

**An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents’
Negotiation of Identities as their Children Begin Early Childhood Education and
Care in Malaysia and Australia**

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AMSA	Australian Malaysian Singaporean Association
CATF	Combined Adapted Theoretical Frame
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
ECE	Early childhood education
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
GMN	Global Malaysians Network
GTP	Government Transformation Programme
ICTC-CA	Integrative Communicative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation
INT	Identity Negotiation Theory
JFADT	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade
MAPECE	Association of Professional Early Childhood Educators Malaysia
MoE	Ministry of Education
MSC	Malaysians Sydney Chapter
NAECCEM	National Association of Early Childhood Care and Education Malaysia
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKRA	National Key Results Area
NPCS	National Preschool Curriculum Standard
NQS	National Quality Standard
PEMANDU	Performance Management and Delivery Unit
PMD	Prime Minister's Department
TP-CRO	Typology of Parent-Child Relational Orientations

Abstract

Families with young children experience numerous and varied routines. Waking up, choosing clothes and travelling to the childcare centre are but some of the essential elements of daily life. Consistent routines are crucial in developing children's feelings of predictability, security and trust. These feelings assist in regulating behaviours, especially during transitions in family life, such as commencing formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) for the first time. Transitions may lead to *disjuncture*, described by Jarvis (2005) as a state of learning when existing experiences and current expectations differ. In order to gain a full understanding of how parents overcome this particular ECEC disjuncture, it is vital to consider the roles and responsibilities that they attach to their identities. A range of historical and relational considerations in the form of goals, beliefs and understandings enable parents to negotiate multiple identities. Parents' negotiation of multiple identities is influenced by the disjuncture of personal and/or family goals, beliefs and understandings. This situation is further complicated for immigrant parents. Socialised in different societies, it is common for immigrants to bring cultural baggage with them to their new country.

This study investigates the characteristics of the Malaysian-Chinese parent identity as their children begin formal ECEC in Malaysia and Australia. Borrowing from the notion of *goodness* (Dixon, Chapman, & Hill, 2005), this study searches for strengths that lie in how parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings during this state of disjuncture, and provides insights into their perceptions of their evolving identities.

Data were collected in the form of non-participant observations of daily family routines and semi-structured interviews with 21 Malaysian-Chinese parents of children 5 months to 5-years-old in Kuala Lumpur and Sydney. Analysis of interview transcripts and field notes was undertaken from an ethnographic perspective, using HyperRESEARCH

(Version 3.0.3) to manage a three-stage, inductive, iterative process according to Morse and Richards (2002). Analysis revealed three categories of parents: Accepters; Negotiators; Challengers. Themes derived from the data show that the parents' identities are mostly signified by three main characteristics: perception of self; education; perceived power structures. Historical and relational considerations are two overarching strengths that inform how these parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings. The interplay of characteristics and strengths in various combinations contributes to how parents perceive their evolving identities. These perceptions were signified by three main themes: change (the nature of change and the extent of its inevitability); sense of responsibility (for self, partner, parent, child, or community); and experiencing empowerment (the level of which depends on acknowledgement, acceptance and respect for beliefs, goals and understandings).

The findings of this study provide insight into the importance of relationships in the provision of quality ECEC experiences for children, in particular Malaysian-Chinese children in Kuala Lumpur and Sydney. Understanding how parents overcome the disjuncture that they may experience when their children commence ECEC for the first time, through characteristics of identities and historical and relational considerations, facilitates the strengthening of relationships between parents and ECEC settings. Parental empowerment during this state of disjuncture is crucial in ensuring strong, meaningful and respectful partnerships among children, families and communities. Such partnerships are crucial in enabling all stakeholders to optimise opportunities for all children.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any educational institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed:

Date: August 16, 2016

This research received the approval of the Macquarie University Faculty of
Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee (Reference number: 5201100948).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It is 8 o'clock in the morning in suburban Sydney, Australia. Four-year-old Alanna¹ is awake and peeks through a gap in the staircase railing. "Alanna, call Aunty Chrys. Hey, open your mouth. What did Mummy say about calling people? No manners, ah..."

"Mama, I want milk, milk, milk. Oh, with Milo!" While Zara, her mother, asks if she would like to pour it in on her own, a standing stool is placed at the counter. Alanna props herself up, grabs a teaspoon and says, "One, two, oh, so small scoop, take another one, three. Okay now, stir, stir, stir." She then sits at the table to eat her banana and drink her milk.

"Alanna, can you go up and brush your teeth on your own while Mummy change *meimei*²?" "Yes!" she exclaims and proceeds up to the bathroom to brush her teeth. "How do you want me to tie your hair? Pony or coconut?" Zara asks Alanna. "I want two pony!" After Zara finishes, Alanna says that she did not ask for ponytails. Zara responds her by saying that she will get a ponytail now because she asked for it at the beginning. It is as if Zara wants Alanna to learn to be responsible for her own independence and decisions.

Throughout the 10-minute drive to the childcare centre, Alanna sings songs to her sister in the baby seat beside her. As the car pulls up at the side of the road in front of the childcare centre, Alanna let out a shrill scream, "Aaaahhh!!!! Fly!!!!!" "What did Mummy say about screaming?" "But there's a fly!" "You don't have to scream," Zara sternly scolds her, as she unbuckles the safety belt to release Alanna.

"Good morning! Alanna, did you say good morning?" "Good morning!" Zara reminds Alanna to greet her educators. It appears that good manners are emphasised in Alanna's upbringing. She signs Alanna in and stays for a few minutes to have a chat with the other children in the room, as she watches Alanna place her belongings in her locker. After a goodbye kiss and hug, she leaves the centre.

¹ Pseudonyms are used instead of participants' names for anonymity purposes.

² *Meimei* is Chinese for younger sister or a younger female in general.

Halfway across the world in suburban Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Bella, who is nearly 6-years-olds, is up at 6:30 in the morning. She pauses brushing her teeth to wave hello and wish me (the researcher) good morning, bubbles and toothpaste in her mouth. As she changes, her mother helps to tie her hair up. “My hair is so long! So troublesome to tie every morning! I want to cut!” “Hm, who was the one who said that she wants to leave it long?” replies Fei Fei, her mother, making Bella grin cheekily. “Okay, all done. You like that?” Bella smiles at what she looks like in the mirror.

“Remember to do your prostration.” Bella kneels in front of a framed calligraphy and proceeds to do a series of prostrations. Fei Fei turns to me to explain that it is important for her children to do their daily prostrations: “The habit has to be formed from when they are young”.

“Come on, let’s go down for breakfast.” Bella sits at the table, waiting for Fei Fei to serve breakfast. A bowl of sausages is placed in front of her and she quickly picks one up and is about to pop it into her mouth when Fei Fei asks, “Did you ask if other people would like to have some? Where are your manners? You have to ask.” She puts the sausage back down, turns to me and offers me some sausage. Fei Fei also reminds her to offer me a seat.

Bella grabs her bag, puts on her socks and shoes and walks out of the gate to my car. “Young lady, where do you think you are going?” her mother asks her. “But I want to go in her car!” Bella points to me. “No, you’re going in Daddy’s car,” disapproves Fei Fei. Pouting her lips, she enters her father’s car and I tail them to her preschool, which is located within the compound of the local national-type Chinese public school. Her father stands at the gate watching, as she finds her way to her classroom. He leaves only after she turns to wave goodbye at him.

Daily parenting routines, such as preparing a child in the morning for formal early childhood education and care (ECEC), occur in both the above contexts even though the

Malaysian-Chinese families are in different geographical and sociocultural locations. Routines, although seemingly common in the unfolding of our daily lives, are an important feature of family life and serve a significant function in families with young children (Wildenger, McIntyre, Fiese, & Eckert, 2008). In particular, consistent routines have a significant influence on the psychological health and adjustment of family members (Fiese, 2002) and are crucial in developing feelings of predictability, security and trust (Sytsma, Kelley, & Wymer, 2001). These feelings assist in regulating children's behaviour, especially during times of transition in family life, which may be stressful events for all members of the family. Transitions may lead to *disjuncture*, an opportunity for change or learning that occurs when there is a mismatch between one's experiences and one's expectations of how to behave (Jarvis, 2005) and one such transition is the transition from informal to formal ECEC.

While many studies (e.g. Eckert et al., 2008; Ferretti & Bub, 2016; Harper, 2016; M. S. Lam, 2014; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011; Wildenger et al., 2008) have looked into kindergarten transition, few have looked into the transition from informal to formal ECEC. Considering the significance of this transition, of a child attending formal ECEC for the first time, and the impact of a positive transition on all members of the family, it is vital to include parents' understanding of themselves and the multiple roles they play during this transition. The negotiation of multiple identities as parents is viewed as a complex on-going process in contemporary constructions of parenthood, taking into account the interaction between the family and the broader sociocultural location, as well as time, in which it is embedded (T. Lam & Yeoh, 2004; Tobin, 2011; Tuttle, Knudson-Martin, & Kim, 2012). These, in turn, affect the process of prioritising personal, as well as family beliefs, goals and understandings.

The process of determining which beliefs, goals and understandings to prioritise in parenting is further complicated for parents who emigrate outside of their heritage culture. Having been socialised in different societies, it is common for immigrants to bring with them

to their new home existing cultures and traditions, also referred to as *cultural baggage* (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001; Sonderegger, Barrett, & Creed, 2004). They are unique in their beliefs and goals, and in the ways in which they construct their own identities, as themselves and as parents.

The Malaysian notion of parent is likely to contribute significantly to the parent identity of Malaysian-Chinese parents, even more so for immigrants. This understanding of who they are and what is expected of them is questioned, as ECEC in unfamiliar territory is negotiated with their children.

Aims

The problem addressed in my study is how parents, in particular Malaysian-Chinese parents, negotiate multiple identities as their children begin ECEC. My study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of Malaysian-Chinese parents' identities?
2. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings during a likely state of disjuncture?
3. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents perceive their evolving identities?

In addressing Question 1, I aim to identify and examine characteristics or aspects of identities that may include but are not limited to ethnic identity and identity as parent. The multiple identities that define these parents objectively and subjectively may or may not interact with each other, or have any significance.

In addressing Question 2, I aim to search for *goodness* (Dixson et al., 2005). This aim looks at the strengths that lie in how the parents meet and overcome challenges, as well as negotiate their beliefs, goals and understandings during this state of disjuncture. This also

builds understanding of the underlying role that identity plays in helping parents to prioritise some beliefs, goals and understandings over others.

In addressing Question 3, I aim to gain insight into what parents feel and think about their identities, having negotiated a system new to them (in this case, the formal ECEC system in Malaysia or Australia). In addition, this helps to illuminate the impact of the perceptions on the decisions underpinning choice of and access to ECEC settings, and possible differences between parents in Kuala Lumpur and Sydney.

Positioning Myself

I am a Malaysian-Chinese woman in her early 30s residing in Sydney, Australia. I spent the first 20 years of my life in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I am fluent in English, Malay, Cantonese, Hakka and Mandarin. Prior to obtaining tertiary qualifications in ECE, I worked in an ECEC setting in Malaysia. After obtaining my tertiary qualifications in Australia, I continued accumulating work experience in ECEC settings in Malaysia, as well as in Australia.

Due to my Malaysian-Chinese identity, I could be considered to possess insider knowledge (explained in more detail in Chapter 4), as I share multiple identities and profound experiences with my participants. The insider knowledge of a researcher consists of the researcher's knowledge, experiences and perceptions, and can be referred to as presumptions (Yin, 2011) or preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2011). It is quite probable that my presumptions will influence the analysis, which may result in bias. Instead of attempting a complete prevention of bias, I constantly remind myself throughout the study of the influence of presumptions on observations and their interpretations (Fischer, 2009), as freedom from bias is neither possible nor desirable when aiming to understand lived experiences (LeVasseur, 2003).

A method sometimes used by researchers to reduce the potential effects of presumptions related to the research is positioning, or bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2011). A complex process, positioning is when researchers must decide where to “locate themselves on what is in effect a continuum of what is bracketing” (Tufford & Newman, 2011, p. 84). Hence, rather than specifically locating or positioning myself in one location on this continuum, in this study I draw from the concept of bracketing in my attempt to reduce the potential effects of presumptions by constantly reminding myself to be aware of my presumptions. Here, I briefly foreground my identity or identities. A more detailed depiction of where I position myself in the context of this study is included in Chapter 4.

Significance

The significance of my study lies in how it builds on identity and early childhood research pertaining to Malaysian-Chinese communities in two multicultural Commonwealth countries – the relatively young Malaysia and the more mature country of Australia. Although all ethnically Chinese, there is a distinction between the Chinese of Malaysia and the Chinese of other parts of the world. This is a distinction that is co-created by government policies and culturally embedded frameworks that set the construction of self and conception of parenting for Malaysian-Chinese parents from that of other parents in other ethnic Chinese communities (more details are given in Chapter 2).

In particular, my study:

1. Contributes to the existing body of literature available on the Malaysian-Chinese community in Australia. Literature on the Chinese from Malaysia is sparse in comparison to the more accessible literature on the Chinese from China and Vietnam. This is despite Malaysia being the ninth largest contributing country of permanent residents in Australia, the majority of whom are ethnic Chinese

(Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016a). In addition, according to the 2011 Australian Census, Malaysia (9.06%) is the second largest country of origin of the Chinese in Australia after China (42.76% including Hong Kong and Macau), followed by Vietnam (4.78%) (ABS, 2016b). This implies a gap in the literature, as Malaysian-Chinese either may have been “put together” with other Chinese when being identified as a cultural or ethnic group or may have been considered Malay due to their nationality.

2. Contributes to existing body of literature available on identity negotiation, and that involves parents as main participants. Despite the existence of literature deconstructing the ethnic and gender aspects of identity in young children of early childhood age, and in the adults who educate and care for them, as well as for school-aged children and adolescents, in formal contexts, the literature on identity negotiation that is not limited to ethnic and/or gender identity is sparse. This scarcity is even more pronounced in literature with a focus on the voice of parents.
3. Contributes to understanding of a large group of people who make a significant contribution to the Australian economy. With a participation rate of 67.5% in the labour force (Department of Social Services, 2014), many Malaysians in Australia are employed in professional, skilled managerial or trade occupations. Out of all the Malaysia-born immigrants aged 15 years and over, 70.6% have Diploma level or higher qualifications, including Degrees or higher, and are permanent residents who have remained in Australia after completing their studies or training (Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee [JFADT Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee], 2007).

4. Validates the experiences of Malaysian-Chinese parents. The JFADT Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee (2007) reports that, “Malaysia-born people are one of the best groups in Australia for integrating into the community” (p. viii). Interest in and understanding of these parents may be fostered by examining their negotiation of identities to help them adapt to the ECEC systems of both countries.

Thesis Overview

I began this first chapter of my thesis with family routine scenarios, of two families who live in contrasting settings, to exemplify how families in different parts of the world may have similar experiences, including the transition from informal to formal ECEC. The complexity of identity negotiation for parents with children starting formal ECEC for the first time guided the formulation of the overarching theme of my study: investigating how Malaysian-Chinese parents negotiate their identities as their children begin ECEC in Malaysia and Australia. This led to my research questions, aiming to address, during this likely state of disjuncture, the characteristics of parents’ identities, the challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings, and their perceptions of their evolving identities. I then outlined the significance of my study.

In Chapter 2, I provide a literature review, which begins with an introduction to the Malaysian-Chinese population in both Malaysia and Australia. Then, I explain the concept of identity that is used within my study, including cultural and ethnic identities, immigrant identity, and parent identity. I then examine two types of parenting: Baumrind-informed, and Confucian-informed. The chapter concludes with a review of the overarching sociocultural approach of prior research in education, which highlights the importance of context in the notions of identity and parenting.

In Chapter 3, I present the theoretical framework, including the theories that guide my study: the Integrative Communicative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation (Y. Y. Kim, 2005), Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005), and the Typology of parent-child relational orientations (Tuttle et al., 2012). I explain how these theories complement each other and assist in the formation of a more holistic understanding of the process of identity negotiation when parenting.

In Chapter 4, I present the methodology of my study. I reintroduce the research questions, and then justify the qualitative approach taken. I then briefly introduce my participants and outline the recruitment process. Next, I move on to the practicalities of data collection and analysis. Specifically, I explain that my research questions are answered by applying an exemplified case study method, with data drawn from non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews. I outline my approach to analysis, which uses descriptive, topic and analytic coding. I conclude the chapter with the ethical considerations of my study.

In Chapter 5, I present the findings of my study. I begin with an overview of the findings, followed by case studies to exemplify the main categories of parents that emerged from the data analysis.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the main findings of my study in direct relation to the research questions. The themes derived from the findings are highlighted and then discussed in relation to various ECEC stakeholders.

In Chapter 7, I highlight the outcomes of the main findings of my study and their main implications in relation to ECEC. I then outline the limitations of my study, and offer potential directions for future research.

To recapitulate, my study aims to illuminate how Malaysian-Chinese parents negotiate their identities as their children begin ECEC in Malaysia and Australia. Specifically, I seek to

show how they do this, by learning how these parents view themselves, how they meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings, and how they perceive their evolving identities during a likely state of disjuncture; and how this learning assists us in forming a holistic idea of identity negotiation in parents. The following chapter presents a review of the literature that relates to my study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter 1, I introduced the background, aims, significance and outline of this study. I present, in this chapter, past research about the main components of my study, the ethnic Chinese community of Malaysia, identity, and parenting, as they relate to ECEC. As much as possible, I include research based in Malaysia and Australia with participants of Malaysian-Chinese background. However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, literature on Chinese practices and parenting, specifically on the Chinese in Malaysia, is scarce. Therefore, this chapter includes research with Chinese participants from other countries, such as China (including Hong Kong), Singapore, the United States of America (USA) and Canada. In addition, when reviewing literature on immigrants, I include research based not only in Malaysia and Australia, with participants of non-Chinese backgrounds, such as Indians, Koreans, Mexicans and Vietnamese, to gain more insight into possible similarities and differences among diverse immigrant groups.

I begin this chapter by introducing the Chinese people of Malaysia because the Malaysian notion of parent is likely to have contributed significantly to the parent identity of Malaysian-Chinese immigrants and is questioned as ECEC in Australia is negotiated for their children. This questioning of their existing parenting framework may lead to them experiencing disjuncture, a state of learning that occurs when there is no harmony between one's experiences and one's expectations of how to behave (Jarvis, 2005). To better understand the cultural baggage of these Malaysian-Chinese parents, it is crucial to understand them in the Malaysian context.

The Ethnic Chinese of Malaysia

Initial Chinese Settlement in Malaya. Initially the Chinese groups that arrived in Malaysia, then Malaya, settled in waves. According to Wang (2011), there were three main

waves and there was variation in these waves not only chronologically but also geographical, with immigrants coming at different times from different parts of China. The first wave of Chinese settlers consisted of single men who arrived for business and work during the era of the Malacca Sultanate (1400-1511) (B. Lin, Jin, & Information Office of the People's Government of Fujian Province, 2005). Up to the 16th century, most of the men returned to China, while those who remained intermarried and integrated to the local cultures and societies (Wang, 2011).

The second wave of Chinese settlers to arrive in Malaya consisted of traders who traded with the Europeans merchants and colonisers. As the society in Malaya became increasingly complex, integration decreased due to the encouraged preservation of Chinese communities by the European merchants, particularly by the Dutch (Wang, 2011). As the Dutch were attempting to trade with China, they wanted the assistance of the Chinese settlers. This resulted in the separation of different communities in a much more distinctive way, whereby the Chinese were encouraged to remain Chinese, and to be the middlemen between the Dutch and the native peoples of Southeast Asia, the Chinese merchants and the officials of the southern coastal areas of China (S. K. Lee, 2011; Wang, 2011). The preservation of Chinese communities during this time, in addition to the intermarriages with the locals of the first wave of Chinese settlers, produced descendants who are now generally known as the Peranakan, or the Straits Chinese (S. K. Lee, 2011). Due to intermarriages that were predominantly between a Chinese and a Malay person, the Straits Chinese community retained many Chinese traditions and rituals, such as religion, name and societal structure, while they also partially integrated the Malay culture into their own, in terms of language, dress and cuisine (S. K. Lee, 2011).

Attracted by the prospect of work in the tin mines, rubber plantations or the possibility of opening up new farmlands, there then followed a third wave of Chinese settlers when the

British-led Industrial Revolution brought labour from China and India in large numbers for all their territories around the world, including Malaya (Wang, 2011). In addition, this third wave of Chinese settlers was responsible for establishing the many Chinese-medium schools in Malaya due to concerns regarding their children losing their language, identity and culture (Kua, 2008; Lee, 2012).

However, due to the rise of nationalism in China, these Chinese settlers faced the problem of identity issues. Along with this concern of Chinese nationalism, there was also the concern of maintaining their identity as Chinese communities in Malaya, as well as their identity as members of their new nation of Malaya (Wang, 2011). Wang (2011) distinguished three types of political leanings within the Chinese community: at one end were those who underlined their loyalty towards China as a nation; at the other end were those who were eager to help build the new Malayan or Malaysian nation; while members of the third group were not prepared to declare for one side or the other. Put simply, the group who happened to be loyal to the new nation but still saw themselves as an ethnically distinct group of Chinese were the first generation of what is known today as the Malaysian-Chinese in Malaysia.

