on our Web site is an example of direct investigation.

The nexus between FACES II and habitus

The 1986 Hong Kong survey provides data on practice but not on habitus. We are bound to use the indirect way. It becomes necessary to examine whether these data on practice are adequate for our analytical purpose. It was captured with the help of a behavioural-psychological scale called Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES II), whose items are given in Appendix 1.³⁶ All items are strictly behavioural descriptions except item 12 “Discipline is fair in our family” which involves the notion of fairness, a notion more moralistically judgmental than amorally behavioural. All items refer to social interactions within the family. It seems to us that there are no omissions of significant aspects of family life that we are aware of among the Hong Kong Chinese.³⁷ It is probably a result of the way that psychological scales or inventories are usually built. It usually takes a maximal starting point with hundreds of items and strips it down gradually by repeated use of factor analysis. The end product is a minimally adequate set of items in which major factors are preserved.³⁸ The so-called factors are statistical artifacts in the first place, whose sociological meaning needs to be ascertained.

A noticeable fact here is that the conceptual assumption of this process is very close to what Bourdieu believes to be the relationship between habitus and practice: The former is the “matrix” of the latter, and the latter is the “countless representations” of the former. In what sense are the items of FACES II (or in fact another other similar scale or inventory) a collection of representations of the habitus? In the sense that answers to these items are utterances of respondents who are supposed to be a fair representatives of the population we are studying, they are surely a collection of representations of the habitus. Also, we do not doubt that the habitus does in fact exist since it is a “system of durable, transposable dispositions,” and a disposition “designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*.” It must in fact outlive any representation that can be possibly made. It must be “an endless capacity to engender products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions.” The doubt we have in mind is that whether the FACES II can embrace the habitus in its entirety. This doubt cannot be dissolved unless some other questions are answered.

First, how does habitus as a structure look like? Perhaps we can envisage it as a cabinet with a finite array of drawers, each of which contains a different substance. Every representation is a mixture of substances taken out from the drawers. The amounts taken out depend on the individual and the representation he/she wants to make. There are therefore two levels of determination here, one being the individual level while the other being the representation level. The important point to realize is that there is no a priori hierarchy between the two. On the one hand, if we gaze at the range of representations made by the same individual, then his/her disposition (or system of dispositions) assumes (or is assumed to assume) a higher order of reality, which we can call a parameter structure. A parameter structure in the non-technical sense is a structure that determines the range of possible outcomes of the system (or mechanism) that it defines symbolically. On the other hand, if we gaze at the range of dispositions exhibited by individuals in making the same representation, then the parameter structure of the representation (that is, in the truly statistical sense, means, variances, etc., of the distributions of amounts of substances taken out from the drawers by the individuals) assume a higher order of reality. In short, there is a duality (but not a dualism) between the individuals who make presentations and the presentations that they make. It is in the first assumed hierarchy that

³⁶ Adolf Tsang introduced it into the 1986 Hong Kong survey questionnaire. It is not known whether FACES II has been validated locally. But it will not affect our use in this paper since it is not used as a psychological scale.

³⁷ This claim needs to be verified against the research literature.

³⁸ Whether FACES II was indeed produced in this way needs to be verified. I do not have the original document at hand.

Bourdieu uses the terms “matrix” and “representations”. It is in the second assumed hierarchy that the statistical method called factor analysis proceeds to isolate the so-called factors. The two assumed hierarchies are not in conflict.

We can also assume reasonably safely that the duality implies some kind of symmetry between the two levels of determination and hence between the two assumed hierarchies. Furthermore, if the duality can be expressed mathematically, then there should be a mathematical-symbolical-structural symmetry between the two-parameter structures. Indeed, this is satisfied by the mathematical form of factor analysis: Each factor can be expressed as a linear combination of the items in FACES II (which are representations of habitus), and vice-versa each item can be expressed as a linear combination of the isolated factors. So far so good. But a second question is awaiting us: Are factors thus isolated really the “matrix” that Bourdieu speaks about?