Today's Malaysian-Chinese community in Malaysia. According to the 2010 Malaysian Census, 91.8% of the total population in Malaysia were Malaysian citizens, of which 24.65% were Chinese (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). While having managed to preserve a distinct identity and culture in Malaysia (Freedman, 2001), the Malaysian-Chinese community are generally differentiated according to ancestral origin (e.g. T. Lam & Yeoh, 2004; Tan, 2005) and literacy (e.g. K. H. Lee, 2011; Sim, 2012). As Malaysia consists of East Malaysia (also known as Malaysian Borneo) and West Malaysia (also known as Peninsular Malaysia), there is also a distinction between the Chinese communities in the East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah and the Chinese communities in West Malaysia (e.g. H. K. Chua, 2011; Wong, 2011).

Ancestral origin. The ancestral origin of particular Chinese groups is normally identifiable by their dialect spoken (e.g. Mak & Him, 1992; Tan, 2005) and by their cuisine (e.g. Tan, 2011). The latest records identify 11 Chinese dialect groups in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2003, as cited by Tan, 2005). The largest Chinese group by ancestral origin is the Hokkien group. Speakers of the Hokkien dialect, these earliest Chinese settlers were from the southern regions of the Fujian province (Tan, 2005; Yow, 2006) and settled primarily in the port states of Penang and Malacca in West Malaysia (Mak & Him, 1992; Tan, 2005), and the cities of Kuching and Sibu in the state of Sarawak in East Malaysia (Yow, 2006). Hokkien food is traditionally Fujian cuisine. It is differentiated by its focus on retaining the original flavours of the main ingredients and an emphasis on utilising broths and soups (E. N. Anderson, 1988; L. N. Anderson & Anderson, 1972; Simoons, 1991; Tan, 2001). Notable dishes of the Hokkien cuisine include *bak kut teh*³ and *popiah*, a type of fresh spring roll (Simoons, 1991; Tan, 2011).

The Hokkien group is followed in number by the Hakka group (Tan, 2005). These speakers of the Hakka dialect were from the areas of Guangdong and Western Fujian (Tan, 2005), who settled in the states of Perak and Negeri Sembilan in West Malaysia, and in East Malaysia (Wong, 2011; Yow, 2006). They form the majority of the Chinese community in the East Malaysian state of Sabah, where many were initially involved in agriculture (Sim, 2012; Tan, 2005). Compared to Hokkien and Cantonese cuisines, Hakka cuisine is relatively simple and pragmatic, with little garnishing or flavouring (E. N. Anderson, 1988; Simoons, 1991).

³ Originally developed in Malaya by Hokkien immigrants, *bak kut teh* translates literally into meat bone tea and is a popular dish of pork ribs and pork belly braised in a broth of herbs and spices (i.e. star anise, cinnamon, clove, angelica root, fennel seed and garlic) served in a claypot (Tan, 2011).

Notable dishes of the Hakka cuisine include salt-baked chicken (E. N. Anderson, 1988; S. C. H. Cheung, 2004) and *yong tau foo*⁴ (E. N. Anderson, 1988; Tan, 2001).

The third largest Chinese group by ancestral origin is the Cantonese group (Tan, 2005). These speakers of the Cantonese dialect were from the regions around Guangzhou (Tan, 2005; Yow, 2006), and settled primarily in the tin mine towns of Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh in the state of Perak, Seremban in the state of Negeri Sembilan (Tan, 2005), and Sandakan in the East Malaysian state of Sarawak (Yow, 2006). Cantonese cuisine is the most popular type of Chinese food worldwide due to the widespread immigration of Chinese from the Guangdong province (Tan, 2001). Cantonese cuisine is differentiated by its emphasis on freshness, speed and convenience, with stir-frying as their most widely used cooking technique (E. N. Anderson & Andersson, 1969; Simoons, 1991). Notable dishes of the Cantonese cuisine include sweet and sour fish (E. N. Anderson, 1988) and dim sum (E. N. Anderson, 1988; Simoons, 1991).

The other of the 11 identified Chinese dialect groups are Teochew, Hokchiu, Hainanese, Kwongsai, Henghua, Hokchia, Wu and Mandarin, a northern Chinese dialect (Tan, 2005). Dialects are considered important for the older generation, such as grandparents who use dialects to communicate with their grandchildren, who are often more likely to be fluent in English and Mandarin (Yow, 2006). Yow (2006) also notes that the practice and maintenance of dialects inevitably ceases with gradually declining usage. In addition to ancestral dialect, it is common for a Chinese person from a different part of the country to learn the local regional dialect in the Malaysian region in which they are settled (Yow, 2006). For example, a Chinese person of Cantonese ancestry who is from Kuala Lumpur, where Cantonese is dominant among Chinese, may learn the Hokkien dialect when living in

⁴ *Yong tau foo* translates literally into stuffed bean curd. Traditionally, cubes of bean curd are stuffed with pork mince or fish paste and are either deep-fried or braised. Variations include stuffed vegetables such as chilli, eggplant and okra (E. N. Anderson, 1988; Tan, 2001).

Hokkien-dominated Penang and vice versa. However, Mandarin is presently the unifying Chinese dialect for the overall Chinese community in Malaysia and is used as the official language of instruction in all Chinese schools in Malaysia (Kua, 1999; Tan, 2005; Yow, 2006).

Literacy. In addition to ancestral origin, the Chinese community in Malaysia today can also be differentiated according to literacy categories (K. H. Lee, 2011; Sim, 2012).

According to Sim (2012), three groups of Chinese can be clearly identified, in particular: the Chinese-literate (G1), the non-Chinese literate (G2), and the in-betweens (G3) (p. 10).

G1 is the largest group within the Malaysian-Chinese community, as they constitute 90% of the total Chinese community in Malaysia (Kua, 2008; K. H. Lee, 2011; Sim, 2012). G1 identifies completely with the traditions of ethnic Chinese culture, language and expression, and populate both urban and rural settings of West and East Malaysia. The Chinese language is an identity marker for G1, and this is partly attributed to the fact that all Chinese-literate individuals read the same script even though there are many dialects, for dialects take place through spoken language only (Sim, 2012; Yow, 2006). The G1 Chinese community stands on three pillars of significance: the Chinese associations, Chinese education, and the Chinese press (Sim, 2012). The first pillar, Chinese associations, is made up of over 7,000 Chinese guilds and associations, and is an accumulation of societies, trade associations and clans that meet specific needs and provide a sense of belonging (Sim, 2012).

The second pillar, Chinese education, began with small Chinese schools originally intended for the Chinese immigrant community. These immigrants attached great importance to their schools as preservers of Chinese linguistic and cultural heritage. Traditional Chinese education was also expected to provide a solid grounding in moral, cultural and economic values (Sim, 2012). The teaching of Mandarin is also viewed as extremely important because G1 sees it as central to their Chinese identity, rather than just another language (K. H. Lee,

2011; Sim, 2012). The Chinese school is also seen as a provider of quality education and values, and this is reflected in the 95% of Chinese parents who enrol their children in the 1,293 national-type Chinese primary schools, 61 independent Chinese schools, 78 national-type Chinese secondary schools, and three privately-funded, not-for-profit institutes of higher learning (Kua, 2008; Sim, 2012). Many of these students go on to Taiwan or China to complete their tertiary education (K. H. Lee, 2011; Sim, 2012; Tan, 2005). While the national-type Chinese schools adhere to the national syllabus and conduct lessons in Mandarin and English, the medium of instruction in the independent Chinese schools is solely Mandarin (Kua, 1999; K. H. Lee, 2011; Yow, 2006). The third pillar, Chinese media, is often underestimated despite its active role in social and cultural affairs, serving the various Chinese communities and promoting Chinese cultural heritage. Explained simply, G1 are Chinese-educated and are deeply rooted in traditional Chinese values, traditions and beliefs. In comparison to G2 and G3, G1 is usually considered the mainstream of Malaysian Chinese society (H. K. Chua, 2011).

G2 is a smaller group, which is not Chinese-educated and is predominantly middle-class and urban (Sim, 2012). Its primary language is English and for the G2 within the Straits Chinese community, Malay. The Chinese generation who experienced the English stream of education are made up more of the older generation (Sim, 2012). They were largely educated in English-medium missionary schools, as it was believed that an English education would lead to better employment opportunities in the colonial civil service and British firms (Lee, 2012). While G2 makes up only 10% of the Chinese community, they remain distinct because of their concentration in urban centres, with many in influential positions and professions (Sim, 2012) and who are still active in political parties, social clubs and non-government organisations (K. H. Lee, 2011). For them, English remains important because the language is used in the business and corporate sectors. Furthermore, the children of this generation, while

having gone through national-type schools, are more familiar and at ease with Malay, because English was replaced by Malay as the medium of instruction in national-type schools in 1976. Many in G2 proceed to universities overseas in countries such Australia, New Zealand or the USA (Tan, 2005) or to local English-language university-colleges, and continue to fill the ranks of the depleting English-education group. However, while many may be able to speak their family dialect, most will not be able to read Chinese (Sim, 2012; Tan, 2005).

G3 has a growing number of Malaysian-Chinese. G3 individuals are originally from one of the other two groups, but through social and economic mobility have come to overlap both G1 and G2. For example, a growing number of English-speaking parents also enrol their children in national-type Chinese schools. The children may then go on to national-type schools where the medium of instruction is in Malay, or to national-type Chinese schools, where they would also learn both Malay and English. This results in G3 members becoming trilingual, further promoting their social mobility (Sim, 2012), possibly due to better career advancement and life opportunities (Lee, 2012). Many of these children further their studies in local private colleges or overseas universities where English is the medium of instruction (K. H. Lee, 2011).

The Malaysian-Chinese, regardless of literacy group, can also switch to speaking Malaysian-English, or *Manglish*, a colloquial variety of English with borrowings from the Malay, Chinese and Indian languages (Abdullah, Subramaniam, Jaafar, & Elangkovar, 2013). Manglish is spoken by all Malaysians, regardless of ethnicity as a form of affiliation (Preshous, 2001; Rajadurai, 2007; Young, 2008).

East Malaysia. East Malaysia is made up of the states of Sarawak and Sabah. Although geographically larger and richer in natural resources (e.g. oil and gas), East Malaysia is less populated and less developed than West Malaysia (Krimi, Yusop, & Hook, 2010; Marshall & Taylor, 2005). According to the 2010 Malaysian Census, 23.4% of the

Sarawak population identified as Chinese, 12.8% in Sabah (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). The socio-political landscapes in East Malaysia differ greatly from those in West Malaysia. In Sarawak, this difference began from initial Chinese settlers of Hakka ancestry who established a settlement in the mid-18th century due to the pioneering gold mining (H. K. Chua, 2011; Sim, 2012). However, it was not until the 20th century that the first large Chinese settlement was established in Sibu, which was known as the new Fuzhou because the immigrants were mainly brought in from the Fuzhou Province in China to open up land for commercial agriculture (Tan, 2005). Later, many came to Sarawak as wage-earning workers, to venture into the mining industry or for other general business opportunities (Sim, 2012). Presently in this state, the largest group by ancestral origin is the Hakka, followed by the Hokkien and Teochew groups (H. K. Chua, 2011).

Sarawak is the largest state in the Federation of Malaysia (H. K. Chua, 2011) and, being geographically apart from West Malaysia, its people have developed a greater sense of state (Sim, 2012). The Chinese community in Sarawak may not necessarily identify fully with the Chinese community in West Malaysia. However, for clustering purposes, they are grouped as G1 due to their levels of Chinese literacy and consumption of Chinese media (Sim, 2012). As such, H. K. Chua (2011) proposes that the Chinese community in Sarawak be considered a part of the mainstream Malaysian-Chinese society. With increased travel between West and East Malaysia for leisure, education and career purposes, there is also increased interaction between the Chinese from both parts of the country (H. K. Chua, 2011).

In Sabah, the Chinese community remains the largest non-indigenous group, with the predominant groups by ancestral origin being Hakka followed by Cantonese and Hokkien (Sim, 2012). The arrival of Chinese settlers in Sabah began in the 18th century, when workers were needed in paddy fields and in various plantations including those of tobacco, maize, coconut, coffee, tea, cocoa and pepper. When rubber became an important commercial crop in

the early 20th century, more Chinese labourers were brought in to work in the plantations. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a rapid growth in the Chinese population due to voluntary migration. The rapid development of timber and other industries bolstered the growth of towns such as Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan and Tawau, where most of today's Sabah Chinese community live (Sim, 2012). Also contributing to this growth was the gradual relocation of Chinese communities, most apparent among the Hakka group, from rural to more urban areas, contributed to by a shift from agriculture-based to more white-collar occupations due to modernisation (Wong, 2011). Similar to the Chinese community in Sarawak, the Chinese community in Sabah also travel to West Malaysia for leisure, education and career purposes. Many who complete their tertiary education in West Malaysia realise the limited work opportunities in their home state and remain in West Malaysia or move abroad for employment (Wong, 2011).

The movement of the Chinese community in Malaysia to other countries is not limited to employment reasons but also for education. Australia is one of the most popular Western-culture destinations due to its geographical proximity (Khoo & Mak, 2003). Following the above outline of the Malaysian-Chinese community in Malaysia, I will now present an outline of the Malaysian Chinese in Australia, in the following section.

The Malaysian-Chinese in Australia

The Early Malaysian-Chinese Immigrants in Australia. There is a long history of migration between Malaysia and Australia. Until the 1970s, most of the Malaysian-born immigrants in Australia were the children of English and other European workers who were or had been working in the then Malaya. The implementation of the White Australia Policy effectively excluded non-Europeans from Australia, resulting in there being only a small population of non-English or European Malaysia-born immigrants (Price, 1974). However,

when Malaya gained independence from the British, there was an increase in Malaysian-born immigrants, including many with English origins (Hugo, 2011; Price, 1974).

The Colombo Plan also contributed to this increase, as it promoted Australia as an education destination to Malaysian students (H. D. M.-h. Chan, 2005; Hugo, 2011; Price, 1974). This promotion of Australia as an education destination may have contributed to the current high regard by Malaysians for Australian expertise in education and training (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT], n.d.). Many of these students stayed on in Australia after completing their studies (Museum Victoria Australia, n.d.) due to employment opportunities or due to marrying Australians (Hugo, 2011). The Colombo Plan, instigated in 1950 by the Australian government, was an early part of the gradual relaxing of the White Australia Policy, which took place in several steps from the post-war period to the mass migration of the 1970s. When the White Australia Policy was entirely abolished in 1973, Australia became a favourable destination for Malaysia-born immigrants again, largely the Malaysian-Chinese (Crissman, 1991; Museum Victoria Australia, n.d.). This resulted in an increase in the Malaysian-born immigrant population in the 1970s, and by 1981, the population effectively became the third largest group born in Asia in Australia, after the groups born in India and Vietnam (Hugo, 2011). This population grew to form today's Malaysian-born immigrant population in Australia.

Today's Malaysian-Chinese Immigrants in Australia. Australia has the second largest overseas Malaysian community after Singapore (Hugo, 2011). The most recent available data records Malaysians as the ninth largest overseas-born group in Australia (ABS, 2016a). In one of the few reports specifically addressing cultural diversity and practice of Australians of Chinese background, Denzin and Lincoln (2012) found that the majority of Malaysians were Permanent Residents (PRs) and were the only immigrant Chinese group to call themselves Australian. In the 2011 Australian Census (ABS, 2016a), 62.1% of the

Malaysian population in Australia reported that that they were of Chinese ancestry, followed by 13.2% Malay, 5.8% Indian, 4.2% English and 14.7% other ancestries. There are several factors contributing to the strong sense of connection to Australia felt by Malaysian-Chinese immigrants in general, including education, employment and quality of life. They display distinct characteristics that differentiate them from the Chinese immigrants from other countries, in terms of multilingual ability, as well as cultural beliefs and practices. In their unique ways, they have maintained their version of Chineseness (explained in more detail later in this chapter) over time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Yao, 2009).

Education, employment and quality of life. A generally high regard for Australian expertise in education and training in Malaysia (DFAT, n.d.) and comparatively low regard for the credibility of public tertiary education in Malaysia (Sin, 2006) may be a reason for high levels of tertiary education institution enrolments in Australia by Malaysians. Not only has this high regard attracted Malaysians to Australia, it has also made undertaking Australian courses in Malaysia more likely. This is possible through either university twinning arrangements or attending one of the three Australian universities with campuses in Malaysia, namely Monash University, Curtin University and Swinburne University of Technology (Ziguras & Law, 2006).

In Australia, Malaysia ranked as the third highest country of origin in 2015 of international students in tertiary education institutions (DFAT, n.d.). Not only do international students contribute to the development of the Australian economy, they also boost research and teaching activities at tertiary education institutions, in turn expanding Australia's knowledge base and intellectual capital (Ziguras & Law, 2006).

A frequently reported reason for the high number of Malaysian international students in Australia is the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), an intervention led by the Malaysian government intending to create a more equitable distribution of wealth among

the ethnic groups in Malaysia (Hugo, 2011). However, a main element of this policy is its favouring of *bumiputras*⁵ (comprising ethnic Malays and other indigenous Malay groups) in terms of education (e.g. K. H. Lee, 2011; Sin, 2006), employment, political power and wealth (e.g. Hugo, 2011; Joseph, 2005; T. Lam & Yeoh, 2004). Parents involved in the Hewitt and Maloney (2000) study reported feeling that their children's educational opportunities were restricted by the Malaysian government's preferential education policies, referring to the discrimination at the tertiary education level whereby Malay enrolments exceeded enrolments of other ethnic groups, propelling large numbers of Malaysian-Chinese school-leavers to attend universities overseas (Hugo, 2011; K. H. Lee, 2011).

This has resulted in the apparent domination of non-*bumiputra* Malaysians in Australia, especially ethnic Chinese Malaysians who are highly educated, becoming highly skilled and located within higher income groups (H. D. M.-h. Chan, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Hugo, 2011; Sin, 2006; Ziguras & Law, 2006). This implies that many of the Malaysian international students in Australia become PRs upon completion of their tertiary studies (Hugo, 2011), as they stay on permanently in Australia due to employment opportunities. Employment opportunities may reflect the Australian government's efforts to retain international students as highly-skilled workers, to capitalise on the benefits of their economic potential (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, n.d.; Ziguras & Law, 2006). Similar skills-based migration programmes also exist in other developed countries, such as France, New Zealand, and the USA (Ziguras & Law, 2006).

Residing in Australia permanently may be a possible way of deflecting the NEP, as there are reports of improved quality of life due to a more relaxed lifestyle and more freedom for individual expression (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). Improved prospects of education,

⁵ In Malaysia, *Bumiputra*, or "sons of the soil" in Malay, is a Sanskrit-derived term that generally refers to members of the ethnic Malay and Indigenous groups.

employment and quality of life were also cited as motivating factors for those Malaysian immigrants who permanently relocate to Australia directly from Malaysia without experiencing the Australian tertiary education system (e.g. Joseph, 2013). However, Joseph's (2013) findings on these factors were from a study that involved only women participants.

Multilingual ability, and cultural beliefs and practices. The apparent domination of non-*bumiputra* Malaysians in Australia is also reflected in the languages spoken at home, whereby 24.0% of the Malaysian population in Australia speak Mandarin or Cantonese (23.1%) at home, while only 8.1% speak Malay, as reported by the 2011 Australian Census (ABS, 2016a). The Census also reports that 92.6% of the Malaysians who speak a language other than English at home speak English very well or well, a pattern that has continued from their country of origin, as on average Malaysian-Chinese immigrants speak three languages (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2012), suggesting that they may originally be part of the G3 Chinese group in Malaysia (K. H. Lee, 2011; Sim, 2012). H. D. M.-h. Chan (2005) in his study, also found this high level of English proficiency in the Chinese immigrants from Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong and attributes this proficiency to the English language education available in those countries (H. D. M.-h. Chan, 2005, p. 639).

Prior to H. D. M.-h. Chan (2005), Crissman (1991) also observed similar anglophone and Westernised characteristics of the largely professional Chinese immigrants from Malaysia and Singapore. However, although they outwardly demonstrate Westernised characteristics, this group of immigrants still attempts to retain parts of their cultural beliefs due to the importance they attach to these beliefs. They continue to observe culturally Chinese festivals and celebrations, consume Chinese entertainment and diet, maintain Chinese dialects, and practice respect for elders and filial piety (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). Like the Chinese from other countries, they have continued to shape “their own destinies and [take] an active part in the host society and economy – including in Australia” (Benton, 2007, p. 72).

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, the Malaysian-Chinese identity is questioned when in an unfamiliar place, such as Australia. To understand the disjuncture experienced by Malaysian-Chinese parents in Australia, there is a necessity to first grasp the concept of identity that is used within my study, due to the multiple identity-related considerations involved in what a Malaysian-Chinese parent should be in Australia. In the next section of this chapter, I present a discussion of literature on identity.

Identity

Identity is a reflection of ourselves: it is who we think we are and what others perceive us to be. There are two contesting schools of identity, whereby some perceive identity to be a construct that is fixed and constant through time (e.g. A. B. Anderson, 2001; Giese, 1995), while others describe it as something that is flexible and responsive to context, containing both fixed and malleable constructs (e.g. A. B. Anderson, 2001; Bhabha, 1994). This latter view of identity is one that promotes constant negotiation of boundaries and meanings (Luke & Luke, 1999). According to Rutherford (1990), identity is the conjuncture of the past with the current social, cultural and economic relations, as well as traces of what it is to become. My study is situated within the notion of identity being a responsive *production* that is an ever-occurring process constituted within representation (Hall, 1990). In the following, I discuss literature relating to cultural and ethnic, immigrant and parent identities.