In fact, there is no certainty beyond this point. We can only be groping along. But this uncertainty is not specific to the method of factor analysis. It is in fact an inherent uncertainty of sociological methods in general. Even within the Bourdieuan approach, what enshrines the objectivity of the sociological construct? Sociological construction is selecting, categorizing, differentiating and naming, in accordance with the sociological reason. The sociological reason is like a dictionary whose entries are made after very careful consideration and among and between whose entries a certain coherence of meaning to the editor and hopefully to the reader prevails. I tend to think that the “dictionary” is the second objectification itself. Sociological constructs are therefore discourses within the language prescribed by the sociological reason as a “dictionary”, whose objectivity derives from that of the “dictionary”. This epistemological view is in line with Bourdieu's.³⁹ The question that whether the factors isolated by factor analysis is the Bourdieuan habitus can then be turned into a more specific and concrete question: Does factor analysis fall within the language of the “official” Bourdieuan “dictionary”? My answer is “yes.”

My first defense is simple: Bourdieu himself has never used factor analysis, but it does not follow that he will reject it. Bourdieu likes correspondence analysis (a type of statistical analysis which the SPSS has included recently) most. He dislikes regression because there is an assumption of hierarchical relationship between dependent variables and independent variables.⁴⁰ The symmetry between the parameter structure of the variables and that of the factors must be able to dissolve his dislike. My second defense is less simple. Although Bourdieu has a very strong view about Lazarsfeld's way of doing empirical investigation—“... the Viennese empirical bias of Lazarsfeld, a sort of short-sighted neo-positivism, relatively blind to the theoretical side.”⁴¹—from which factor analysis is descended, the statistical outcome of factor analysis is in fact fundamentally indeterminate unless the sociologist who is using it makes the required decisions in accordance with the “dictionary” he adopts. Whether the outcome is acceptable depends on whether he/she can offer a satisfactory naming (or range of possible naming) of the factors in accordance with the “dictionary”.

It implies that a naming has to be satisfactory on three counts: First, it has to be satisfactory semantically. For any particular factor, the name given to it must support the ordinary interpretation of those items in which it is embedded. For any particular item, the names of the factors it contains must support at least one coherent discourse using all the names together at the same time. Second, a

³⁹ This claim needs further elaboration within Bourdieu's corpus.

⁴⁰ It needs verification in Bourdieu's text.

⁴¹ *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, pp 36–37. Paul Lazarsfeld was very active in the forties, fifties and sixties. He developed and promoted use of statistical methods in sociological enquiry. He was the methodologist of a very influential sociological circle, which Bourdieu dislikes. The other two members of the circle were Parsons and Merton.

naming has to be satisfactory practically. By this I mean that the name of each factor reflects a moral principle or a pragmatic rule and the collection of names must reflect all the relevant principles and rules so that almost all possible practical representations (including as a matter of course representations outside of FACES II) can be made in term of them. Third, a naming has to be satisfactory theoretically. By this I mean that the names of the factors together must reflect the notion of the field as a structure of power relationships. Now if the naming satisfies these three criteria—namely the semantic, the practical and the theoretic—what objections can Bourdieu possibly raise? We are very far from “the Viennese empirical bias of Lazarsfeld.” Besides, Bourdieu never says that there can only be one legitimate construction for the same object of study.

Now we can go back to the question that whether FACES II can embrace the habitus in its entirety. If the questions, answers and assumptions we have just raised and discussed are reasonable, then the adequacy of FACES II as a collection of representations is simply a question of coverage because its does not seem to have given rise to other problems that may invalidate it as an empirical basis for the search of the habitus. But this is an unanswerable question: Any scientific endeavour is finite in character whereas the problem of adequate coverage is infinite in character. Only when FACES II is found to be inadequate in coverage by a concrete example (or counter-example), it is proved to be inadequate. It is a substantial proof, and there will not be a formal proof. The same argument applies to any other scale or inventory on family life, or even any description of family life. It implies that any scale, inventory or collection of behavioural-descriptive items on family life can be a legitimate starting point for empirical investigation. The only difference among them is that some can be found to be inadequate easily while some survive for a long time.