Cultural and Ethnic Identities. Culture is not merely a reproduction of traditions and ways of life, as culture also flexibly incorporates new practices and values according to the ecology in which it is situated (Vasta, 1993). In other words, context and the reproduction of culture are inextricably connected. Representing *webs of significance*, or a series of symbolic and mythic interpretations in daily lives, Geertz (1973) highlights the process of navigation and interpretation involved in studying culture. Indeed, this view is echoed by Hall (1990),

who explains that “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within” (p. 225), implying a sense of navigation either externally or internally motivated. Morris (1994) further outlines that there are different roles and responsibilities attached to these different positionings. Currently, there is increased understanding that culture is not a *residual* factor in life, a factor only when there are no other explanations (Lachman, 1997). This current view reflects a conceptualisation of culture as representing an “intimate association between... mentality and... practice” (Shweder et al., 2006, p. 872).

The embeddedness of culture in everyday practices that are constantly restructured within gendered, political and historical contexts implies that cultural identity constantly negotiates boundaries. According to Chase (2006), cultural identity functions as a stable point of reference, as it consists of shared culture or historically shared cultural codes that transmit information about how or when to do something. Similarly, Hall (1990) refers to cultural identity as points of identification. This view of cultural identity accords it flexibility, as reference points are for reference and do not necessarily dictate emerging practices or values. Cultural identity provides a fixed point of reference for other, more surface identities (Hall, 1990), identities that are temporarily adopted for specific reasons. Therefore, one understanding of culture can be as the fixed foundational aspects of self, while another understanding of culture can be as the *being* and *becoming* aspects of self (e.g. Hall, 1990; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Vasta, 1993).

Whereas culture may be seen to intimately shape attitudes and practices from within a social group, ethnicity provides a more overt source of identification that is sometimes imposed by external forces (e.g. Sonderegger et al., 2004). For example, a common cultural or ethnic marker is language (e.g. Ang, 2005; Phinney et al., 2001; Voon & Pearson, 2011), and

the assumption that a Chinese-looking person must have the ability to speak a Chinese language of some variety (Ang, 2005).

The concept of ethnicity is defined in many different ways across disciplines, but in Australia, for example, ethnicity is also often used in reference to non-English speaking background immigrants and associated with membership of a minority or non-mainstream cultural group (e.g. Vasta, 1993). In cases whereby identity is wrongfully ascribed, feelings of disempowerment and humiliation can be generated, as found by Ang (2005) in some women from Asian backgrounds in particular community settings.

Put simply, people of the same ethnicity, or shared heritage, tend to identify with one another or are identified by others on the basis of a boundary that distinguishes them from other groups (Ang, 2005; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Vasta, 1993). This boundary may take any of a number of forms, cultural, linguistic or religious. This boundary is often flexible rather than fixed, because it is constantly renegotiated: in Ang's (2005) words, the renegotiation is according to "how I see others, how others see me and how I see others see me" (p. 394).

As a definition in relation to dominant national identity, ethnicity is used as "a self-defined construct of being an immigrant, having an immigrant background, or sharing minority languages, cultural traditions and histories" (Vasta, 1993, p. 210). For children of immigrant parents, ethnic group membership accords the individual an ethnic identity, a sense of belonging and group pride, and a set of prescribed norms, values and social behaviours. While there is a degree of debate about how ethnic identity develops, there is wide consensus, within the literature and across disciplines, that attaining a positive sense of identity is important for healthy all-round development. For example, Verkuyten and Thijs (2006) found, in their study involving adolescents, that a positive sense of ethnic self-esteem promotes global self-worth. Ethnic affirmation promotes a sense of group pride that helps form part of the group members' identities (Phinney et al., 2001). However, group

identification and a positive sense of ethnic identity are more achievable with consistent guidance of important socialising agents such as parents, who expose children and group members to specific cultural influences (Downie et al., 2007).

My study adopts the view of identity, culture and ethnicity as representing the boundaries of Malaysian-Chinese parents' beliefs, goals and understandings, which that are constantly being renegotiated during a likely state of disjuncture. This likely state of disjuncture is further explicated by their immigrant positionings in society.

Immigrant Identity. As previously outlined, identities are always grasped and understood within particular sociocultural contexts. These identities may change when there is movement from one context to another due to experiencing a likely state of disjuncture. However, it has been argued that migration is not merely a simple case of movement from one sociocultural, political and historical system to another, in this case, the movement of Malaysian-Chinese parents from Malaysia to Australia. More so, it involves repositioning identities and experiences, as parents' cultural baggage may not align with emerging contexts (Joseph, 2013). Cultural baggage, or the cultural identities that immigrants bring with them to the new home countries, assist in mapping future decisions regarding identity (Hall, 1990). As cultural identity can function as a reference point for practices and values, the Malaysian identities can inform the negotiation and repositioning of identities in Australia. For example, a group of Malaysian women referred to their existing understandings of Malaysian and Australian cultures in negotiating their identities as immigrants in Australia (Joseph, 2013). They realised a need to balance between adapting and resisting existing and new positionings of their identities. Referring to their work experiences, they felt that their pre-migration education and work experiences had somewhat assisted them in adapting to their Australian work contexts. This may have promoted the feeling of being a global citizen, as they found

that they could flexibly negotiate particular identities and experiences to reposition themselves within different settings.

The flexible negotiation of particular identities and experiences reflects the notion of *selective reconfiguration*, a notion Meerwald (2001) used to describe her identity and her Chineseness. Like a continual *work-in-progress* (Meerwald, 2001; Wickberg, 2007), she posits that selective reconfiguration assists her in understanding her identity as a “Chinese woman living in Australia, while ‘keeping intact her shifting and multiple [identities] and integrity’” (Meerwald, 2001, p. 397), and that she “can be Australian, Chinese, Malaysian all at once, without having to be fixed to any particular space” (Meerwald, 2001, p. 387). According to Ang (1998), Chineseness is not a category with a fixed content. Instead, with migration of Chinese people to many Western contexts (e.g. Chao, 2001; Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Crissman, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Voon & Pearson, 2011), Chineseness has become a signifier that is open and undefined, with meanings that are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated according to context (Ang, 1998).

The notion of Chineseness not being a category with a fixed content, with meanings that are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated according to context (Ang, 1998), appears to be reflected by the persistent cultural maintenance of the Chinese language by Chinese people around the world, which has taken different forms and various purposes. Language is a contributor to cultural and ethnic identities and is commonly used by immigrants of different ethnicities around the world as a cultural maintenance tool (e.g. Pattnaik, 2005; Phinney et al., 2001; Voon & Pearson, 2011). Immigrant parents have been reported to go to great lengths to support their children in acquiring the mother tongue of at least one of their parents, citing communication benefits, especially with members of the extended family (e.g. grandparents) (e.g. Luke, 2003). Shared literacy conventions (Diaz & Harvey, 2007) assist in developing

ethnic affirmation, a sense of belonging, and a positive sense of identity, as there is understanding among family members.

An overall positive sense of identity also builds on parents' beliefs, goals and understandings, as validation and respect for the views and approaches of parents towards the negotiation of preferred beliefs, goals and practices are likely to facilitate understandings that holistically inform the ECEC of their children (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008). The decisions that underpin the choice of and access to ECEC settings are a set of what parents deem to be the right and best life decisions for their families. Literature relating to parenting in Chinese culture highlights the roles of a good parent, which include modelling, guiding and imparting experiences and knowledge to ensure children have a good upbringing (e.g. Chao, 1994; Downie et al., 2007; Leung, 1996; Luo, Tamis-LeMonda, & Song, 2013; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Wu, 1996). However, as relocation of the permanent kind can confuse parents' identities and identification (Ang, 2005), Malaysian-Chinese parents may overcome the feeling of disjuncture in their new home by learning the conventions and expectations of the new environment (Jarvis, 2005). For some of the parents in my study, one way may be to learn an Australian way of parenting.

The following sections look at the Malaysian and Australian governments' definitions of parent and parenting roles, by scrutinising key policy documents that inform the implementation of ECEC in both countries. The practices in both countries are then contrasted and discussed within key parenting frameworks that imply particular cultural leanings in both systems.

Parent Identities.

The State's concept of parent: Australia. The Australian Government recognises the importance of increasing the focus on the early years, to ensure the well-being of children throughout their lives and to lift the productivity of the nation as a whole. This recognition is

in line with research that advocates for early investment to potentially increase human capital and decrease inequality later in life (e.g. Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Bauchmüller, Gørtz, & Rasmussen, 2014). Therefore, with a focus on all aspects of children's development from before birth to age eight, an overarching national strategy endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments, among other agendas, is to improve outcomes for parents, including "improved parenting skills and confidence, and greater capacity to participate in the community and the workforce" (DEEWR, 2009b, p. 2). Parents are more likely to participate in the community and the workforce when there is access to high quality ECEC settings that they deem to reflect their beliefs, goals and understandings. Achievement of the strategy's goals consists of the implementation of a National Quality Standard (NQS), including the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009a).

The EYLF is the curriculum document that forms the framework for the ECEC in Australia. The Framework places emphasis on the relationship between the early childhood educators and the families. The notion of educators working in partnership with parents is consistently highlighted throughout the document, in recognition of the family as children's "first and most influential educators" (DEEWR, 2009a, pp. 5, 7, 12). This is reflected in its five principles that guide the Framework in achieving progress towards the Learning Outcomes (DEEWR, 2009a, pp. 12-13), comprising the principles of: secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships; partnerships; high expectations and equity; respect for diversity; and ongoing learning and reflective practice.

According to the Framework, families are actively encouraged to help make learning experiences meaningful by partaking in curriculum decisions, as it is also important to understand their expectations and attitudes. As in many Western contexts, the learning experiences that take place in Australian ECEC settings are through play (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Whitebread, 2012). Some of the ways families help

educators to promote meaningful learning are by sharing community and family protocols (DEEWR, 2009a, p. 29), aspects of their culture and spiritual lives (p. 31), familiar games and physical activities in play, health and hygiene routines and schedules (p. 32), linguistic heritage (p. 40), as well as family and community texts and stories (p. 41). The contexts of family and culture are viewed as central to children's sense of being and belonging, and to lifelong learning (DEEWR, 2009a). Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge the coexistence of home and host cultures, especially for parents from immigrant backgrounds (Chao, 2000, 2001; Cline, 2015; De Gioia, 2009, 2013), whose cultural baggage may include different and relatively dichotomised notions of education and care (e.g. Chiam, 2008; Sims, 2014; Van Laere, Peeters, & Vandenbroeck, 2012). Acknowledging parents' cultural background reiterates the importance of cultural baggage in assisting parents to map future decisions regarding identity (Hall, 1990). Understanding parents' cultural baggage and context of family promotes their cultural competence, in turn assisting in the development of the transformation of self (Vasta, 1993).

The EYLF is supported by the Australian Government's implementation of the NQS (DEEWR, 2009b), in its aim to raise quality and drive continuous improvement in ECEC and school-age care. The NQS is made up of seven quality areas considered crucial in the provision of quality ECEC and school-age care. One of these quality areas calls for collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

Underlying these seven quality areas of the NQS are six principles, which inform the delivery of quality ECEC. The delivery of quality ECEC is crucial in producing positive long-term effects of early investments (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Bauchmüller et al., 2014). One of these principles denotes parents and families as children's "primary nurturers and teachers" (DEEWR, 2009b, p. 10), a definition mirrored by the EYLF. Also similar to the EYLF, the NQS encourages the provision of opportunities for families to influence and shape the setting,

through reviewing the setting of policies and contributing to setting decisions. Parenting roles are supported, along with respecting their values and beliefs about child-rearing. Families are encouraged to share in the decision-making about their children's learning and well-being. These are all reflected in how settings are required to have a policy about families' participation in the setting, which incorporates a variety of opportunities for family participation. Thus, a parent is considered to be a respected partner in the knowledge of the children's development.

The view of parents as partners working in collaboration with early childhood educators provides the opportunity for both parties (parent and educator) to feel empowered to contribute meaningfully to the children's upbringing (De Gioia, 2009, 2013). The feeling of empowerment refers to "a concept of inclusion and normalisation that draws upon the importance attached to autonomy and self-determination in liberalism" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 149). Strong partnerships that are empowering are enabled by meaningful communication that promotes agency, a sense of belonging, and trust that works both ways (parents trusting educators, as well as educators trusting parents) (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; De Gioia, 2013; Halgunseth, 2009; Knopf & Swick, 2007). This meaningful communication process is referred to as true dialogue (Adair & Tobin, 2008; Delpit, 2006), and Delpit (2006) posits that educators are in an ideal position to initiate such dialogues.

The notion of parent in ECEC settings comes across as an empowered one in the Australian policy documents, while the notion of educators in ECEC settings appears to play more of an enhancing role in the transfer and sharing of knowledge and expertise from both the home and ECEC setting environments. According to the EYLF, educators are to work in respectful collaboration in the meaningful upbringing of children, providing the avenue to empower parents. The parent is viewed as very influential in their children's development due

to their first-hand knowledge of the child. The question arises, are there different connotations to these just discussed, of the parent identity in Malaysia? The State's concept of parent in Malaysia is next examined to shed some light on this matter.

The State's concept of parent: Malaysia. Literature on what constitutes a parent in the Malaysian context is limited. Thus, as a starting point, I have chosen to approach this limitation by understanding this term through the lens of the government. I do this by scrutinising the curriculum document that forms the framework for the early childhood education (ECE) in Malaysia, the National Pre-school Curriculum Standard (NPCS) (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2010). This national document is one of seven implementations by the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) in improving student outcomes in addition to improving the quality of pre-school educators and teacher assistants (PEMANDU, 2011). Improving Student Outcomes was one of the seven key priority areas of development, or the National Key Results Areas (NKRAs), identified by the first of the three-stage Government Transformation Programme (GTP). For the second stage of the GTP, this NKRA was revised to become Assuring Quality Education, which included enhancements to the first stage of the GTP. This NKRA now has a focus on quality through ensuring national standards for ECEC settings and up-skilling of early childhood educators (PEMANDU, 2011). Similar to the Australian Government, this NKRA is part of the government's efforts to potentially increase human capital and decrease inequality (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Bauchmüller et al., 2014).

The NPCS identified six teaching and learning standards, with the fifth standard denoting parental and local community involvement as "highly important in the delivery of early childhood education" (MoE, 2010, p. 22). Educators are to develop strong relationships with families through various methods, and also assist in forming a committee that involves parents and guardians. Educators are expected to arrange frequent meetings with parents, with

a minimum of two meetings in a year. Educators are also to involve parents in programmes and activities, such as Sports Day, Family Day, Working Bee, excursions, and parenting programmes. However, parents are part of the delivery only and not of the design of the programmes and activities. Educators are also encouraged to build teaching and learning links from the service to the home setting.

This emphasis on parental and local community involvement is highlighted in the implementation of the National PERMATA Programme, a nation-wide initiative to upgrade and standardise the provision of ECEC for the disadvantaged in the country. According to their curriculum booklet, their curriculum is a comprehensive ECEC programme for children aged 1 to 4 years, and emphasises parental and local community involvement in the children's learning process. Parents play a catalyst role in the programme, where the continuity of care and education development of the PERMATA centres in the home is stressed. Parents with children enrolled at centres implementing this programme are required to pledge their continued active 4-hour-a-month participation through a letter of undertaking (PERMATA Negara, 2013). Among the activities that they can be involved in are: playing with the children; serving food, bathing, reading, conversing and cooking with children; participating in excursions with children; and ensuring continuity of the PERMATA learning methods at home (PERMATA Negara, 2013).

The above activities, listed by both the NPCCS and by PERMATA, appear to be assistive of the educator's role, and reflect a surface sense of parental involvement in children's learning in different settings. Educators appear to be portrayed more as dispensers of knowledge rather than as co-constructors or partners (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011; Hewitt & Maloney, 2000; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; You, 2014), as there is a sense of superiority in the teaching and learning methods of settings over the knowledge held by the parents. This suggests that sharing of knowledge is more unidirectional and more didactic (e.g. C. K. K.

Chan, 2009; Fowell & Lawton, 1992; Hewitt & Maloney, 2000; Mustafa & Azman, 2013) compared to the EYLF. In Malaysia, more structured forms of learning in ECEC settings may be due to parental demand as a form of school preparation (Hewitt & Maloney, 2000; Mustafa & Azman, 2013), a phenomenon that is also experienced in Singapore (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011; Mustafa & Azman, 2013). However, the recently revised primary and secondary school curricula, with more focus on a student-centred, project approach to learning, may influence parents' perception and, therefore, demands for the type of learning that occurs in ECEC settings (Nasa, 2016).

While the extant literature promotes the benefits of having bi-directional communication between educators and parents, such as that desired in Australia (e.g. DEEWR, 2009a), few have pointed out how the context has contributed to the practice of unidirectional communication, as experienced in Malaysian ECEC settings. This may be an example of the clear separation between educator and parent roles and responsibilities practiced in many Asian cultures (e.g. S.-C. E. Ho, 2003; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Tobin, 2011; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). This may also reflect the implicit knowledge of home practices or *implicit cultural practices* (Tobin, 2011), hence the unnecessary mention of parental input in decision-making that takes place in these settings.

In contrast to the distinct inclusion of parents in playing active and involved roles in the process of ECEC, as defined by the EYLF, the notion of parent is more ambiguous in the NPCS. Parents are only mentioned in one of the six teaching and learning standards, where the document points out parental and local community involvement as highly important in the delivery of ECE. However, this is mentioned as part of the educator's role, and is portrayed as an assistive role to that of the educator in the Malaysian context. Again, whether this reflects the separation between the knowledge and skills of educators and those of parents is

questionable. There is an implication that educators are perceived as more knowledgeable in relation to the education of children while parents are perceived more knowledgeable in relation to the care of children.

There is a high possibility that there are implications for how immigrant parents hold divergent views of ECEC settings when these are used as entry points to the Australian society (De Gioia, 2009, 2013; Ebbeck, 2001). This may result in a misinterpretation and possible downplaying of their roles as parents, due to a lack of confidence in their abilities to be good parents according to the Australian definition. Immigrant Chinese parents in USA also reported to having this feeling of being a deterrent to children's learning, especially academically, due to their lack of experience in the host country (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009).

To understand the type of parent the Malaysian-Chinese parent becomes (or does not become) when introduced to the Australian EYLF, it is important to first understand the type of parent, or parenting style, that is encouraged by the EYLF. Similarly, it is important to first understand the type of parent, or parenting style, that is encouraged by the Malaysian NPCS to understand the type of parent the Malaysian-Chinese parent becomes (or does not become) when introduced to the NPCS. Understanding the type of parent, or parenting style promoted in both curricula assists in better comprehension of parents' identity negotiation when making decisions relating to formal ECEC for the first time. For the purpose of understanding the parenting styles in both curriculum documents, the next section of this chapter outlines two ideologies that are frequently referred to in the literature for classifying parenting styles: Baumrind's Parenting Typology and Confucianism.

Parenting

Baumrind's Parenting Typology. Although there is a wide range of parenting behaviours worldwide and within different cultural groups, the majority of research on child-

rearing behaviours has been conducted in Western developed countries. In most societies, parents are expected to take responsibility for raising their children, and there is a substantial body of research that recognises parenting techniques that are likely to lead to positive outcomes for young children. Baumrind (1971), one of the most prominent figures in studies of parenting styles, identified three styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. According to Darling and Steinberg (1993), Maccoby and Martin (1983) later identified a fourth parenting style, neglect, and transformed Baumrind's parenting typology.

Authoritative parents are warm, responsive, demanding and involved in their children's daily lives. They exhibit behaviours that include respect for children's viewpoints and independence, while setting clear limits. In addition, they have in place high but realistic goals for their children, and provide the necessary support for them to achieve these goals. The authoritative parent is found to be most effective in fostering social responsibility, sense of self-esteem, confidence and adaptability in their children to meet challenges of academic and other contexts, where strong beliefs in one's abilities are required. The authoritative parenting style, with its firm but warm interactive mode, has consistently been found to relate to positive child outcomes (Baumrind, 1971; Kaufmann et al., 2000; Rinaldi & Howe, 2012).

Authoritarian parents rate high on control and demand, which in turn results in children being responsive towards parental demands (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Children are discouraged to negotiate over family rules (e.g. Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009), because the authoritarian parent expects obedience from their children without feeling the need to communicate the reasons for such compliance or its consequences (e.g. Maccoby & Martin, 1983). There is no value placed on promoting independence or autonomy in children. Authoritarian parents tend to use low levels of affection, praise and reward in their pursuits to motivate children. Studies have found children

parented using this parenting style tend to display negative child outcomes (e.g. Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

The permissive parent is characterised as warm, highly nurturing, permissive, and responsive, but low in parental control and demanding few maturity behaviours (Baumrind, 1971; Rinaldi & Howe, 2012). This style of parenting has been found to be unsuccessful in enabling children to develop a range of self-directing abilities that underlie academic success due to its laissez-faire approach (e.g. Kaufmann et al., 2000).

The negligent parent is also known as the uninvolved parent, and is characterised as cold, permissive and uninvolved (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). This style of parenting involves little or no discipline, whereby parents only tend to their children's basic needs. As negligent parents normally do not monitor their children's behaviours, children of negligent parents have been found to display truant or delinquent behaviours, and poor academic performance, and seem socially withdrawn (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). According to Rinaldi and Howe (2012), this parenting style is observed more often in research involving adolescents and less often in research involving children.

It is important to note that Baumrind's (1971) classification of parenting styles, as listed above, represent examples from mainly Western backgrounds. These parenting styles demonstrate beliefs or attitudes that are typical of Western parents. By reference to this classification, the tone that comes through the EYLF document is one that is reflective of a more authoritative style of parenting. The incorporation of parents into the decision-making process in different settings shows that the curriculum acknowledges that parents demand certain expectations. By including parents' viewpoints in the shaping of setting policies provides the opportunity for parents to be actively involved in and responsive towards their children's needs. When the education and care received by children are responsive and have the active participation of parents, the teaching and learning environment, including the

relationships between children, parents and educators, becomes warm. Therefore, the parent identity formed in Australia is one that is shared by the State and individual families.

However, due to the myriad of ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds of the immigrant population in Australia, the formation of a meaningful and unique parent identity that is also supported by ECEC settings is a highly complicated and sensitive matter.

In contrast to the EYLF, the NPCS document displays a more authoritarian style of parenting, specifically in how the teaching and learning practices of the settings are to be continued in the home settings. It reflects a linear process of distribution of knowledge that begins from the setting and is passed on to the parent and finally to the child. This suggests that parents control what and how children learn, as they would have to comply with the demands of the settings, leaving less room for negotiation of the teaching and learning that take place in the home setting that is representative of parents' own beliefs and expectations. Thus, by reference to Baumrind's authoritarian style of parenting, it would seem that the parent identity in Malaysia is very much controlled by the State.

Despite the widespread application of Baumrind's parenting typology, there appears to be a certain degree of inappropriateness in using a characteristically Western concept of parenting in describing the non-Western, Malaysian parent, and more specifically, the Malaysian-Chinese parent. Applying parenting typologies that are used in Western contexts in research that involves non-Western participants or in research based in non-Western contexts has been reported by previous research to have sociocultural limitations, and scholars have called for the use of alternative concepts of parenting (e.g. Chao, 1994, 2001; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Frewen, Chew, Carter, Chunn, & Jotanovic, 2015; Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009; S.-L. Lim & Lim, 2003; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1990). As previously mentioned, there is limited literature on Malaysian parenting styles; but because my study focuses on the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia, the literature on Chinese parents and parenting styles becomes relevant.

Chinese parenting practices largely follow the teachings of Confucius (551-479 B.C.), as do other East Asian groups such as the Taiwanese, Japanese and Koreans (Morris, 1994).

Confucianism. A well-documented influence in Chinese parenting is that of Confucianism (e.g. Chao, 1994, 2001; Cline, 2015; Li, 2009; Morris, 1994; Wu, 1996; Yim, Lee, & Ebbeck, 2013). Basically, Confucianism is an ideology based on a compilation of teachings by the Chinese scholar and educator, Confucius (551-479 B.C.), whose teachings were recorded by his disciples and passed down over the generations (Yow, 2006). During the Southern Song Dynasty, the scholar Zhu Xi (朱熹) compiled these teachings into the Four Classic Texts (四书), which later became the standard reference texts for Confucianism studies (Yow, 2006). The Four Classic Texts are The Analects (Lunyu 论语), The Great Studies (Daxue 大学), the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong 中庸), and Mengzi (孟子) (Yow, 2006).

Confucianism is, therefore, a set of guidelines for proper behaviour, and an ideology that underlies, pervades, and guides Chinese culture by setting standards for family, community and political behaviours (Yim et al., 2013; Yow, 2006). It is not a religion (Yim et al., 2013; Yow, 2006). This set of guidelines functions as the basic starting point for every person to arrive at what is referred to as a state of perfect morality, and is a teaching based on a moral code for human relations. Fundamentally, Confucianism has five core values (Yim et al., 2013):

1. Benevolence (Ren 仁): good actions that brings people together
2. Righteousness (Yi 义): righteousness, morality, and faithfulness
3. Courteousness (Li 礼): proper behaviour and courtesy
4. Filial piety (Xiao 孝): respect, love and reverence for parents, grandparents and elderly family members

5. Wisdom (Zhi 智): knowledge and its practical reasoning processes

The value of wisdom is reflected in how education is seen as a long-standing and highly regarded cultural aspect of the Chinese identity (e.g. Chao, 1994; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Voon & Pearson, 2011; Wu, 1996). The Confucian emphasis on education is regardless of social class, and reflects the belief that every person has the potential to be trained well (Leung, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). The emphasis on effort by the Chinese in educational settings is also related to the Confucian belief in perfectibility, or cultivation of self (Cline, 2015; Leung, 1996; Li, 2009; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). If a person fails, the self is to blame. For example, Chao (1994) found that Chinese parents in the USA believe that academic achievement is more strongly related to effort than to innate characteristics. They put more emphasis on hard work and less on innate ability, unlike their American counterparts. This is based on the Chinese belief in human impressionability and improvability advocated by Chinese philosophies (Leung, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002): an inherent notion of commitment to establish a learning purpose that will not only cultivate high levels of morality but also a purpose in life (Li, 2009; Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

Reflecting the Confucian emphasis on education, an Australian study involving Chinese participants from Vietnam, Cambodia, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and Malaysia saw education rated as very important by all Chinese parents. They considered acquiring a good education for their children of fundamental importance, as in their opinion, the higher the level of education, the more the potential for success and satisfaction. Moreover, success in school was seen as reflecting well on them and on the family, bringing honour to the family name (Chao, 1994, 2000; Hartley & Maas, 1987; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). Educational performance has also been reported to be an important factor in social mobility, which may explain the higher retention rate to Year 12 of immigrant children (Khoo, McDonald, Giorgas, & Birrell, 2002). An emphasis on academic achievement also signifies efficient parenting

(Chao, 2001), a way of expressing love towards their children instead of in physical forms (e.g. hugging or kissing) or expression of feelings (e.g. telling children how much they are loved) (Chao, 2000; C. S. Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011). However, it has been shown that the stress associated with upholding competitiveness (Hewitt & Maloney, 2000), and the achieving Asian social stereotype, along with parental pressures for excellence in school performance, results in potentially adverse individual psychosocial development.

The high importance placed on education by parents who practice Confucian values provides an explanation for such parents' respect for education figures of authority. Due to their revered status in Confucianism, educators are referred to by their title, such as Mr., Madam, Teacher, Sir or Professor among others, as a sign of respect (You, 2014). Educators are looked up to because they are deemed to have attained high levels of morality through continual self-improvement, to teach and instil in society culturally and socially accepted behaviours and knowledge (Leung, 1996; Tao, Yuan, Zuo, Qian, & Murray, 2006; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Yim et al., 2013; Yow, 2006). Due to this perception, Confucian-informed parents generally do not question what educators ask of them.

In Confucian thought, it is believed that good children are cultivated and not born, and therefore that every person has the ability to develop their moral standards and to abide by them, consequently reducing the need for external regulation (Bui & Turnbull, 2003; Leung, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Although Chinese parents from several locations around the world (i.e. Singapore, New York, Hawaii) reported geographical variations in traditional patterns of Chinese socialisation (Wu, 1996; Yim et al., 2013), they all concentrated on training children's moral character, such as respecting elders and cooperating, and they helped motivate children to achieve in school (e.g. Chao, 1994; Chao, 2000; Hartley & Maas, 1987; Li, 2009; C. C. Lin & Fu, 1990; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Yamamoto & Li, 2012). However, today's parents may not be as harsh disciplinarians as were older

generations. These values may still be practiced today, but possibly with modified meanings to suit the needs of today's Chinese communities and their contexts. For example, second- and third-generation Chinese-Americans were found to refer frequently to teaching by example and instilling filial piety from early childhood (Wu, 1996). More recently, Chinese parents in Hong Kong have been observed to develop children's moral character, such as respect for elders and good manners (Yim et al., 2013). The importance of instilling good moral character in children was also reported by Malaysian-Chinese parents in Sydney (Voon & Pearson, 2011). In Confucianism, this is viewed as obedience and cooperation, as the younger generation are required to respect the older generation and not disregard the teachings that are handed down to them, further promoting the value of filial piety (Bui & Turnbull, 2003; Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

Considered a major value in Confucianism (Morris, 1994), filial piety is "an attitude of respect for one's parents with tangible acts such as obeying them, providing for them and nurturing them" (S.-L. Lim & Lim, 2012, pp. 204-205). The concepts of obedience and respect for elders play a part in maintaining the relationships that promote group harmony, which underpins the collectivistic nature of Confucianism. Parents deem it an important responsibility to maintain the value of filial piety with their children (S.-L. Lim & Lim, 2012). However, while the younger generation is expected to owe the elderly reverence, the older generation also has duties of obligation, or an implied duty of care and concern towards the younger generation. Part of a parent's cultural role is in educating their children (Downie et al., 2007; Wu, 1996). That is, parents believe that it is their responsibility to build the good character of their children, so that their children would develop into individuals with a similar sense of responsibility towards self, family and community. This reciprocity is prevalent in East Asian cultures (Leung, 1996).

Promoting group harmony by maintaining close relationships with family members is common in societies that are characterised as collectivistic (Triandis, 1994, 2001). According to Triandis (2001), people who are members of a collectivistic society emphasise relationships, and tend to be interdependent on other members of the collective (e.g. family, community, country). Group goals have priority over personal goals, and behaviours are according to group expectations and position in the society. On the contrary, people who are members of an individualistic society emphasise autonomy, and tend to be independent of the collective. Personal goals have priority over group goals, and behaviours are according to personality rather than group expectations (Triandis, 2001). Comparatively, there is a connotation that collectivistic societies are seemingly more hierarchical than individualistic societies in their maintenance of relationships.

Relationships are central to Confucianism, where a person is positioned in a web of relationships (Morris, 1994). At any given time, a person is simultaneously positioned in several different relationships with different people, but mainly in relation either as a junior or senior to someone. The identity of a person is therefore in constant negotiation according to the person's position in this web of relationships. A person is considered a junior in relation to people older in age, generation and societal status, such as parents, elders, supervisors/employers, and teachers, as well as a senior in relation to people younger in age, generation and societal status, such as younger siblings and cousins, students, and employees (Morris, 1994). In this context, a parent socialises their children according to societal and cultural expectations that are historically significant (Yip & Fuligni, 2002). According to Yim et al. (2013), Chinese parents have also been found to feel a need to preserve cultural values to enable the child to be accepted in the society, especially with the value of benevolence helping one to learn how to interact with others and the value of courteousness further defining the appropriate behaviour in this interaction. One way for children to behave

appropriately and according to their position in the web of relationships is to display listening-centredness (Gao, Ting-Toomey, & Gudykunst, 1996). Listening-centredness is a sign of respect, whereby to maintain group harmony, elders are not challenged by those positioned as juniors in the web of relationships (Gao et al., 1996; Wu, 1996).

A combination of listening-centredness and the revered position of educators in Confucianism may have contributed to the traditional notion of the Chinese learner. Traditionally, children referred to as Chinese learners have been described as rote, passive and submissive learners. However, these descriptions were made by observers from traditionally non-Chinese education backgrounds, who may have different meanings and identities attached to that of a learner (e.g. Barker, Child, Gallois, Jones, & Callan, 1991; Samuelowicz, 1987). However, there are observations of the Chinese learner that reflect the opposite of these descriptions, including those of Chinese learners who are critical, active and participative (e.g. Biggs, 1996; Cheng & Wan, 2016; C. S. Lim, 2007; McGowan & Potter, 2008; Nield, 2004; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). These differences imply the Chinese learner's negotiation of traditional notions of learning within the current global context, due to increased access to different views of learning that are more interactive, less structured and more formative (C. K. K. Chan, 2009; Tobin et al., 2009).

Socialisation that is according to societal and cultural expectations that are historically significant can provide a sense of security, as these expectations can function as reference points in states of disjuncture. However, socialisation in this manner may also downplay personal autonomy (Morris, 1994). In comparison, the collaborative nature of parents' involvement highlighted in the Australian EYLF presents parents as more outspoken individuals, who are perceived to be as knowledgeable about their children as, if not more so than, educators. The empowerment given to parents by the EYLF does not necessarily sit well with Confucian teachings (e.g. Ebbeck, 2001). It signifies a rebellion against tradition and the

social structure that exists in many Confucian-informed societies, where social harmony, the main goal of Confucianism, is achieved from each person understanding their place in the social order, and playing their part well.

There appears to be a distinction between the values upheld in a more individualistic society as compared to values prioritised in a more collectivistic society, this in turn influencing the parents' ways of parenting (Triandis, 1994, 2001). Parents socialised in a collectivistic society or culture such as that of Malaysia (e.g. Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009) are likely to experience a state of disjuncture in an individualistic environment such as Australia (e.g. Ebbeck, 2001), and vice versa. However, especially with the advent of new media, it is unsure whether any disjuncture is experienced, as there is a possibility of combining both individualistic and collectivistic values for specific contexts. If a disjuncture exists in beliefs, goals and understandings related to themselves as individuals, and more importantly, as parents, how is this negotiated when deciding on ECEC of their children? From the literature reviewed, it is apparent that parents' sociocultural contexts are an influential factor in their identity negotiation, especially during a transitional period for the family.

A Broad Sociocultural Perspective

The literature reviewed in this chapter sits broadly in the sociocultural realm. This also informed the perspective that I took for this study, where I was seeking answers to specific questions regarding a specific experience at a specific point in time. The specific experience refers to parents' identity negotiation, while the specific point in time refers to when their children begin ECEC. A broad sociocultural perspective frames my study, to take into consideration the complexities that exist within the contexts and relationships that influence parents' negotiation of identities during a state of disjuncture. Indeed, a strength of the

sociocultural perspective is its “potential to shed light on the complex interrelationships between humans and their social and cultural settings as well as among the diverse contexts” (Eun, 2010, p. 416).

A sociocultural perspective is based on the concept that human activities or knowledge take place in specific cultural contexts and are mediated by language and other symbol systems over time (Eun, 2010; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Nasir & Hand, 2006). According to this perspective, knowledge is co-constructed, which can give recognition and empowerment to people, especially those from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). This recognition and empowerment is due to the acknowledgement of diverse types of relationships or partnerships and participation (L. Lim & Renshaw, 2001) gained by mutual listening and understanding.

As cultural background shapes parents’ views on their involvement in children’s educational experiences (C. S. Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011), the diversity in relationships and participation defines and redefines what is regarded as knowledge, and is increasingly relevant due to constantly “changing local, national, and global conditions” (L. Lim & Renshaw, 2001, p. 11). For example, C. S. Cheung and Pomerantz (2011) found that, in the USA, although socioeconomic factors do not directly affect parents’ roles, they do appear to influence the effects of parents’ roles and involvement in their adolescent children’s learning. It is highly likely that the influence of these factors also affects children of early childhood age in low socioeconomic families, due to less economic resources (C. S. Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011) and parents feeling less capable than more advantaged parents in helping their children with their learning (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Another example of how changing local conditions can redefine knowledge is in families with divorced parents. Divorce has been reported to result in children constantly being exposed to parental conflict, relocating to new neighbourhoods, and attending different schools (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). Such experiences

may have negative implications for children's developing understandings of family and relationships (Amato & Cheadle, 2005; Halpern-Meehin, 2012; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). However, regardless of whether parents are divorced or not, it is crucial to have quality parent-child relationships, as this quality has a significant influence on children's later parenting when they become parents themselves (Friesen, Woodward, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2013).

Throughout the lifespan, knowledge is continuously defined and redefined, culture is constantly produced and reproduced (L. Lim & Renshaw, 2001; Nasir & Hand, 2006). Thus, cultural baggage is created in moment-to-moment interactions with others, as cultural tools and practices, and is (re)produced (Nasir & Hand, 2006). This demonstrates people's agency in the constant redefining of who they are (L. Lim & Renshaw, 2001; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Rhedding-Jones, 2005), suggesting an ever-occurring process of negotiating identities that recognises "the diversity of identities within self and the presentation of self through multiple identities" (L. Lim & Renshaw, 2001, p. 18). According to Nasir and Hand (2006), people tend to associate themselves to activities or ideas that are aligned with the identity or identities they hope to construct for themselves. When activities or ideas are misaligned with the identity or identities they hope to construct for themselves, people tend to disassociate themselves (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Therefore, to gain a full understanding of people's lived experiences and identities, context is absolutely vital, as pointed out above.

The relevance of taking a sociocultural perspective is not limited to only forming culturally respectful and reciprocal relationships (L. Lim & Renshaw, 2001), but can also constantly redefine and inform the understanding of people experiencing life in increasingly diverse communities (L. Lim & Renshaw, 2001), as identity is inextricably linked to the understanding of people's daily practices (Nasir & Hand, 2006). By exploring parents' identity negotiation from a sociocultural perspective, I investigate characteristics of their

identities, their goodness or strengths when negotiating and overcoming challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings, and their perceptions of their evolving identities during a likely state of disjuncture by providing them a voice within their contexts (L. Lim & Renshaw, 2001). I not only contribute to the extant literature on identity negotiation that involves parents as main participants, I also contribute to potential change that may empower people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, while I take a broad sociocultural perspective, I use particular theoretical and methodological tools to assist me in my investigation of identity negotiation during a likely state of disjuncture experienced by a defined group of people. The following chapter presents the theoretical framework of my study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter, I presented a review of literature on the ethnic Chinese of Malaysia, identity, and parenting, as related to ECEC. These concepts of parent, child and education inform many of the characteristics of the Malaysian-Chinese parents' identities. Subsequently, the negotiation of these identities informs their beliefs, goals and understandings, including in their parenting. I outline in this chapter the theoretical frameworks that guide my study.

The two main concepts that inform this study are identity negotiation, and parenting. The concept of identity negotiation is viewed through the lens of an adjustment theory, Integrative Communicative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation (Y. Y. Kim, 2005), and an identity theory, Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Both these theories assist in addressing the constant changes that occur to an individual during the identity negotiation process. The interplay of these two theories is explained later in this chapter. The concept of parenting is viewed through the lens of the Typology of Parent-Child Relational Orientations (Tuttle et al., 2012). Tuttle et al. (2012) describe parenting as a relationship co-created through the interactions of parents and children, with each other and with others in their family and communities. The interactive nature of this typology (elaborated later in this chapter) makes it flexible, which complements Ting-Toomey's (2005) and Kim's (2005) theories.

Theoretical Conceptualisation of Identity Negotiation

Identity, as presented in the previous chapter, is the notion of a self that is a constantly produced response (Hall, 1990) towards what we perceive of ourselves and what others perceive of us. This constant production negotiates the past with the present, as well as aspects of the future (Rutherford, 1990), reflecting an ever-occurring process of change within

a person. This process of identity negotiation is further explained using a theory on adjustment and a theory on identity in the following sections of this chapter, through the lens of Integrative Communicative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation (Y. Y. Kim, 2005) and Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

The Integrative Communicative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation. Integrative Communicative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation (ICTC-CA) focuses on the communicative processes through which individuals interactively negotiate their changing identities (Y. Y. Kim, 2005). Y. Y. Kim (2005) defines the term *cross-cultural adaptation* as “the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, on relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (p. 380). Adaptation is thus viewed as the dynamic interactive process between the person and the environment instead of something for a state to achieve. The stability, reciprocity and functionality in the relationship that the individual shares with the environment is developed on the basis of the natural human instinct to gain control or find balance in life, especially in unfamiliar circumstances. Because adapting is something that happens naturally, the ICTC-CA does not look at whether individuals adapt but how and why individuals adapt.

As mentioned above, adaptation is a two-way interaction between the person and the environment, meaning that how and why people adapt is influenced by not only a person’s preparedness – mental, emotional and motivational readiness – prior to a disjuncture, but also by the person’s personality. Three personality resources that this theory outlines as influential are openness, strength and positivity (Y. Y. Kim, 2005).

An open person is more receptive to new information. This receptiveness is the willingness of the individual to be more flexible in viewing and interpreting new events and situations (Y. Y. Kim, 2005). This suggests that a person who has an open personality is more

flexible in negotiating identities during a state of disjuncture. A strong person is confident in facing new information that is challenging. This confidence stems from the person's ability to "absorb shocks" (p. 390) from the disjuncture experienced, and is also attributed to interrelated tendencies such as resilience, persistence and patience (Y. Y. Kim, 2005). A person who is positive is optimistic in their outlook on life. This optimism in life is a basic trust in oneself during a state of disjuncture. It is this "self-trust" (p. 391) that encourages a continual thirst for new knowledge that would help to negotiate identities during a state of disjuncture. When combined, it is evident that these three personality resources are considered influential to a person's adaptation, because they facilitate the person's endurance of stressful events and maximise the person's new learning (Kim, 2005).