Hong Kong findings

Having defended the use of FACES II, I go on to perform a factor analysis on it.⁴² The result is shown in Table 3, where any factor with a coefficient less than 0.33 (implying that its contribution to the explanation of the variance of the item concerned is less than 10%, which is the square of its coefficient) is not shown. Nine factors are obtained, and I name them as follows: Component 1, “Responsibility”; 2, “Support”; 3, “Sharing”; 4, “Tolerance”; 5, “Schism”; 6, “Refusal to hear”; 7, “Conformity”; 8, “Readiness to accept”; 9, “Tardiness to respond”.

A sociologist is no linguist. He/she can only rely on his/her layman sense of language to name the factors and do it at his/her best. I am not going to defend my naming, and the reader is invited to give suggestions. But I must show that my naming satisfies the practical criterion as well as the theoretical criterion. I claim that “Responsibility”, “Sharing” and “Tolerance” are mainly moral principles and the remaining ones are mainly pragmatic rules.⁴³ The division between moral principles

⁴² The sample size is 153 with 5 of them having some missing values in the FACES II items. The preliminary statistical-technical justification for use of factor analysis is fulfilled: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy is 0.805, and the significance level of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is 0.000 with 435 degrees of freedom. The extraction method used is Principal Component Analysis. The usual criterion of determining the number of factors to use in the model, that is, the eigenvalue is greater than 1, is adopted. The rotation method used is Varimax with Kaiser normalization. (The Quartimax and Equamax methods have been tried. A brief glance seems to suggest that the other two methods do not provide any interesting pattern.) The proportion of total variance of the FACES II (30 items) explained by the nine components is 62.4%.

⁴³ This is a tentative claim. Let me illustrate my reasoning with "Responsibility" as an example. My claim is equivalent to a claim that "Responsibility" should be read as "Family members should have a responsibility to one another" or "Members should have a responsibility to the family." In reading it normatively, it underpins the behavioural descriptions in which it is found to be embedded and contributes to an explanation of the answers given by the respondents. Its presence (or absence) becomes a "reason" for the behaviour concerned. In attempting to read it as a pragmatic rule, one will encounter some difficulty. Take for example item 1, that is, "In our family, everyone share responsibilities", in which "Responsibility" appears. "Responsibility" accounts for 68% of its variance, and it contains no other factor. If "Responsibility" were a pragmatic rule, what moral principle could be supporting the behaviour? If the behaviour were totally pragmatic,

and pragmatic rules is not clear-cut; the two shade into each other. But the following observations worth our attention: First, the division is an important one because it differentiates components of the moral order into the proactive and the reactive. The proactive/reactive divide determines to some extent the range of arguments that society accepts. A proactive component, that is, a moral principle, is to be upheld and not to be negotiated while a reactive component, that is, a pragmatic rule, is accepted reluctantly as a legitimate excuse. The moral order derives its strength from the former, not the latter. Second, the number of moral principles for the Hong Kong Chinese family as a habitus is surprising few, only three out of nine possible candidates. It is hard to imagine that after having identified nine components there is outside of the nine still a fourth moral principle that has managed to escape our attention. Third, only seventeen out of thirty FACES II items include a moral principle. In other words, nearly one half of the representations of family practice are accounted for by pragmatic rules, the second principles. It suggests strongly that the habitus has not developed to the full in order to rationalize the field as a structure of power relationships. Perhaps there is no need for full rationalization in the case of the Hong Kong Chinese family because a partial development is probably already able to bond the family together. How do we understand the claim we often hear that the Chinese is strongly family-oriented? Is the field bonding it together more forcefully or the habitus? According to Bourdieu, the habitus structures the practice, which in turn reproduces the field. If nearly one half of the practice is structured by pragmatic rules, how likely can the practice reproduce the field more or less unchanged in a fairly long period of time, say, ten years? We are only at the beginning of a theoretical investigation, and much is unknown. Fourth, all names of the nine factors have a power connotation. Perhaps I need not justify my claim, as it seems to be very obvious. It needs mentioning that all the three moral principles are named in a positive light. It is not deliberate, but rather that moral names available to the language user more often than not tend to conceal the power origin of moral principles. They are seldom neutral names.