Initially formulated out of research with refugees, immigrants and travellers in a foreign land (Y. Y. Kim, 1988), the core of the ICTC-CA is the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic (Y. Y. Kim, 2001). This dynamic highlights the changes individuals experience over time, changes which unfold in a dialectic, cyclic and continual "draw-back-to-leap" (Y. Y. Kim, 2005, p. 384) manner. "Draw back" (Y. Y. Kim, 2005, p. 384) is the response to stress, which then triggers an instinctive restructuring of the self, or adapting, to "leap forward" (Y. Y. Kim, 2005, p. 384) and grow. This dynamic will continue for as long as there are new environmental challenges, but will decrease in intensity as the relationship that the individual shares with the environment is stabilised, reciprocated and functional (Y. Y. Kim, 2005).

The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic is a concept that applies to the experiences of parents during their child's transition from informal to formal ECEC. According to this idea, the unfamiliar environment and encounters the parents face would trigger stress in them, further fuelled by a need to conform to new ideas and yet to maintain some existing ideas. Adapting is thus seen as an effective way to manage this stress and, in time, with a continuation of events, growth occurs. However, how growth is considered by this dynamic,

as an intrinsic reaction of the individual towards the environment and not as a working relationship between the individual and the environment, juxtaposes the previously mentioned interactive notion of adaptation.

In addition, this dynamic does not take into account the parents' existing identities, identities that are challenged or questioned to provoke the occurrence of stress. It is felt that the experience of negotiating identities for the Malaysian-Chinese parents in the present study would involve not just growing to fit the environment but would also involve agency and flexibility in shaping who they are. Instead of growth, the process of constant negotiation between the self and the environment that these parents experience is referred to as change in this study, which will be explained further later in this chapter.

To have choices and a voice in shaping their own identities is more reflective of current ECEC practice in many countries that advocate for a working relationship between ECEC settings and families that they cater to. Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005) was thus employed as an additional lens to not only view the many identities of these Malaysian-Chinese parents but also to account for the agency and flexibility involved in identity negotiation.

The Identity Negotiation Theory. The identity negotiation perspective emphasises particular identity domains, such as personal identities and cultural membership, in influencing our everyday interactions. Adapted from Face-Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988), Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) focuses on the view of identity as the explanatory mechanism for intercultural communication processes. The negotiation is defined as “a transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others' desired self-images” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). Similar to the ICTC-CA, identity negotiation is viewed as an

activity that involves mutual communication, whereby the individual attempts to evoke a desired identity while also challenging or supporting others' identities (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

There is an essential element of this theory that is involved in the achievement of positive group-based and person-based identities. This essential element is the process of enhancing identity understanding, respect and mutual affirmative valuation. The feeling of being understood is the validation achieved at the personal as well as group identity level. The feeling of being respected is the credibility achieved, and the feeling of being affirmatively valued is the recognition achieved (Ting-Toomey, 2005). This is not to say that, once these feelings are achieved, identity negotiation ceases. Instead, the process of identity negotiation is viewed as a continuous process in this theory, as any person is constantly situated in socioculturally diverse environments, familiar and unfamiliar, at any one point in time.

The theory consists of the following ten core assumptions (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 218):

- Assumption 1: The core dynamics of people's group membership identities (e.g. cultural and ethnic memberships) and personal identities (e.g. unique attributes) are formed via symbolic communication with others.
- Assumption 2: Individuals in all cultures or ethnic groups have the basic motivation needs for identity security, inclusion, predictability, connection, and consistency, on both group-based and person-based identity levels.
- Assumption 3: Individuals tend to experience identity emotional security in a culturally familiar environment, and experience identity emotional vulnerability in a culturally unfamiliar environment.
- Assumption 4: Individuals tend to feel included when their desired group membership identities are positively endorsed (e.g. in positive in-group contact situations) and experience identity differentiation

when their desired group membership identities are stigmatised (e.g. hostile out-group contact situations).

Assumption 5: Individuals tend to experience interaction predictability when communicating with culturally familiar others, and interaction unpredictability (or novelty) when communicating with culturally unfamiliar others; thus, identity predictability leads to trust, and identity unpredictability leads to distrust, second-guessing, or biased intergroup attributions.

Assumption 6: Individuals tend to desire interpersonal connection via meaningful, close relationships (e.g. in close friendship support situations), and experience identity autonomy when they experience relationship separations: meaningful intercultural-interpersonal relationships can create additional emotional security and trust in cultural strangers.

Assumption 7: Individuals tend to experience identity consistency in repeated cultural routines in a familiar cultural environment, and they tend to experience identity change (or, at the extreme, identity chaos) and transformation in a new or unfamiliar cultural environment.

Assumption 8: Cultural, personal and situational variability dimensions influence the meanings, interpretations and evaluations of these identity-related themes.

Assumption 9: A competent identity negotiation process emphasises the importance of integrating the necessary intercultural identity-based knowledge, mindfulness and interaction skills, to communicate appropriately and effectively with culturally dissimilar others.

Assumption 10: Satisfactory identity negotiation outcomes include the feelings of being understood, respected and affirmatively valued.

Of these ten assumptions, four hold absolute relevance to the present study in that they point specifically to the identity negotiation process, including the changes in identity that the participants experience. These four assumptions are Assumptions 7 to 10. Assumption 7 relates to identity consistency and change issues over time (Ting-Toomey, 2005). This assists with my interpretation of a sense of identity stability through time as being realised via repeated routines or familiar rituals, and also the disjuncture that the parents in this study have experienced.

Assumption 8 suggests that cultural or ethnic, personal, and situational variability influence the meanings, interpretations and evaluations of identity (Ting-Toomey, 2005). This assists with my interpretation of how beliefs and values influence the parents' thinking about their identities, how they construct identities of others, and how the interplay of these identities is reflected in their verbal and non-verbal communication.

Assumption 9 emphasises two ideas. The first is that mindful intercultural communication has three components: knowledge, mindfulness, and identity negotiation skills (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Knowledge refers to the process of in-depth understanding through conscious learning, personal experiences, and observations. Mindfulness refers to the willingness to accept multiple perspectives of others. Identity negotiation skills refer to the ability to behave in a culturally appropriate and effective manner. The second idea is that mindful intercultural communication includes appropriately managing shared identity goals and effectively achieving desired identity goals (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Assumption 9 assists with my interpretation of the parents' mindfulness and how they behave in different situations during their parenting.

Assumption 10 suggests that competent identity negotiation outcomes include the feelings of being understood, respected and positively valued (Ting-Toomey, 2005). The feeling of being understood is the validation felt as an individual and as a member of a group. The feeling of being respected is the equal recognition given to identity-based behaviours and practices. The feeling of being positively valued is being included as esteemed individuals despite different identities (Ting-Toomey, 2005). This assumption assists my understanding of how the parents feel as they negotiate their identities during various stages of their parenting.

INT complements ICTC-CA, as it also looks at the transaction period of negotiation of multiple identities that defines the boundaries drawn by the Malaysian-Chinese parents in Malaysia and Australia. Following is an explanation of how INT is used in combination with ICTC-CA to underpin the present study.

Combined Adapted Theoretical Frame. A more complete understanding of the negotiation of identities can be gained via a combination of ICTC-CA and INT rather than utilising one or the other in isolation (refer to Figure 1 for a graphic illustration of the combination of these two theories). This is because the overlapping of ICTC-CA's stress-adaptation-growth dynamic with INT's assert-define-modify-challenge and/or support process allows for a more all-rounded analysis of the identity negotiation process. While Kim's (2005) ICTC-CA is especially useful in viewing situations of disjuncture, Ting-Toomey's (2005) INT is useful in viewing constant occurrences.

The characteristics of the Malaysian-Chinese parents' identities are investigated using the assert-define stage in INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Their backgrounds and self-perceptions form the basis of how they assert and define their identities. The significance placed on particular characteristics of their identities is influenced by their own childhood experiences

and upbringing (Tuttle et al., 2012). This then builds on the beliefs, goals and understandings they have as parents of young children (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008).

The beliefs, goals and understandings of any person are likely to be questioned when negotiating unfamiliar territory, due to experiencing disjuncture. This is highly likely for parents with young children entering formal ECEC settings for the first time, because they do not have prior knowledge of and experience interacting with a formal ECEC setting. Parents might also experience new belief systems, new expectations, and a raft of government regulations. Using ICTC-CA, the likely disjuncture that the Malaysian-Chinese parents face when their children enter formal ECEC settings for the first time is considered as stress. How they meet, negotiate and overcome this stress is related to how they assert and define themselves according to their beliefs, goals and understandings. The search for goodness occurs in this process of the parents adapting to the disjuncture.

There is a possibility of a redefinition of identities as the parents modify their beliefs, goals and understandings, which may be challenged and/or supported. Unlike ICTC-CA (Y. Y. Kim, 2005), which labels this stage as growth, I will view this process as, more generally, change: I view change as not only growth but also rejection of beliefs, goals and understandings (see Figure 2).

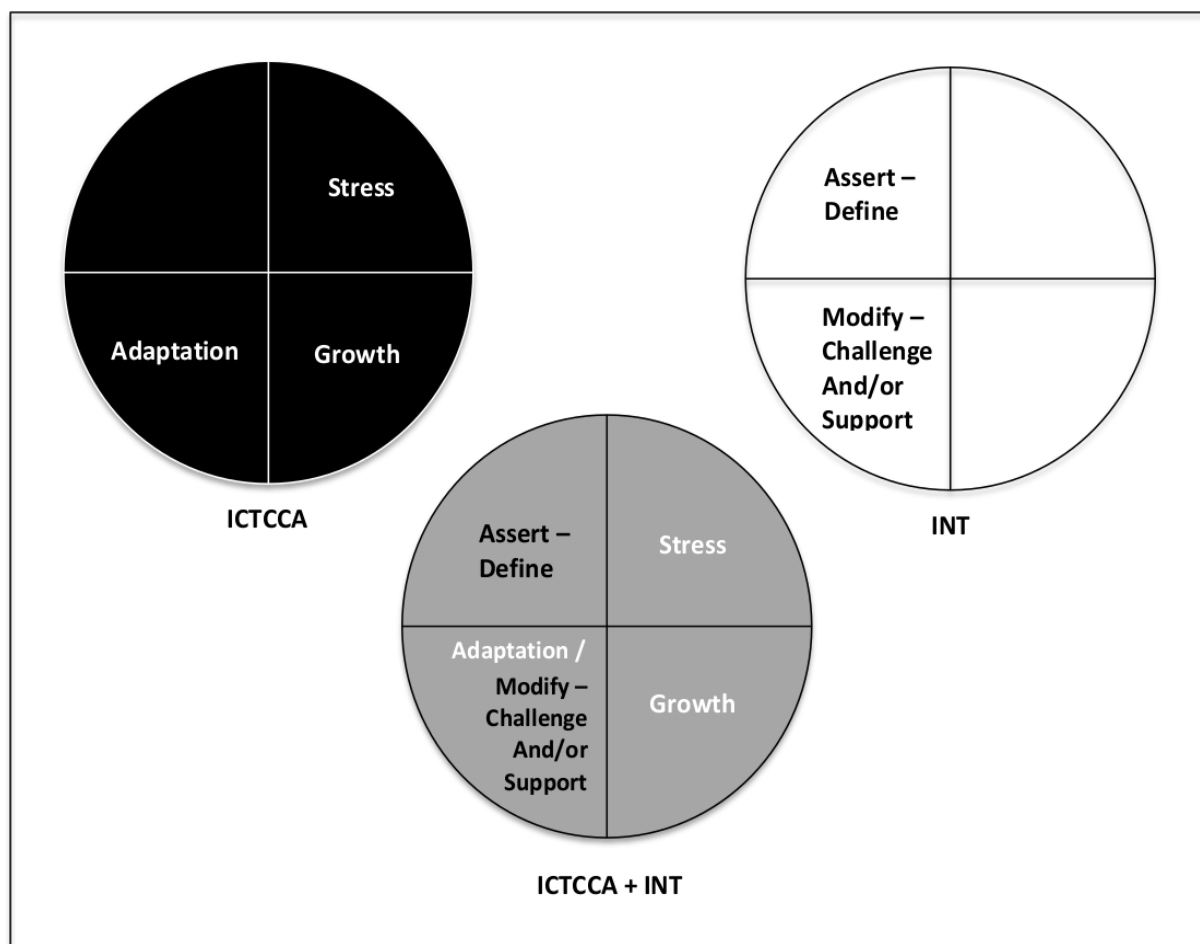


Figure 1. Combination of Integrative Communicative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation (Kim, 2005) and Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

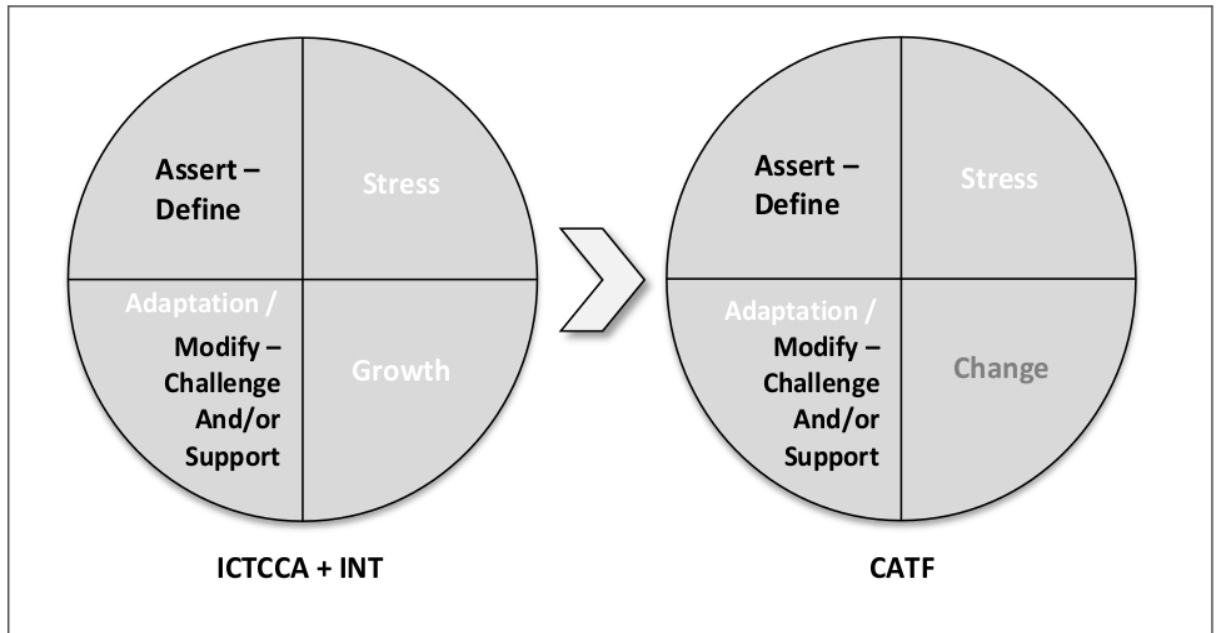


Figure 2. Adaptation of Integrative Communicative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation (Kim, 2005) and Identity Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Theoretical Conceptualisation of Parenting

The notion of *parent* is conceptualised in various ways throughout the vast body of literature pertaining to parenting. One of the most significant is through a parent's parenting style. While parenting is commonly viewed as actions that are directed from parent to child (e.g. Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 2000; Harrison, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009), in this study I view parenting as a relationship. This is aligned with current literature where children are recognised as capable and competent agents of their own learning and development (Carini, 2000; Rinaldi, 2006). When a child's views, needs and rights are considered as important as those of their parent(s), the dynamics of the relationship between parent and child shift from a unidirectional parent-child trajectory to a reciprocal two-way communication. This concept of parenting as a relationship is viewed through the lens of the Typology of Parent-Child Relational Orientations (Tuttle et al., 2012), an outline of which follows.

Typology of Parent-Child Relational Orientations. Originating from clinical practice in relationship therapy, this typology is informed by the notion of relational orientations, from the Relational Orientations Framework (Silverstein, Bass, Tuttle, Knudson-Martin, & Huenergardt, 2006). This framework incorporates the relational self, in which the construction of self is more aimed towards maintaining relationships with significant others than collectivist and individualist constructions of self (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008; Chao, 1994, 2001; Gao et al., 1996).

The Typology of Parent-Child Relational Orientations (TP-CRO) posits that parents and children position themselves in relation to each other (see Figure 3). Thus, parenting is viewed as a relationship co-created through their interactions with each other and with others in their families and communities (Tuttle et al., 2012).

The horizontal dimension of Focus refers to where a person positions themselves according to experiences with others: that is, the extent to which the self is experienced in a relationship, whether the self is oriented more towards autonomy or connection. Parenting that tends to focus more on building relationships between parent and child would be reflected in parents who position themselves more towards the connection end of this dimension.

The vertical dimension of Power refers to how elements of hierarchy and equality are formed in parent-child relationships. Rather than the perspective of parents being more likely to hold more power in a parent-child relationship (Chao, 1994, 2001; Siegel & Hartzell, 2004), this typology perceives power relations to be a continuous experience between parent and child that is affected by societal, gender and cultural expectations (Tuttle et al., 2012). Parenting that tends to focus more on involving children in decision-making would be reflected in parents who position themselves more towards the egalitarian end of the dimension.

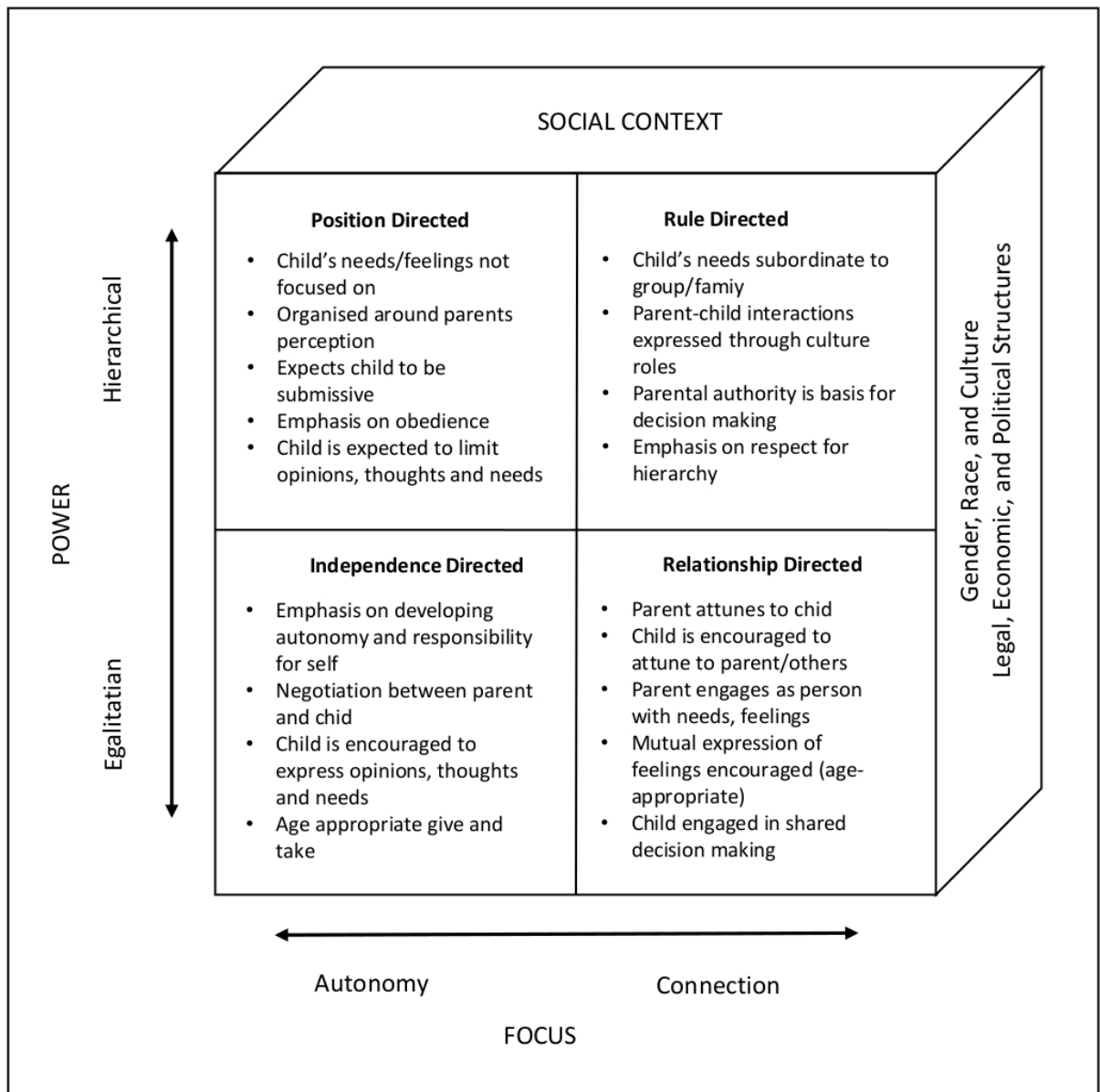


Figure 3. A Typology of Parent-Child Relational Orientations (Tuttle et al., 2012, p. 78).

As Figure 3 illustrates, there are four parent-child relational orientations, namely rule directed, position directed, independence directed, and relationship directed. This typology does not position an individual or a family in a fixed orientation, as people may shift from one orientation to another depending on circumstances and over time, or may even integrate aspects of more than one orientation. Rather, these orientations function more as a guide when using this typology to describe a family, building understanding in the varying approaches to parent-child relationships (Tuttle et al., 2012).

A parent-child relationship that is rule directed (high hierarchy and high connection) is shaped according to societal and cultural roles and rules. Reflective of Confucianism (Chao, 1994, 2001; Gao et al., 1996; D. Y. Ho & Chiu, 1994; Wu, 1996), members of the family are socialised according to societal position, and emphasis is placed on respect for hierarchy. An example of this is through each member of family playing their role in the family and society to make the family proud. Parents play their role as authority figures who socialise their children to be functioning and contributing members of the society, while the child plays the abiding role for the common good of the family.

In contrast, a parent-child relationship that is position directed (high hierarchy and high autonomy) is defined according to individual responsibility and parent-child hierarchy. Children in this orientation are expected to submit to parents' perceptions, as the people at the top of the hierarchy command the most respect. However, children are also responsible for their own feelings and actions. An example of this is when the child is told to complete a task purely because the parent demanded so, and if the child disobeys, the child is considered to be challenging parental authority and is punished.

A parent-child relationship that is independence directed (egalitarian and autonomous) places importance on children's own opinions, needs and interests, and responsibility for their own behaviour. In addition to articulating their interests, children in this orientation also

negotiate with their parents their desires. An example of this is when the child is regularly included in meal preparation decisions; or, when the child wants a new toy, a new toy could be picked out after the child and the parents agree on the amount of days of acceptable behaviour.

A relationship directed (egalitarian and connected) parent-child relationship is defined according to shared power and relational responsibility. Parents engage in this relationship as individuals with needs and feelings and encourage the same engagement from their children. Children engage in shared decision-making and learn to be aware of self and others. An example of this is when the child is punished in school for bullying a friend: the parents would encourage the child to share his or her feelings and to validate these emotions. The parents would also share their own sadness at the situation between the child and the friend, and would help the child consider the impact of the bullying on the friend, the educator and themselves, the parents.

Many factors such as self-identity, temperament, maturity, interactional experience, and position in society contribute to the evolution of both parents' and children's interpersonal experiences. Therefore, social context makes up the background of the typology, because this dimension forms and maintains relationships. This context includes influences that generally remain invisible, including gender, culture, race, ethnicity, religion, and political, economic and legal structures. Thus, an advantage of conceptualising my participants through the lens of the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012) is the inclusion of the environment and culture. This inclusion acknowledges diversity and moves away from the view of culture as a residual (Lachman, 1997) or an added-on (McGoldrick, 1998) element of a person. It is understood that individuals have the capacity to vary across each of these dimensions, and that identity is expressed according to context.

The TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012) is able to highlight dynamic changes in the parents' beliefs, goals and understandings. In particular, this typology provides a useful lens to view how these parents assert and define their identities and how their identities evolve according to the changes that occur. This allows flexibility in viewing my participants while they negotiate their identities during various junctures (and disjunctures) of their children's formal ECEC experience.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The previous chapter considered the theories that underpin this study. This chapter presents the research approach adopted, including a description of the participants, and the data collection and analysis processes (together with instruments of data collection method and analysis). The aim of the study was to explore how Malaysian-Chinese parents negotiate specific parent identities as their children begin ECEC in Malaysia and Australia. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the characteristics of Malaysian-Chinese parents' identities?
2. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings during a likely state of disjuncture?
3. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents perceive their evolving identities?

To answer these research questions, this study used an ethnographic exemplifying case study approach.

The Research Approach – Ethnographic Exemplifying Case Study

Ethnography is a qualitative research design that closely explores an event or culture by joining in the daily lives or chosen situations of participants in the study (e.g. Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; O'Leary, 2005). Although there have been ethnographic studies that incorporate quantitative methods (Emerson et al., 2011), my study maintained a qualitative stance because I aimed to investigate real-life, lived experiences of people (O'Leary, 2005). To fulfil the aims of my study, an ethnographic approach was adopted, because ethnography allows for a more in-depth understanding of the participants (Emerson et al., 2011; Tufford & Newman, 2011). More in-depth understanding is obtained because ethnography allows for more open-ended responses to inquiry, and because of the greater depth that ethnographic

research involves, as it tends to focus on a small sample of participants, as was the case in this study (participants are detailed later in this chapter).

Ethnography is employed in various ways to understand human behaviour, as ethnographic and other qualitative work also focus on the context, not just on individuals, thus providing colour to the study (Ashworth, 1999). This was why I too chose an ethnographic approach, as the combined focus on the context and on individuals works well with the theoretical frameworks that underpin my study.

A case study is research that is focused on one thing – the uniqueness and complexity of a particular phenomenon or case – that is understood through multiple methods of data collection and theoretical angles (Fischer, 2009; Flick, 2007; Stark & Torrance, 2005; Yin, 2003). I applied a case study approach to gain an in-depth insight into the thoughts and daily routines of the parents that were part of this study. I sought to engage with and understand the complexity of social activity that the parents offer to a setting, and meanings of those activities that the parents co-construct with others (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Although normally not generalisable to the wider population or wider research environment (Flick, 2007; Gibbs, 2007; Yin, 2014), findings from research using a case study approach have been argued to provide findings that can represent two things, general experiences, through strategic selection of cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006), or general theoretical propositions (O'Leary, 2005; Yin, 2014). In this instance, my study was the strategic selection of Malaysian-Chineseness in Malaysian and Australian ECEC settings and related environments.

A phenomenon or case can be individuals, a group, an organisation, a community, an event, a role or relationships (Flick, 2007). In the present study, the case under investigation was Malaysian-Chinese parents' negotiation of identities as they interact with ECEC settings for the first time. This study was an exemplifying case study (Bryman, 2016), conducted in two countries (Malaysia and Australia), with contrasting cultural and ECEC contexts. An

exemplifying case study epitomises “a broader category of cases or... provides a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered” (Bryman, 2016, p. 62). An exemplifying case study also allows the investigation of “key social processes” (Bryman, 2016, p. 62), in my case, the investigation of identity negotiation during a likely state of disjuncture. The application of the same research instruments in all settings, consisting of the same questions and observations using the same observation protocol, enabled the analysis of these data to occur within each case (within each country) and also across cases (across both countries) (Yin, 2003). Within- and across-case analysis assists in identifying similarities and differences in data while preserving the uniqueness of the case (Yin, 2003).

Participants and Recruitment

Participants. The participants of this study were 21 Malaysian-Chinese families in Malaysia and Australia. Out of these 21 families, 13 were recruited in Malaysia, while the other eight families were recruited in Australia. This disparity is explained later. The participants self-identified as Malaysian-Chinese and had children experiencing formal ECEC for the first time. These families consisted of parents ranging from 20 to 48 years of age, with children ranging from 5 months to 5 years of age. All but three parents had at least a post-secondary qualification, and most had a full-time occupation, including a Head of Department in a private tertiary institution, accountants and a car dealer. Knowing the range of participants’ qualifications and occupations provides information that enables a fuller contextual understanding of the case studies.

Of the 21 families, five mothers in Malaysia and two mothers in Australia were homemakers. All lived with their nuclear family, except for two families in Malaysia who lived with the paternal extended family. Tables 1 and 2 summarise my participants’ details according to country.

Table 1.

Participants in Malaysia

Participant (parent, age)	Qualification	Occupation	Child (gender, age)
Ai Wee (mother, 33)	Form 5 SPM certificate (Equivalent to Australian Year 11)	Accounts clerk	Woon Ting (girl, 4)
Cheng Ni (mother, 33)	Diploma in Business	Homemaker	Eugene ^b (boy, 2)
Clara ^a (mother, 30)	Diploma in Tourism	Homemaker	Brady (boy, 4)
Fei Fei (mother, 30s)	Master of Information Technology (IT)	Tuition centre director	Bella ^b (girl, 5)
& Jack Ter (father, 30s)	Master of IT	Civil worker	
Jocelyn (mother, 34)	Bachelor of Business Administration	Sales analyst	Jared ^b (boy, 4)
Kelly (mother, 31)	Bachelor of Business Administration	Branch manager of a paint company	Jer Ching ^b (girl, 3)
Leanne (mother, 31)	Foundation of ECE	Childcare centre director	Alice ^b (girl, 3)
Luo (father, 38)	Master of Science	Lecturer and Head of Department	Jee Shuen (girl, 4)
Michelle (mother, 20)	Form 5 SPM certificate	Homemaker	Edwin (boy, 2)
Shirlyn (mother, 36)	Diploma in Secretarial Studies	Homemaker	Chong Hann ^b (boy, 4)
Sim ^a (mother, 35)	Bachelor of Secretarial and Administration Studies	Homemaker	Mei Gee (girl, 4)
Wei Wei (mother, 22)	Certificate in Beauty Therapy	Beautician	Jia Hui (boy, 3)
Yang (father, 36)	Form 2	Car dealer	Derrick ^b (boy, 3)

^aInterviewed twice instead of three times due to limited opportunities during data collection, further explained as a limitation of this study in Chapter 7. ^bAlso observed in the home setting.

Table 2.

Participants in Australia

Participant (parent, age)	Qualification	Occupation	Child (gender, age)
Charmaine (mother, 39)	Bachelor of Accounting	Bank manager	Aric ^c & Newton ^c (twin boys, 3)
Dong Bing ^a (father, 48) & Annabel ^a (mother, 40)	Master of Business Master of Business Administration	IT engineering consultant Regional sales manager	Queenie (girl, 4)
Jackie (mother, 36)	Bachelor of Accounting Master of Business Administration	Accountant	Bowen (boy, 5 months)
Jia Ling (mother, 33)	Bachelor of International Business Bachelor of Pharmacy (Hons.)	Pharmacist	Colin ^c (boy, 4)
Jia Ming (father, 32) & Erin (mother, 30)	Bachelor of IT Bachelor of IT	IT consultant IT support	Jennifer (girl, 2)
May ^b (mother, 35)	Master of Marketing and Management Master of ECE	Childcare worker	Maria (girl, 3.5)
Shuxian ^b (mother, 40)	Bachelor of Accounting Certified Public Accountant	Accountant	Alicia ^c (girl, 4)
Zara (mother, 31)	Master of Science	Scientific officer	Alanna ^c (girl, 4)

^aInterviewed four times due to unexpected development. ^bInterviewed twice instead of three times due to limited opportunities during data collection, further explained as a limitation of this study in Chapter 7. ^cAlso observed in the home setting.

Recruitment. The recruitment process began with a plan to recruit up to 15 families in each country. To maximise contextual variability, participants were recruited from multiple locations across the city, suburban and outer metropolitan areas of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and Sydney, Australia. Although it is not characteristic of case studies to produce generalisable results (Flick, 2007), it was felt that geographic variability within each city allows for a wider Malaysian representation to some level, as families in different parts of the same city may originate from different parts of Malaysia and may experience parenting differently due to diverse social contexts and upbringing.

Participants were identified through a snowballing technique, through referrals from professional and community organisations. Snowballing is a technique where participants are recruited through a referral process (Morrow, 2005) by a small number of initial participants, who recommend similar individuals. It was believed that this technique of participant recruitment would be effective, as a large number of families would be reached. However, initial participant recruitment was ineffective and had to be modified, which resulted in an unexpectedly longer data collection process. Just as life happens with episodes of usual routine and unexpected disruptions, the same is true for human research, whereby the research process is sometimes smooth and sometimes not so (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Emerson et al., 2011).

In Malaysia, the initial stages of participant recruitment involved approaching three early childhood organisations: the National Association of Early Childhood Care and Education Malaysia (NAECCCEM), the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Council, and the Malaysia Association Professional Early Childhood Educators (MAPECE). The NAECCCEM was established in 2005 in acknowledgement of the importance of ECEC, and strives to encourage ECEC providers to view their own profession highly. Similarly, the main function of the ECCE Council, established in 2010, is advocating for professional and quality

ECEC. The ECCE Council also serves as a link between the ECEC field and the relevant government bodies and agencies. Initiated in 1999, the MAPECE is a non-profit and non-government organisation that promotes the rights, education and well-being of children from birth to 8-years-old. The NAECCM assisted by disseminating the research invitation to ECCE centres in its network, but did not receive any response after a month. In addition, due to sensitivities (e.g. personal conflicts of interest between members of different committees, which I later realised), much time was lost in getting approvals from members of the MAPECE and the ECCE Council committees. Thus, alternative approaches to participant recruitment were necessary.

Consequently, online parenting groups and forums, such as theAsianparent.com and NextGenParenting.com were approached. theAsianparent.com is a free online community targeted at urban parents and parents-to-be who live in Malaysia, while NextGenParenting.com is an online forum for parents to share, learn, network and help each other in parenting. My attempts at approaching theAsianparent.com were unsuccessful, despite several attempts. NextGenParenting.com offered recruitment assistance in the form of a public invitation posted on their Facebook page for the viewing of all its members, but this also did not yield responses.

As a result, personal and professional contacts such as friends and colleagues were approached and participants were gradually recruited through referrals. It is believed that this approach of using friends and colleagues as referrals was effective due to its informal, direct and interpersonal appeal. Generally, informal networks are often more trusted than official channels (Emerson et al., 2011). However, because of its interpersonal nature, friends and colleagues were not allowed to disclose my background to the participants. To prevent biased responses in the interviews, it was vital that the participants did not know me personally beforehand, as it is believed that interviewing someone known, especially people from the

same culture or country, increases the likelihood of the participants assuming that certain things need not be explained due to shared common knowledge, then causing potential gaps in the data (Yin, 2014). This was also to prevent the participants from tailoring or staging their replies to what they think are desired (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005), and perhaps not replying honestly. Of the 13 families finally recruited in Malaysia, five families were referred by personal contacts, while the other eight were recruited through professional contacts.

In Australia, the participant recruitment process began with approaching the Australian Malaysian Singaporean Association (AMSA), the Australian chapter of the Global Malaysians Network (GMN), and the Malaysians Sydney Chapter (MSC). Established in 1970, AMSA originally served as a social networking body for Malaysian and Singaporean residents and their families. AMSA has evolved into an autonomous non-profit, non-political and non-religious community organisation, recognised by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, which promotes multiculturalism in Australia. The Australian chapter of GMN was originally formed by *The Star*, a Malaysian newspaper, to promote exchange of experience and knowledge between Malaysians residing in Malaysia and the diaspora. The MSC is a sub-group of the GMN for Sydneysiders.

All three organisations agreed to offer participant recruitment assistance. The AMSA offered recruitment assistance in the form of an e-mail invitation sent out to all its members, while the Australian chapters of GMN and MSC posted public invitations on their Facebook pages for the viewing of all their members. Interested members of AMSA contacted me via e-mail, while interested members of the Australian chapters of GMN and MSC contacted me via the personal messaging facility on Facebook. These initial participants then acted as informants who recommended similar families.

However, this also took more time than expected, as many of the families recommended by the initial participants did not agree to participate, citing inconvenience as

their reasons. For example, one woman cited how the home observations posed an inconvenience to her husband's work routine, as he worked from home. Another woman did not feel comfortable with having her morning routines observed. Again, personal and professional contacts such as friends and colleagues were approached and more participants were gradually recruited. In addition to time constraints, this unforeseen complication also resulted in fewer families being recruited in Australia compared to Malaysia. In the end, instead of achieving the targeted 15 families per country, 13 families were recruited in Malaysia and eight families were recruited in Australia.

Data Collection and Analysis

Two methods of data collection were utilised to satisfy the case study aims. These two methods were observations and semi-structured interviews, methods similar to those employed by Denzin and Lincoln (2012), who also used the common ethnographic methods of semi-structured interviews and observations in their study looking at consumer perspectives of Chinese immigrants living in Melbourne. These methods were employed because of the likelihood of them providing insightful and detailed descriptions of participants' thoughts, otherwise inaccessible through more closed methods such as questionnaires (Emerson et al., 2011). These methods were also selected based on their capacity to capture the justifications individuals and communities use in relation to beliefs, values and practices (Barbour & Schostak, 2008). This is important because these justifications hold personalised, unique meanings, and would differ for individuals and communities from one context to another. A mixture of these methods is most appropriate for cross-cultural research (Pollack, 2003), because these methods complement each other in forming a thick description of the various ways participants interpret their experiences, cultural understandings and patterns of behaviour (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

Observations. Observation data pertaining to children and ECEC were collected in the form of field notes, which were recorded after the observations had taken place. These observations were in the form of non-participant observations (Casey, 2006; Parke & Griffiths, 2008), as I wanted to minimise my influence on the observed context. Unlike in the participants' homes, where the environment was of a more private nature, the ECEC settings were not as private and were more used to having outsiders such as student researchers and authorised officers from regulatory authorities making non-participant observations. Non-participant observations were suitable in the setting because there were social and cultural relations to observe between the child of the participant family and the people in the ECEC setting. At the ECEC settings, I chose to sit at a place that did not obstruct the flow of activities and that was at a distance far enough to not be noticed but still close enough to observe what was happening. Anecdotes of what was observed of the child's ongoing behaviour throughout the time the observation was taking place were first written in notes to capture the events, contexts and immediate antecedents. Subsequent behaviours were then written up more fully immediately after leaving the ECEC settings. I followed the same style of observation in the participants' home settings, but was at times, part of the activities being observed (e.g. joining a meal on participant's request).

Observations included daily routines, from when the children got out of bed up to the point of drop-off at ECEC settings, and also afternoon or evening routines from the point of pick-up from settings until children went to sleep or dinner time. Day routines included toileting, breakfast and preparing to leave home for ECEC settings (e.g. changing from clothes, putting on socks and shoes, getting into the car). Evening routines included arriving home, taking a shower, having lunch/dinner and washing up.

The home observations were optional to account for family circumstances and comfort with researcher presence. Where families provided consent, each routine was observed once.

Permission to undertake observations at ECEC settings was a requirement for participation, therefore, all families provided consent. Each child was observed once up to 4 hours at the ECEC settings. The observations in both the home and ECEC settings focused on the:

1. Interactions between the child and the adults around him/her;
2. Interactions between the child and other children;
3. Gestures or expressions during these interactions;
4. Language used by the adults around him/her (e.g. directive, non-directive, tone of voice);
5. Environments the child was in (e.g. types of play or learning material available, built structures or natural environment);
6. Behaviours encouraged or discouraged.

This observation protocol was adapted from O'Leary (2005), to observe the non-verbal, spatial, extra-linguistic and linguistic behaviours that were occurring and under what circumstances. The focus was to gain insight into the parents' perceptions of ECEC and the child's ECEC experience, as I observed. The days and times of these observations were arranged at the convenience of the families and the ECEC settings. These observations took place in the morning for at least 2 hours from the time of drop-off at the settings, because this allowed me to observe the child involved in a range of activities, routines and learning experiences, with a range of other people.

Semi-structured Interviews. The semi-structured interviews used in this study function as in-depth inquiry into the understandings of identity negotiation in parents. As presented in Chapter 2, identity is best understood through talking and discussion (e.g. Hall, 1990), and the use of interviews maximises the sharing of comprehensive narratives that would allow insight into the beliefs, goals and understandings of the participants as they negotiate their identities as parents. According to Yin (2011), such conversational sharing of

information contributes to the individualised quality of the relationship between the researcher and participant; in my case, between myself and the parents. Participants are more likely to be forthcoming and honest when they feel that their thoughts and feelings are understood and validated (Cannold, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews, ranging from 20 minutes to 3 hours, were conducted on three separate occasions across a 6-month period for each family. Semi-structured interviews were used because of their more flexible nature in comparison to structured interviews. This was in anticipation of the many possible directions and topics of interests that participants may present as the interviews progressed. In addition, unlike structured interviews that take on a more serious question-and-answer tone, semi-structured interviews offer a more relaxed atmosphere, whereby the participants engage in more conversation-like exchanges of information and experiences with the researcher (Barbour & Schostak, 2008; Yin, 2011).

Based on a protocol outlined by Yin (2011), this procedure of interviewing the same family on three separate occasions covered, firstly, participants' demographics and life histories, secondly, the events involved in the topic of study, and thirdly, participants' reflections on the meaning of their experiences (see Appendix A for Interview Protocols). The initial part of the first interview focused more on the participants' demographics and life histories, and less on the events involved in the topic of study and their reflections on the meanings of their experiences. This functioned as a form of icebreaker, whereby, in addition to getting to know each other, participants only needed to provide replies to questions that were more factual in nature and readily addressed, to ease them into the more difficult subsequent replies (Emerson et al., 2011; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Yin, 2011). The second and third interviews focused more on the events involved in the topic of study and the participants' reflections on the meanings of their experiences, and less on their life histories. However, there were instances whereby the interviews were conducted as the

participant was undertaking a task (e.g. cooking or feeding an adventurous toddler), resulting in longer, noisier and more colourful conversations.

Conducting more than one interview with each family also allowed for the clarification of subtle nuances within the interviews and the observations (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). All participants were interviewed. Interviews with participants in Malaysia were conducted in English (two participants), Mandarin (six participants), Cantonese (two participants) and Hakka (two participants), mixed with Manglish throughout all interviews. While all eight participants in Australia were interviewed in English, their replies gradually included sentences in Manglish and their respective dominant Chinese dialects (e.g. Mandarin and Cantonese), as they became more familiar and felt more comfortable with me.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, for coding and analysis. All non-English content was translated on the fly as part of the transcription process. The transcripts and observation notes were shared with participants for an additional opportunity to confirm the accuracy of my notes (Barbour & Schostak, 2008). Participants were also assured of anonymity throughout and also after completion of the study. The children, although not interviewed, were informed and aware of my presence in their homes and ECEC settings.