The next analytic task is to link the habitus to the field. To synchronize the two we use the profile of power structure at the time of survey (which is more or less similar to the 1985 profile) since FACES II measured the family practice at the time of survey only. For each type of power structure, the means and standard deviations of the nine components of the habitus are calculated. Some of the results are shown in Table 4. From Table 4, I move on to test the between-group mean differences, and results are shown in Table 5.

Notice that none of the three moral principles is involved in Table 5. It means they are equally regarded or disregarded in all types of power structure shown there. It also means none of these types of power structure structures its habitus differently on these moral principles. I tend to interpret this finding as an evidence of the universality of these moral principles, that is, they are not negotiable at all times in all circumstances. Second, if types of power structure structure their respective habituses differently, they work on the pragmatic rules only. Three pragmatic rules, namely, “support”, “refusal to hear” and “conformity”, are worked on differently by some types of power structure.

Our next question is this: How should we interpret these differences? Before we interpret them, let us remind ourselves that the power structure of the family was seen through the eyes of the children. Types “Father only”, “Mother only” and “Father and mother” are truly comparable because

what amoral social force could be pushing family members to behave in this way? I do not find an easy answer, and in fact I am unable to find one. I have to accept that it is not a pragmatic rule. my aim is to ascertain the moral status of each component of the habitus, that is, whether it is a moral principle or a pragmatic rule. The line of attack is to argue for or against various possibilities within the identified moral order (that is, the nine components of the habitus), to push the moral arguments to the extreme, and if an argument goes out of the moral order, to continue it as an amoral one. The naming of components of the habitus is a result of moral arguments, and hopefully a generally accepted one in society. A forceful argument is more than simply logical; it must carry societal consensus.

in each of them the respondent-child concerned was necessarily in a relatively powerless position from which he/she saw the power structure of his/her family. Type "Child(ren)" is not the case. The respondent-child could be one of the powerful. It is included for the sake of contrast rather than comparison. Look at the type "Father only" first. It is often said to be a patriarchy. The findings confirm its authoritarian aspect: It demands a higher degree of "Conformity" in its habitus than "Mother only" does. It demands a lower degree of "Support" and a higher degree of "Refuse to hear" than "Father and mother" does. Besides being weaker in "Conformity" than "Father only", "Mother only" is also weaker in the same component than "Father and mother" only, indicating the presence of a "kind" mother. Perhaps traditionalism persists; traditionally the father is said to be strict and the mother kind. But in "Father and mother", the kind mother seems to have disappeared; it demands the same degree of "Conformity" as "Father only" does.

On the whole, there is more similarity than dissimilarity among the three types. In the first place, they do not differ in the three moral principles, namely, "Responsibility", "Sharing" and "Tolerance". (We note in passing that "Child(ren)" also does not differ in this respect.) In the second place, there are other pragmatic rules, namely, "Schism", "Readiness to accept" and "Tardiness to respond", in which the three types does not differ. At this point, we must ask ourselves this question: What does power in the family mean? Obviously, Whoever in power must carry with him/her "Responsibility", "Sharing" and "Tolerance", the three moral obligations. His/her withdrawal of "support", "refusal to hear" and demand for "conformity" from other family members are merely the abrasive face of power; they are far from being a destructive force when the benign stability prevails. The Hong Kong Chinese family will continue to be blessed with a bright future.

Table 1. Power transitions for category (1) “Father only”, by year.

Decision-maker(s)	Year																
	77		78		79		80		81		82		83		84		85
	Loss	gain															
Father	344		331		313		293		276		262		244		226		214
Mother	1	1	1		1			3	2	2	3	1	2				
Father and mother		1	1	1	1				1								
Father and child(ren)							1				2		2				
Mother and child(ren)	2				2		1		1		1		2		1		
Father, mother and child(ren)							1						1				
Child(ren)	6		7		6	1	9		4	1	4	1	1	1	1	4	
Person(s) outside the list									1				1		1		
Other structures	3		1		1	1	1		1	1			1				
Marriage of respondent-child	3		9		11		7		8		10		9		6		

Table 2. Power transitions for categories (1) “Father only”, (2) “Mother only”, and (3) “Father and mother only”, aggregated over 1977–1985.

	Father		Mother		Father and Mother	
	Total loss	Total gain	Total loss	Total gain	Total loss	Total gain
Father	N.A.	N.A.	7	10	3	1
Mother	10	7	N.A.	N.A.	2	3
Father and mother	3	2	1	3	N.A.	N.A.
Father and child(ren)	5	0	9	0	3	0
Mother and child(ren)	10	0	1	0	0	0
Father, mother and child(ren)	2	0	5	0	12	1
Child(ren)	41	4	14	0	18	1
Person(s) outside the list	3	0	1	0	0	0
Other structures	8	2	3	0	4	2
Marriage of respondent-child	63	0	38	0	40	0

Table 3. Representations of family practice (items of FACES II) decomposed into components of habitus of the family (component matrix extracted by principal component analysis and rotated by varimax method with Kaiser normalization).

FACES II Item	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	0.824								
2	0.583								
3	0.578								
4	0.528	0.516							
5	0.468					0.363			
6	0.446			0.428				0.392	
7	0.433			0.421					
8		-0.668							
9		0.654							
10		0.594							-0.409
11	0.338	0.476	0.349	0.331					
12	0.349	0.372		0.357					
13			0.692						
14			0.690	0.340					
15			0.578						
16	0.395	0.365	0.534						
17			0.454				0.398		-0.352
18				0.803					
19			0.339	0.556					
20					0.744				
21					0.707				
22			0.340		-0.514				
23					0.488	0.459			
24						0.804			
25		-0.400				0.462			
26							-0.763		
27				0.349			0.480		
28								0.762	
29									0.755
30							0.431		0.536

Note:

Component 1 means "Responsibility"; 2, "Support"; 3, "Sharing"; 4, "Tolerance"; 5, "Schism"; 6, "Refusal to hear"; 7, "Conformity"; 8, "Readiness to accept"; 9, "Tardiness to respond".

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of components of habitus of the family by type of power structure in the family.

Power structure	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Father only (N=43)									
Mean	0.04	-0.18	-0.08	0.09	-0.10	0.28	0.26	0.01	-0.04
S.D.	1.04	0.97	0.98	0.92	0.86	0.95	0.93	0.99	1.06
Mother only (N=25)									
Mean	-0.05	-0.16	-0.09	0.00	0.23	0.07	-0.46	0.15	0.14
S.D.	0.99	1.08	1.05	0.97	1.11	1.31	0.95	1.17	0.96
Father & mother (N=25)									
Mean	-0.04	0.31	-0.11	-0.21	0.00	-0.24	0.32	-0.22	0.14
S.D.	0.94	1.01	0.98	1.15	1.14	0.79	1.01	1.04	1.12
Child(ren) (N=27)									
Mean	-0.13	-0.01	0.03	0.32	0.20	-0.33	0.05	-0.02	-0.17
S.D.	1.14	1.05	1.16	1.15	1.06	1.01	1.15	0.98	0.91
Total (N=146)									
Mean	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
S.D.	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Note:

Component 1 means "Responsibility"; 2, "Support"; 3, "Sharing"; 4, "Tolerance"; 5, "Schism"; 6, "Refusal to hear"; 7, "Conformity"; 8, "Readiness to accept"; 9, "Tardiness to respond".