Trustworthiness. The strength and veracity of qualitative research can be established via several means, including triangulation and notions of trustworthiness (Bryman, 2016). This is in contrast to research quality of quantitative studies, which, is often established via the use of measures of reliability and validity (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, it was essential to maintain the trustworthiness of my study to maintain its quality. The objectives for building trustworthiness included the transparency of procedures, which allowed for review and understanding by others (Yin, 2011). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) propose strategies to materialise sound and truthful use of data. The following strategies were applied to maximise the trustworthiness of my study:

1. Carry out prolonged engagement with the families to understand their daily lives. This was achieved by meeting the families on at least three separate occasions for interviews and observations. These observations lasted for at least 2 hours. Spending an extended period of time with participants not only allows researchers to not be a disruption as much as possible, but also allows participants to adjust to the presence of researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).
2. Undertake persistent observation by gathering, interpreting and analysing data derived from the interviews at the same time. Observations were incorporated into interviews when I wanted to question an unknown observed action or behaviour, or to clarify interview information of which I was unsure (Yin, 2011). Persistent observation of the phenomena under study over a prolonged period of time increases the researcher's familiarity with the phenomena and participants, thus assisting in differentiating relevant from less relevant data (Eisner, 1979; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007).
3. Engage in peer debriefing with professionals experienced in the field of study but who are removed from the immediate context of the study, through discussions regarding data collection and analysis. Peer debriefing refers to the discussing of the research that took place with professionals including my PhD supervisors, fellow PhD candidates, as well as colleagues working in other ECEC settings in Malaysia and Australia. These discussions assisted in identifying patterns in data and potential presumptions, and questioning the suitability of data collection tools (Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004).

Analysis and Coding. Analysis of my data was taken from an ethnographic perspective, and involved taking “an inductive view of the relationship between theory and

research” (Bryman, 2016, p. 375). As data was collected over three interviews, some of the data that emerged from the second or third interviews resulted from interpretations of data that emerged from the first or second interviews. The emerging data were given codes to assist me in connecting them to related literature, theories or interpretations.

HyperRESEARCH (Version 3.0.3) was used to manage the coding and analysis of data.

Coding of data involves labeling data, assigning a system, and developing categories that justify and account for the interpretation of ideas (Morse & Richards, 2002). Coding for this study was undertaken according to a three-phase process, following Morse and Richards:

1. Descriptive coding was used to describe factual knowledge or base data. This included demographic information about the participants, details of the event or setting, as well as the context in which the information is situated. This occurred in the earliest stages of the research.
2. Topic coding was used to identify potential categories and to project their applicability within the data. According to Morse and Richards (2002), topic coding takes place at the first stage of the analysis to collect all relevant material that may be used to form categories as the analysis process progresses.
3. Analytic coding was the development of concepts that informed the themes and categories emerging from the data. This phase occurred as topic coding gradually became more analytic, when themes or categories were generated and validated by linking data to recurring categories (Morse & Richards, 2002).

The three phases of coding above then led to the identification of overarching themes. Once these themes were identified, the meanings of these themes and their significance were established in relation to the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 3.

Positioning Myself. The theoretical frameworks outlined in the previous chapter underpinned my study. These frameworks influenced the way the research questions were

designed and interview questions were asked, as well as how observations were undertaken. However, I also recognise that I have insider knowledge, or more specifically, “total insider” (Chavez, 2008, p. 475) knowledge, as I share multiple identities or profound experiences with my participants due to my Malaysian-Chinese identity. Consisting of researcher’s knowledge, experiences and perceptions, the insider knowledge of a researcher can be referred to as presumptions (Yin, 2011) or preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2011).

Insider knowledge does not necessarily lead to ease of research. On the contrary, insider knowledge may make research more difficult, as when the researcher and the participants share the same cultural codes and conventions and there is thus an increased chance of subjectivity due to familiarity and filtering of data based on personal knowledge and experience (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Greene, 2014; Yin, 2011). However, it has been argued that researchers without insider knowledge may also demonstrate subjectivity, but due to unfamiliarity rather than familiarity (Greene, 2014).

According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009), sharing similar experiences with the participants does not necessarily mean knowing the experiences, due to nuances of differing sociocultural contexts. However, the influence of my presumptions on my analysis is highly possible, especially when I am of the same Malaysian-Chinese identity. These presumptions may result in bias. However, it has been proposed that a complete prevention of bias is neither possible nor desirable when aiming to understand lived experiences (LeVasseur, 2003). Instead of complete prevention, Fischer (2009) suggests that researchers constantly be mindful of and explicit about the influence of presumptions on observations and their interpretations.

Positioning, or bracketing, is a method sometimes used by researchers to reduce the potential effects of presumptions related to the research (Tufford & Newman, 2011). It is a complex process, as researchers must decide where to “locate themselves on what is in effect

a continuum of what is bracketing” (Tufford & Newman, 2011, p. 84). Thus, I do not specifically locate or position myself in one location on this continuum. Rather, I drew from the concept of bracketing in my attempt to reduce the potential effects of presumptions by constantly reminding myself of my presumptions. Therefore, this is where I have positioned myself in the context of this study.

As explained in Chapter 1, I am a Malaysian-Chinese woman in her early 30s who has resided in Sydney, Australia for 13 years. I spent my formative years in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, in a predominantly Hakka Chinese New Village in Malaysia. I am of Hakka ancestral origin, and belong to the G3 group of Malaysian-Chinese. I was schooled in national-type primary and secondary schools but received my Year 12 education in a private institution in the form of the Ontario High School Diploma. I am fluent in English, Malay, Cantonese, Hakka and Mandarin. However, although I can speak three Chinese dialects, I am unable to read and write in Chinese. Prior to obtaining tertiary qualifications in ECE, I worked in an ECEC setting in Malaysia. After obtaining my tertiary qualifications in Australia, I continued accumulating work experience in ECEC settings in Malaysia, as well as Australia.

I used my insider knowledge to my advantage in facilitating the “production of knowledge without necessarily gaining or losing because of shared ethnicity” (Abbas, 2006, p. 319). In other words, I used my background and insider knowledge to facilitate deep and meaningful conversations with the participants, and also deeper-level analysis of the data (Tufford & Newman, 2011). These conversations contained information that was both novel, thus needing further elaboration, and common, thus only needing clarification. At times, I showed *skepticism* (Yin, 2011), as I compared my own experiences to the information shared and questioned them.

While being an insider researcher was beneficial during data collection process, it was not so during the stage of gaining access to the participants. As outlined previously in this chapter, there are times when human research is not as smooth as at other times (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Emerson et al., 2011). Although a combination of factors may have contributed to the complications regarding accessing my participants, the process of gaining access was within the Human Research Ethics Committee's approved guidelines.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the involvement of people during the process of data gathering, this study acquired clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix B for Final Approval). Written consent (see Appendix C for Parent and Children Information Statements and Consent Forms) was obtained from the participants (before data collection), followed by verbal re-consent (at the beginning of interviews) and the option to discontinue participation at any time. Written consent (see Appendix D for Information Statements and Consent Forms for Centres) was also obtained from the ECEC settings attended by the children of the participants, to allow for the non-participant observations to take place.

Findings are presented within the context of a case study, with highly personal stories articulated around the topic of identity negotiation, as careful sequencing of events allows for informed interpretations (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). I outline the findings of my study in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Results

Chapter 4 detailed the manner in which I collected data and the approach that I took to the analysis. Chapter 5 presents the findings of my study. Firstly, I introduce the categories of parents that the data revealed. I follow this with detailed case studies as exemplars of each of these categories. In presenting my findings, I interweave analysis with thick description (Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) of the particular cases. My study focused on the lived experiences of participants, and I overlay this description with analytical content to bind participant experiences, emotions and behaviours, allowing for increased knowledge and understanding of the circumstances under investigation (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

The initial stages of data analysis revealed two main groups of parents. The first consisted of parents who displayed characteristics of willingness to negotiate their beliefs, goals and understandings within the ECEC settings. The second group were parents who displayed characteristics of acceptance and support of the prevailing philosophy of the setting while maintaining their beliefs, goals and understandings. However, my analysis revealed other unique characteristics crucial to understanding the various types of possible perceptions parents may have of negotiating ECEC. Of the 21 participating families, two families displayed overt and palpable characteristics that clearly did not fall within the purview of either of the two main groups. I was compelled to investigate further, and ultimately established a third group, of dissenters or challengers. As a result, three main categories of parents emerged, which I have named *Acceptors* (two families), *Negotiators* (17 families), and *Challengers* (two families).

Acceptors are parents who accept and support the prevailing ECEC philosophy of the systems that encompass the settings they chose for their children. This means that Acceptors are satisfied with the ECEC that their children are experiencing at the settings. They accept

and in some cases continue at home the practices adopted by the setting. This promotes consistency in their children's learning opportunities, as parents support at home the learning experiences that occur at the settings to the best of their abilities. The childhood experiences of Acceptors inform the experiences of their children, in that Acceptors try to emulate their own parents' approaches to experiences they deem were positive, as well as relevant and beneficial to their children. I found that these parents' enthusiastic, supportive and accepting characteristics stood out during the data collection and analysis process.

By reference to the CATF (discussed in detail in Chapter 3), when Acceptors face the disjuncture of their children entering formal ECEC settings for the first time, they are more accepting of change in their identities. They are open to modifying their beliefs, goals and understandings, which may be challenged and/or supported. Therefore, they are more flexible in negotiating multiple identities. By reference to the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012), Acceptors are more relationship directed in their parenting. This means that the approach to parenting by Acceptors involves more elements of shared power and relational responsibility. They engage with their children as individuals with needs and feelings and encourage their children to engage similarly. Children share decision-making opportunities with their Acceptor parents, which then makes their relationship feel empowering. Through shared decision-making, children also learn to respect the needs and thoughts of others, whereby they develop an awareness of self and others (Tuttle et al., 2012).

Negotiators are parents who accept the prevailing ECEC philosophy of the systems that encompass the settings they chose for their children, but would complement that with elements of their own philosophies of ECEC at home. This means that, although Negotiators are satisfied with the ECEC settings that their children experience, they feel the need to include home culture in their children's learning. Home culture includes the children's mother tongue and also Malaysian-Chinese practices and values. Similar to Acceptors, Negotiators

accept and therefore incorporate at home the practices adopted by the settings. However, in addition, Negotiators would request the ECEC settings to incorporate elements of their own philosophies at the settings. Like the Acceptors, the childhood experiences of Negotiators inform the experiences of their children, in that they incorporate elements of their childhood and upbringing that they have found to be beneficial and deem relevant to be part of their children's ECEC. They negotiate and are open to discussion, characteristics that stood out during data collection and analysis.

By reference to the CATF, when Negotiators face the disjuncture of their children entering formal ECEC settings for the first time, they manifest a mix of acceptance and resistance to change in their identities. Their beliefs, goals and understandings, which may be challenged and/or supported, are modified according to the priorities they place on these during a disjuncture. Therefore, while they are open to negotiating parts of their identities, some parts are fixed. By reference to the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012), Negotiators are more independence directed in their parenting. They prioritise their children's development of independence and autonomy. Thus, Negotiators encourage their children to be responsible for their own behaviours, and to learn that there is a consequence for every action. Negotiators view their children's opinions, needs and interests as important, and therefore engage with them as individuals with needs and feelings equally important as their own. Unlike Acceptors, who engage their children in shared decision-making, Negotiators engage their children in age-appropriate decision-making. This presents opportunities for their children to learn how to negotiate their desires with their parents (Tuttle et al., 2012).

Challengers are parents who do not readily accept the prevailing ECEC philosophy of the systems that encompass the settings they chose for their children. Challengers express dissatisfaction with the ECEC that their children are experiencing at the settings, because they deem these to be inadequate. Challengers compensate for this inadequacy by teaching at home

what they deem the children are lacking. Like the Acceptors and Negotiators, the childhood experiences of Challengers inform experiences of their children in that they incorporate into their children's ECEC positive elements of their childhood and upbringing and reject negative elements. Not only do they feel challenged by their inability to locate a setting that shares a similar prevailing ECEC philosophy, they are dissatisfied with what is offered at the current setting. They also feel inadequate as parents in providing the ECEC they deem to be satisfactory at home. I found that the feelings of being challenged, dissatisfied and inadequate were apparent in these parents.

By reference to the CATF, when Challengers face the disjuncture of their children entering formal ECEC settings for the first time, they are more resistant to change in their identities. They mostly feel that their beliefs, goals and understandings are challenged, and are more assertive in their quest to retain these. By reference to the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012), Challengers are more rule directed in their parenting. This means that the approach to parenting by Challengers is largely informed by societal and cultural influence. Challengers view their children's opinions, needs and interests as inferior to those of the family or collective. Therefore, unlike Acceptors and Negotiators, who involve their children in decision-making at different levels, Challengers do not engage their children in decision-making. As parent-child interactions are expressed through cultural roles, children learn to behave according to their position in the family hierarchy (Tuttle et al., 2012).

The reference of each category of parents to the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012) is not definitive, in that the highlighted parent-child orientation is the one that is most apparent but is not the only parent-child orientation in their parenting. For example, although Negotiators are more independence directed in their parenting, they may also exhibit elements of a rule directed parent-child orientation. As the categories of parents emerged at the end of the 12-month data collection period (6 months in Malaysia, followed by 6 months in Australia),

whether the parents remained in the same category or moved from one category to another could not be determined and was not the focus of this study.

A summary of each category of parents is presented in Table 3. In the following, I address findings in relation to each of these categories. Each category begins with a brief introduction to the category of parents. I then present a case study from each country to exemplify the category of parents. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection pre-empting the following chapter. As mentioned in Chapter 4, findings are presented in a narrative style, and names of all participants are replaced with pseudonyms.

Table 3.

Emerging Parent Categories

Characteristics	Acceptors	Negotiators	Challengers
Acceptance of prevailing ECEC philosophy of the systems that encompass the ECEC settings children attend	Accept and support	Accept but complement with elements of own philosophies of ECEC in the home setting	Do not readily accept
Satisfaction with children's ECEC experiences at the ECEC settings	Satisfied	Satisfied but incorporate home culture in their children's learning	Dissatisfied
Pedagogical practices of ECEC settings	Support and in some cases mirror at home	Incorporate but also share and negotiate with the ECEC settings to incorporate elements of their own ECEC	Inadequate and therefore do not support
Own ECEC experiences	Positive and relevant elements of own ECEC experiences are incorporated into children's ECEC experiences. Negative and irrelevant elements of own ECEC experiences would be omitted from children's ECEC experiences.		
Identity negotiation	More accepting of change in their identities	Mixture of being accepting and resisting of change in their identities	More resisting to change in their identities
Parent-child relational orientation	More relationship directed	More independence directed	More rule directed
Character	Enthusiastic, supportive and accepting	Negotiating, open to discussion	Feel challenged, inadequate and dissatisfied

Acceptors

From the analysis of data, only two families were identified as Acceptors. Coincidentally, both are represented by the mother and are both are working in the ECE field. The most apparent of the characteristics of the parents' identities is their identity as early childhood educators. Attached to their educator identity is the sense of responsibility to educate future generations. Also influenced by their educator identity is their mother identity, an identity that they also feel carries the responsibility of educating good children who will then contribute to the human capital and common good of the country. As both Acceptors work in the same setting that their children attend, their children learn to negotiate multiple identities themselves because their mothers also assume professional identities at the setting. In addition, working at the same setting that their children attend made it easier for the parents to continue the ECEC philosophies of the settings at home. Both parents also pointed out that, during their parenting, they negotiate other identities, such as those as a wife, a daughter, a daughter-in-law and a co-worker. Their daughter identity was especially highlighted, as they explained their responsibilities as daughters. The Acceptor in Kuala Lumpur feels that her responsibility as a daughter is to be filial to her parents by ensuring that her parenting reflects that which she experienced as a child. The Acceptor in Sydney feels that her responsibility as a daughter is to maintain a close relationship with her parents and to also develop a close bond between her parents and her daughter.

While Acceptors highlight the importance of their parents' teachings, they are also aware that their situations may differ to that of their own childhoods. As such, their parenting approaches reciprocate their children's changing thoughts by incorporating the ECEC philosophy embraced by the setting. However, they have much trust in the other educators because they both work at the same setting that their children attend. This also makes it easier to feel a sense of belonging, which in turn encourages communication that is open and honest.

Thus, their relationship with the educators becomes more meaningful, as they are viewed as a respected contributor to their children's development. They are also flexible in negotiating their multiple identities when facing the stress of their children beginning ECEC. They employ knowledge gathered from past experiences and combined with new information, adjusting their thinking to accommodate different values that are expected in different situations by different parties (e.g. family, society, the State). They negotiate and overcome the challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings by falling back on the guiding principles of their Confucian-informed upbringing, such as benevolence and filial piety. These parts form an aspect of their identities as daughters, implying the importance placed on the value of family. This importance of family is so strong that it is partly the reason for their children attending the same setting at which they work. Their belief in quality relationships is also reflected in their choice of setting, where they view educators as more important than the facilities of the setting.

The flexibility of Acceptors, in adapting when in a state of disjuncture, assists them to negotiate the meanings and boundaries of their multiple identities. Their open-mindedness to unfamiliar philosophies of ECEC appears to be a contributing factor to their practical and easy-going attitude towards their mother identity. Their movements between their multiple identities as mother, daughter, wife and daughter-in-law highlight the negotiation of different roles and responsibilities attached to these identities. Their willingness to negotiate the meanings and boundaries of their multiple identities suggests that it is easier for them to feel accepted, and thus empowered. Feeling accepted and empowered contributes to a positive sense of self-worth, which assists in building resilience towards adversity. This resilience towards adversity may be why Acceptors are more accepting of change. Their relationship directed approach to parenting is reflected in how they continually attune their parenting to reciprocate with their children. They also encourage their children to relate to others, and

often point to how being with the extended family helps in developing this. Another reflection of this approach to parenting is in the way they engage with their children. They engage as a person with needs and feelings, because they also want to develop a positive sense of self-worth in their children. For example, the Acceptor in Sydney encourages her child to express her feelings, and likewise, she expresses her own feelings to her child, but understands that the method of expression will evolve as her child grows.

I now share the story of these two families who exemplify characteristics of Acceptors. The first family is from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, while the second is from Sydney, Australia. I also present in the same format the following case studies on Negotiators and Challengers.

It's About Being Someone's Child: Case Study of Acceptor Family in Kuala Lumpur. I was introduced to Leanne through a friend. Leanne, 33 years of age, struck me as a friendly, out-going person, as she shared plenty of information even during this first meeting. She had been in the ECEC field for 15 years, and has a Foundation in ECE. Permission to observe her daughter, Alice, at her childcare centre was obtained. Alice was 3 years and 4 months when we were introduced.

It was on a warm and sunny afternoon when I met Leanne for the first time. We met at her childcare centre, which was located in one of the more established neighbourhoods right on the border of the city. The children were taking their afternoon nap, which allowed Leanne some time to talk to me in a quiet environment.

As I attended primary and secondary school in this small neighbourhood, I was aware that there were already a considerable number of existing childcare centres. This made me curious as to why she chose to operate her childcare centre at its current location. It turned out that she also attended secondary school in the area. Furthermore, her first working experience was at a well-known childcare centre up the road from her secondary school. When they

decided to close down, Leanne bought their business license and continued to operate but at different premises – her current location. Effectively, from an employee, she became an employer. On top of that, she became a mother:

I have many identities [laughs]. My identity... I'm not like a normal working parent, they work in an office, they work in various jobs... All the while I have spent most of the time in this education line, previously as a teacher, now a principal. Now I have my own children, so my identity... The first thing when I go out I'm not going to say I'm the principal. I'm a teacher only. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

I was a little surprised at her response, because I was expecting her to identify as a mother first. However, she placed more priority on her ECEC identity, suggesting the sense of responsibility she felt regarding educating future generations, something not exclusive to her own children:

When you bring a child into this world, you must teach it well... I always tell the parents, since you have chosen to send your child to our school⁶, we must take up the responsibility to look after your child. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

She felt that many parents neglect this responsibility, even outsourcing their parenting due to increasing financial needs that require many families to have double incomes:

Must teach them well. You bring them to this world, you must take up the responsibility to teach them well. Some parents stop doing it after some time, relying on others to do it, the reason being work, work, work. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

⁶ School is also referred to as childcare, kindergarten and preschool, as they are places where children receive education and care, as viewed by Malaysians.

Relationships. Leanne would rather consider herself an educator only and not a principal because she felt that she did not fit into the typical principal mould – serious, strict, a figure of authority:

Most of the people they think principal like, quite serious, like, quite serious type... So, like I will tell others that I am a kindergarten teacher... So... how shall I put it, most of the principals I have met are very serious... Ah, more serious, and strict. You look at them and you can tell these are no-nonsense kind of people. But I'm not like that... (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

Instead, she described herself as active and childish, and finds it difficult to put up a serious front. The other educators now working at her childcare centre used to also work with her at her previous workplace, and so she naturally continued to be their colleague:

It feels strange. I have been a teacher since so long ago, now my status... I won't introduce my teachers as my staff. Colleague. All on the same level. This is my principle. We have been teachers together for so many years... Friendship. We help each other and are not calculative... When you value this and they value that, then the atmosphere, the environment becomes a different one. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

Leanne's "different" environment is one that is supportive and based on reciprocity.