Table 5. Significant mean differences in components of habitus between types of power structure of the family.

Power structure	Power structure				
	1	2	3	4	5
1 Father only	N.A.	7+	N.A.	2-,6+	6+
2 Mother only	7-	N.A.	N.A.	7-	
3 Father only or mother only	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	2-,6+	6+
4 Father and mother	2+,6-		7+	2+,6-	N.A.
5 Child(ren)	6		6-		N.A.

Note:

1. The power structure “Father only or mother only” combines “Father only” and “Mother only” into a type representing the power structure dominated by one of the parents.
2. “N.A.” denotes that the cell concerned is inappropriate for testing the significance of the mean difference in any component of habitus.
3. All appropriate cells are t-tested for every component of habitus with the rule of rejecting the null hypothesis that the means of the two types in the component concerned are equal set at t-statistic being greater than 2 or less than -2.
4. For example, “7+” at the intersection of row 1 “Father only” and column 2 “Mother only” means that the mean difference between the two type in component 7 is significant and is negative in direction. More than one component can be found to be significant in any one cell, see for example the intersection between row 1 and column 4.
5. Empty cells indicate no significant mean difference in the cell concerned.
6. Component 1 means “Responsibility”; 2, “Support”; 3, “Sharing”; 4, “Tolerance”; 5, “Schism”; 6, “Refusal to hear”; 7, “Conformity”; 8, “Readiness to accept”; 9, “Tardiness to respond”.

Appendix 1: FACES II

(Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale)

Items:

1. In our family, everyone share responsibilities. (C122, original order in FACES II)
2. Family members go along with what the family decides to do. (C121)
3. We shift household responsibilities from person to person. (C110)
4. Each family members has input in major family decisions. (C104)
5. Children have a say in their discipline. (C106)
6. When problems arise, we compromise. (C126)
7. Our family tries new ways of dealing with problems. (C120)
8. Family members feel closer to people outside the family than to other family members. (C119)
9. Family members are supportive of each other during difficult times. (C101)
10. In our family, it is easy for everyone to express his/her opinion. (C102)
11. Family members discuss problems and feel good about the solutions. (C108)
12. Discipline is fair in our family. (C118)
13. Family members share interests and hobbies with each other. (C130)
14. Family members know each other's close friends. (C111)
15. Family members consult other family members on their decisions. (C113)
16. Family members say what they want. (C114)
17. Family members like to spend their free time with each other. (C123)
18. We approve of each other's friends. (C127)
19. Family members feel very close to each other. (C117)
20. Family members pair up rather than do things as a total family. (C129)
21. Family members avoid each other at home. (C125)
22. Our family gathers together in the same room. (C105)
23. In our family, everyone goes his/her own way. (C109)
24. It is easier to discuss problems with people outside the family than with other family members. (C103)
25. Family members are afraid to say what is on their minds. (C128)
26. It is hard to know what the rules are in our family. (C112)
27. Our family does things together. (C107)
28. In solving problems, the children's suggestions are followed. (C116)
29. We have difficulty thinking of things to do as a family. (C115)
30. It is difficult to get a rule changed in our family. (C124)

Response categories:

1 = "almost never" 2 = "once in a while" 3 = "sometimes"
4 = "frequently" 5 = "almost always"

Source:

Olson, D.H., J. Portner, and R. Bell. 1983. FACES II (Family Adaptability & Cohesion Evaluation Scales). *Family Social Science*, University of Minnesota.

CHART 1

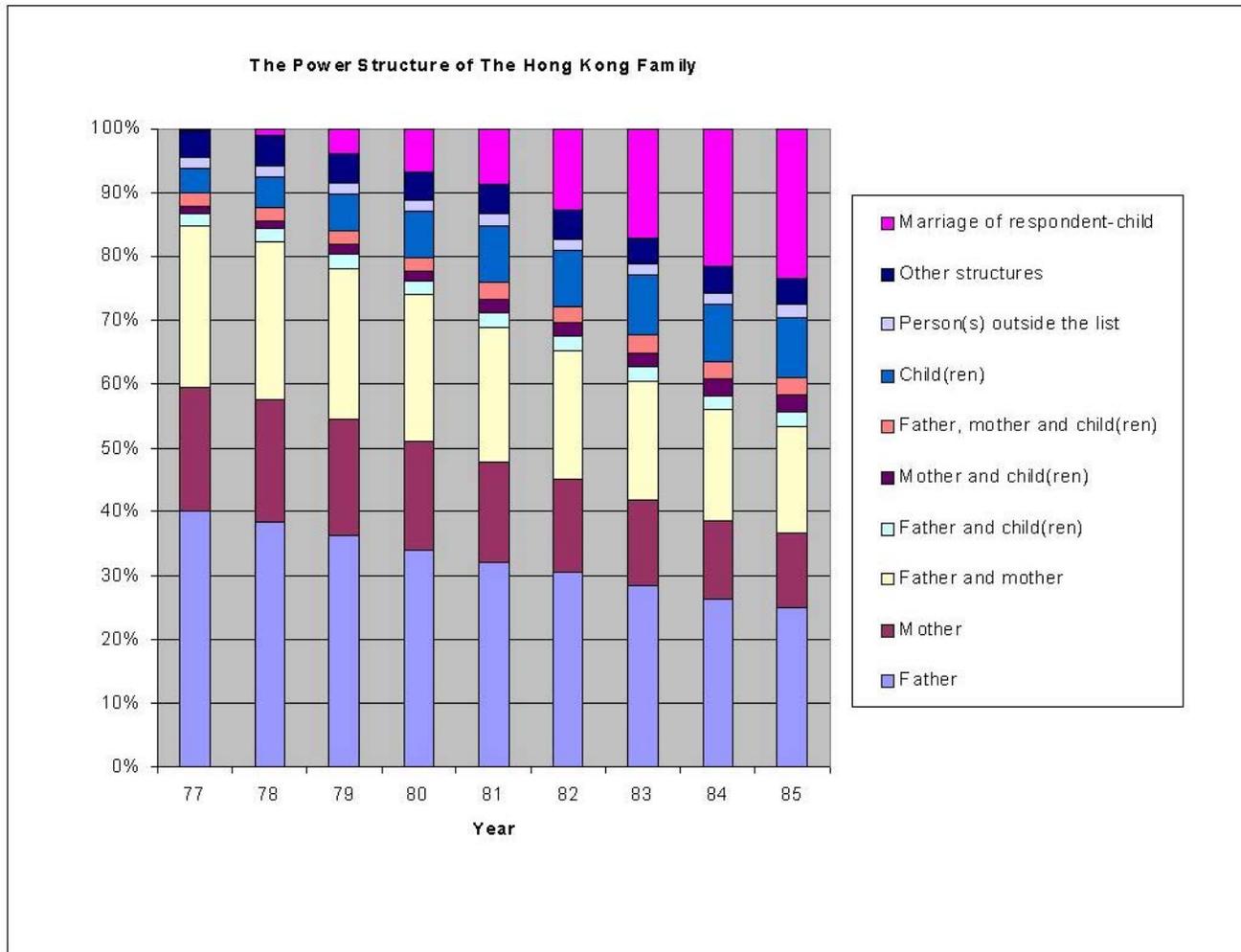


CHART 2

The Power Structure of The Hong Kong Family