According to Silverstein et al. (2006), reciprocity is part of a relationship directed relationship, indicating that Leanne is a person who is relationship directed in her work environment, as reflected in her interactions with the parents of the children enrolled at her centre:

I also don't want the environment to have a gap. Like a gap between principal and educators or a gap between the school and the parents. I want it all-accommodating...

Even in school our relationship with parents is that of friends. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

Although Leanne had not formed a parent committee, she was delivering what was required of her by the fifth teaching and learning standard in the NPCS document (MoE, 2010), which denotes parental and local community involvement as “highly important in the delivery of early childhood education” (MoE, 2010, p. 22). Educators are highly encouraged to build strong relationships with families through various methods such as arranging frequent meetings with parents, with a minimum of two meetings in a year, involving parents in programmes and activities such as Sports Day, Family Day, Working Bee, excursions and parenting programmes, as well as building teaching and learning links from the ECEC setting to the home setting. Leanne does this by maintaining a friendship-like relationship with families. This was evident from the way she talked to parents when they came to take their children home. The content of those conversations did not only involve what the parents could do at home to help reinforce their children’s learning but also included organising brunch on the weekend or buying an extra packet of their favourite fruit snack. There was even one occasion where she did a favour for a parent who was stuck in traffic, by taking the child to the grandparents’ place, with no extra charge.

Safety and trust. Leanne imagined the children attending her childcare centre to be her own. When asked what were the main things she would look out for when selecting an ECEC setting for Alice, should she not be operating her own centre, she highlighted safety:

Safety is a huge responsibility. Not only your own children but also that of the other children. Since they entrust their children to me, I want to first, ensure their safety, secondly treat them like my own. I must protect them. Every teacher there must protect them. You must put that confidence into the parents. If the facilities are superb but the security is lacking, it presents a problem. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

Initially, I was confused as to why safety took precedence over adult-child relationships, but I realised later, that when the environment is safe, she is then able to wholeheartedly feel at ease and trust the centre. Hence, she included building the trust and confidence parents have in her and her team as part of her responsibility, implying that she placed priority on building relationships. Similar to how May (Acceptor in Sydney) had higher regard for people than facilities at an ECEC setting, Leanne placed importance on the culture and atmosphere that her team evoked:

When they come in they should feel the warmth of the place and not just “coming to school”. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

Good character. Leanne’s decision to prioritise emotional aspects of the ECEC she provided was influenced by the importance she placed on developing good character in her children, and also by her background as a professional in the ECEC field:

I’m not too particular on their academic attainment. I spend time observing them and what interests them and place more importance to developing them in their interest areas. But sometimes I control them, restrict them. Children learn things very fast – they pick up undesirable things from their friends... Maybe it’s my identity or to do with the work I do... I am more focused on their character... (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

When you teach a child it’s not teaching the child but you must read the child to understand the character more. Education is secondary, maybe later... (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

This focus on developing good character came from her childhood. Although not born in Kuala Lumpur, Leanne had moved to Kuala Lumpur with her family from an island 3 hours north of Kuala Lumpur when she was 4-years-old. The island is a famous tourist and fishing

destination with affordable and fresh seafood, as well as a laidback village lifestyle. She shared how industrious her parents were in finding a living for her older brother, older sister and herself – her mother operated a noodle stall while her father was a truck driver. She grew up helping her mother at the noodle stall after school, where she learnt the importance of diligence and perseverance. After returning home from work, her parents would help the children with school work.

Although her own ECEC experiences need not inform those now experienced by her children, she did incorporate aspects she deemed important and helpful in making her the person she is, even blatantly admitting it on more than one occasion:

The method of teaching children is the method my mother used to bring me up.

(Leanne, Interview 2, June 14, 2012).

One of these aspects is how hands-on and involved her parents were in her and her sibling's upbringing, regardless of how busy they were. As part of her relationship with Alice, Leanne wants to be hands-on with developing her character, scaffolding her so that she can take her place in society. One way she does this is by helping Alice develop some self-control:

Their discipline... I believe that... without the discipline even if they progressed well in their academic work they will still be affected... Without the discipline, if you let it go, let it be, they would not listen to you because their thinking then would be, "My mother don't care anyway, I'll do what I like." So we have to pick the time to let them express themselves and when to control them. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

Although she might not be able to put away the plates and bowls after her meal she's certainly able to tidy up her own toys. If she refuses she would not get to play the next time. She needs to be disciplined. I know my daughter. If you leave her alone she

would become very demanding, she's already getting that way. (Leanne, Interview 2, June 14, 2012)

The emphasis Leanne placed on developing autonomy and responsibility for self suggests that there is an independence directed (Tuttle et al., 2012) element in her parenting. I observed this as well, as Alice is mostly left to her own devices at home. She ate independently, she helped herself to the toilet, and drew on her own. On several informal outings, I even observed her helping her younger brother with his food, grabbing a baby chair for him and helping Leanne carry a bag or two. It also suggests that, in addition to delivering what was required of her by the fifth teaching and learning standard in the NPCS document (MoE, 2010), Leanne was also delivering what was required of her by the first teaching and learning standard.

The first teaching and learning standard of the NPCS document (MoE, 2010) denotes that ECEC educators are to plan their teaching and learning according to curriculum requirements and children's needs. ECEC educators can do so using several methods listed in the document. These methods include guiding and facilitating children's learning by identifying and responding to a diverse group of children, and encouraging them to think critically and creatively, as well as by modelling the process of critical and creative thinking (MoE, 2010, p. 21). Another method included in this list is to use a teaching and learning approach that supports the development of a community of children who are creative and open-minded, which can be achieved by displaying a positive attitude towards new ideas, providing opportunities for children to be involved in decision-making, and to make children responsible for their own learning (MoE, 2010, p. 21). In addition to linking the teaching and learning in the ECEC setting to the home setting (fifth teaching and learning standard), Leanne is also respecting Alice's agency and helping Alice to take responsibility over her own actions (first teaching and learning standard).

Part of building good character is also instilling good manners in her children. This was evident over dinner at her parents-in-law's place, where they normally dine and unwind before returning home. Leanne reminded Alice to acknowledge everyone first before eating, including the domestic helper:

Grandma, eat dinner. Mummy, eat dinner. Jiejie⁷, eat dinner. Kakak⁸, eat dinner.

Another part of building good character is also instilling filial piety, to view family as important:

Depending on what it is about, but if it is values, piety is most important. I have seen many cases. High achievers, professors, whoever, if you have no bond with your family what's the point? There is only one family, friends there are plenty. You may have very close friends but when in need it is always the family. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

Even though my parents spend their whole day working they would still find time with us on our books, albeit loaded with scolding and beating... we spend much time together as a family. It is this warmth that I would like to give to my children... Let them know the importance of a family. Don't let them get the idea that it's alright for a family to be dispersed, each to their own. (Leanne, Interview 3, July 12, 2012)

My parents' family was also this way, one generation to the next. I would not like to see this break with me, I want them to be close with the family. (Leanne, Interview 3, July 12, 2012)

⁷ *Jiejie* is Chinese for older sister or an older single female in general.

⁸ *Kakak* is the general term used to call domestic helpers in Malaysia, especially if they originate from Indonesia. *Kakak* literally means older sister in the Indonesian and Malay languages.

Leanne feels that it is part of her responsibility to maintain in her children the family practices previously passed on by her parents to her and her siblings, as cited above. The importance of family plays a big role in her identity, so much so that it was one of the contributing factors of having Alice attend her centre and not others:

Of course she'd attend my kindergarten, we could be together. (Leanne, Interview 3, July 12, 2012)

Leanne pointed out that there are benefits to being close to family, but that, benefits aside, it is more about her identity and responsibility as someone's daughter:

Close to the family...benefits to me... it's not really about the benefits. Able to discuss anything, being open, being filial – it's about being someone's child. (Leanne, Interview 3, July 12, 2012)

Negotiating multiple identities and overcoming challenges. In addition to being someone's daughter, Leanne had to negotiate her identities as Alice's mother and also Alice's educator. I observed Alice refer to Leanne as "Teacher Leanne" and not "Mum" while at the centre. This was Leanne's method of helping Alice learn that her mother has different identities when in different situations:

In the morning school hours I treat her as a student. I would not cuddle her and sweet talk her; if you do wrong I'd reprimand, even in the presence of other children. I delineate it clearly for myself and also for her... In the morning she is to call me "Teacher", "Teacher Leanne". Only at this hour or in the afternoon, after school when the children have gone, would she call me "Mum"... Let her draw the line, let her know. (Leanne, Interview 3, July 12, 2012)

It could also have been Leanne's method of overcoming her own disjuncture of having Alice as an enrolled student and not just her daughter. Being referred to formally as Teacher Leanne helps Leanne in drawing her own boundaries, in asserting her own identities according to the

different contexts that she and Alice are in. Leanne's way of using communication to negotiate the changing identities in herself and Alice is, according to the ICTC-CA (Y. Y. Kim, 2001), a way of adaptation to stress that is experienced.

Leanne took the effort to not roster herself to have contact with her daughter's group of children, another method used in overcoming the disjuncture she felt, although she did not admit to it:

When she first came I was rather anxious but I didn't make it apparent, no special effort was made for her. I left it to my teachers because I trust my teachers. I don't want to micro-manage. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

Nevertheless, it was evident that having Alice with her brings peace of mind because of the mutual affirmative valuation, respect and understanding that Leanne has with her team of educators. Such feelings are regarded as contributing factors towards positive group-based and person-based identities, according to the INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005):

... having her here with me, I trust my teachers more. I see their methods, the way they handle the children – I prefer a tougher teacher, a strict teacher. Teachers elsewhere, you do not know if they care for the children or they couldn't be bothered. (Leanne, Interview 2, June 14, 2012)

In addition, by having Alice with her at her centre also revealed what she felt is part of her identity and responsibility as a mother:

So if you look after your own child you will know her. (Leanne, Interview 2, June 14, 2012)

Becoming a parent. Leanne shares that there are added responsibilities after becoming a parent, again citing safety and security as things that she constantly thinks of:

When they go out to play, now that I'm a parent, I would constantly tell the children to be careful, look out for that... Some parents are not so alert but being in this line we

are more alert towards security matters. You are more aware of the pitfalls of the place. Like, at home when the child goes to the toilet, you are aware that the floor is slippery, you need to pay attention. Or if there are large pails and small pails in the house... (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

She admits that, because she is constantly on a lookout for her children, parenting, although interesting, has not only been a physically but also a mentally demanding experience:

Interesting! Challenging! [laughs] Challenging, complicated, tiring! [laughs] Hungry easily... It takes a lot of energy. Not just physically but also the mind, your psychology. It's very tiring. This only a mother can experience. Caring for children requires a lot of energy. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

So when the child is ill, the mother would be busiest. Sleep was start and stop. Those days when I was younger, I slept so soundly that I wouldn't awake even if I rolled off the bed! Now with even the slightest sound, they have a little bracelet with a bell, I'd be awake, have a look at them to make sure... Because you are not able to go to rest fully, it will affect your mental alertness. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

In addition, there is also the psychological stress she feels that stems from the difference between her parenting and her husband, Ray's. While Leanne is more relationship directed in her parenting, Ray is considered more rule and position directed in his parenting (Tuttle et al., 2012), and even in the way he interacts with Leanne. Leanne believes that, to Ray, Leanne and his children's needs are secondary to his, they are expected to be submissive and obedient towards him, and his interactions with them are largely expressed through culture roles:

His thinking is the traditional male's. I'm the man of the house, I control the situation, I make the decisions. Even if he realised his decision is wrong he would insist to proceed accordingly. (Leanne, Interview 3, July 12, 2012)

... Even though he is not home I still report to him. He makes the final decision. He is the decision maker... But essentially he is the decision maker. Very often not home but he wants to lord over most matters and wouldn't let me decide. (Leanne, Interview 3, July 12, 2012)

It appears that the cultural role important to Ray is as the one whose responsibility is to work, be the family's main income provider. According to Leanne, he perceives it to be the mother's responsibility to care for domestic responsibilities, such as caring for and educating the children:

My husband was slumped on the sofa watching TV oblivious to the two children running about behind him. He doesn't care about these things, that's why my job looking after them is so taxing. (Leanne, Interview 2, June 14, 2012)

He never asks about the children's homework. (Leanne, Interview 3, July 12, 2012)

While Leanne feels that she perceives herself as different before and after becoming a mother, she feels that Ray has not changed after becoming a father:

No difference really. Before the children my husband came back late. With the children he is equally late. My friend was right when she said that, to the husband, he has already done what he ought to do – you wanted marriage, I have married you, you wanted children, I have given you children. The rest is not my concern. I feel this: I'm off duty, you take care of the children. Does he care about the children? He has a responsibility. (Leanne, Interview 2, June 14, 2012)

Leanne feels that Ray's nonchalant attitude towards his family is the opposite of what she experienced as a child and what she would like her children to experience:

As for me, I want to spend as much time as possible with them because I feel 'love' is most important. I think 'time' and 'love' are most important. No matter how much you

spent to 'win' the child, this is, this is... because they won't appreciate it. They won't think that my father spent so much to buy this for me because he loved me. And in time they will place great importance on money. (Leanne, Interview 3, July 12, 2012)

Leanne constantly refers to her own upbringing throughout all three interviews, negotiating some of her past with her current situation. She may feel that her parenting is more traditional but is comparatively better than the more modern parenting:

I see much of this materialistic fulfilment for the children and not giving them the love that they need. Not truly feeling for the child but bribing them with material gifts. This is wrong. Call it traditional thinking, call it whatever, but in fact in some aspects a child brought up the traditional way is better. (Leanne, Interview 1, May 8, 2012)

Perhaps, Leanne's familiarity with and constant reference to her upbringing is her way of injecting some confidence into her own parenting and into herself. Unlike the Acceptor family in Sydney, whereby both parents, May and Mark provide each other support and comfort, Leanne reportedly does not have the support from Ray. Unlike Mark, Ray is not portrayed as a hands-on father. He does not interfere with the education and care of Alice and does not question the goings-on at the childcare centre she attends. This non-questioning reflects two possibilities: that Alice's daily education and care needs are not part of his responsibility as a father; or that he fully trusts Leanne and her team of educators.

It's Not About Where, Which Country, It's About You: Case Study of Acceptor Family in Sydney. It was several months after I posted a research invitation on one of the Malaysian groups on Facebook that May contacted me. She left a message, in which she introduced herself and that she fit the requirements to be a participant of my study. After acquiring permission to observe her daughter at the childcare centre she attended, a date was set for us to meet. It was a delightful first meeting, as we found out that, in addition to sharing the same home country, we also share the same interest in ECE. As per usual interview

protocol, I informed May that a handheld digital voice recorder would be used. For us to get to know each other better, I started by asking background questions that did not require deep thinking on May's part, also referred to as factual knowledge questions by Morse and Richards (2002).

As it turned out, at the time of this interview, May, a human resources professional returning as an early childhood educator, had just completed the first year of a 2-year postgraduate ECE course with an established university in Sydney. She had also been enjoying 1.5 years of full-time working experience in childcare centres. Her studies and work experience in ECE led me to imagine that there would be some common ground and vocabulary between us, and the content of our conversations would be more attuned to the issues related to the research compared to other participants. May enjoys working with children but only joined this field after she moved to Sydney. Prior to her move, she had been involved in talent management and leadership development training for over 10 years. She likened her early childhood studies to her days as a talent manager:

... It was an eye-opening experience. It's pretty much what I used to do, it's just this applies to children... you still have different scales, you train them, you develop their senses. Like it or not, adults have the same problems. (May, Interview 1, December 12, 2012)

Different countries, different systems. May, 35 years of age, has been a PR of Australia since 2004, but relocated to Singapore about 12 months later to join her husband, Mark, who was working in a bank. After 4 years in Singapore, they decided that they needed a change of lifestyle, and taking advantage of May's Australian PR status, moved to Sydney. At that time, she was pregnant with their first child, Maria. Born in Australia, Maria was 3 years and 5 months old when I was introduced to her. May noted that, while she was happy in Singapore with an established career and a good circle of friends, she agreed with Mark's

perception of how the move would provide a better life for their children, as they would have more family time:

... He has a very good job as well, he works in a bank... very established as well but I think because he's too established, a bit bored... and was really under stress. You can imagine he can't spend too much time with the children if he keep working there... that's why he said, you know what, give it a change because at the mid-30s he still can do it because when you hit 40, it will be a bit more tougher. (May, Interview 1, December 12, 2012)

In my own experience, this perception of moving to Australia to provide a better life for their children is similar to that of many other Malaysian immigrants in Australia. She added that Mark particularly did not like the education system in Singapore:

... If he could be a very typical Asian parent, I would say, he would probably stay in Singapore. But he like the way... the children [in Australia] like play, really let them do what they like, you know, it's about childhood, no stress at all, and um really learn through play. I think he really like the concept, that's why he really trusts them. (May, Interview 1, December 12, 2012)

Previous research note the education system in Singapore as stressful for learners due to its significant focus on testing and outcomes (e.g., Ebbeck & Chan, 2011; Zakaria, 2006). May acknowledged the different approaches to education and care in Asian and Western contexts:

... the concept of childcare is very different. Because of that, I told [him] that this is very different from the way we work [there]... don't get them to do counting like the Asians. They play a lot [here], it's a play-based thing. (May, Interview 1, December 12, 2012)

This difference in approach highlights the clear-cut dichotomy in the meanings attached to education and care that is common in many Asian cultures (e.g. Huntsinger & Jose,

2009; Tobin, 2011). Counting and other paper and pencil academic-type learning is considered education, whereas playing is not. May felt that the open and honest communication between family and setting, regarding this different way of education and care in Sydney, helped develop Mark's trust in the educators at the setting:

... Tell them the truth about what happens at home... very open, very er, consistent, like, we know what's going on almost every day... but when there is a problem, we deal with it right away, between the Centre and myself... there is a partnership. (May, Interview 2, May 13, 2013)

The parent-educator relationship becomes one that is based on trust when there is clear, honest and reciprocal communication, essential principles that guide early childhood practices underpinned by the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a). A partnership is then formed between the family and the setting, further developing the family's sense of being and belonging to the setting.

Negotiating multiple identities and overcoming challenges. For May, it was not a case of moving to a new country; it was moving to one she was familiar with, as her family had been living in Sydney since 2004. Mark, on the other hand, was a new immigrant. Despite having spent time living in several countries including New Zealand, Australia, Singapore and Malaysia, May found it more difficult than Mark to develop a sense of belonging. She does not consider herself a citizen of the world, because she is less adaptive to different cultures and lifestyles. She admitted that Mark is better at coping with change and cited her family's move to Sydney as an example:

He really... composed himself like, okay, I'm here, let's deal with it and... really pick things up. Like he started his own business very quickly... I'm the one, who at first, oh my God, it's so different! Where am I, what if I can't find a job, you know, what happens if my children... I don't want to be just a housewife because that's not what I

am you know. It was lots of... anxiety... but uh, he was very supportive. (May, Interview 1, December 12, 2012)

Here, May's identity is reflective of Rutherford's (1990) notion of identity: the juxtaposition of her travelling professional working days with her current days as a full-time mother, as well as part-time university student and childcare worker. It was also clear that, prior to the arrival of Maria, she experienced stress as she was negotiating the addition of new identities at that point in her life. She was overwhelmed by who she was to become (Rutherford, 1990), by this future continuous production (Hall, 1990) of her identity.

Despite experiencing this stress, I found that her education and work experience in the early childhood field assisted in her negotiation of identities. This was obvious on both occasions:

I'm telling myself because of my identity in the industry, I told myself that... I don't want to... like everything try to stop Maria [from] doing it but I want, we really want her to know, I want her to have a life... do what you really like, do what you're really interested but with restrictions, of course, with limitations. (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

... although many parents asked why I don't [enrol Maria in extra-curricular classes], especially when they know I'm trained in early childhood, they felt that I should. But it is because I am trained that I think it is not necessary. (May, Interview 2, May 13, 2013)

What she should and should not do as an early childhood educator helped shape her mother identity. The theoretical knowledge gained during her studies provided some structure to her identity negotiation. Her current ECEC experiences and those she experienced as a child further shaped the education and care beliefs and expectations for Maria in future:

... put Maria into a community [local] school where the parents know each other, headmaster knows each other and they really, they don't have very good facilities to be honest... but um they have a very lovely garden, they have a big playing compound, uh and the educators are really dedicated. Yeah... they do play-based as well. A lot of story-telling, uh, acting, drama... they try to find out their self-identity and this is what I want. (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

According to May, the manner in which she negotiated and overcame the challenges to her beliefs, goals and understandings at this stage of disjuncture was the opposite to that of Mark. May believed that Mark negotiated and overcame the newness of being an immigrant, a husband, a father, a son in a faraway land and a restaurateur, by embracing this newness, by being open to and supportive of the changes that were part of these new identities. He readily became a father who was hands-on and involved in his daughter's life by taking her camping, putting her to bed, changing her nappies and having fatherly conversations with her in the morning and at night. This is reflective of the *new father* ideal reported in the literature (e.g. Singleton, 2005; Thompson, Lee, & Adams, 2013), whereby the new father is expected to be caring, approachable and emotionally available to his children:

Yea, very hands-on father. He's very quiet though but... he really tries to get around. He tries to be balanced as well at different identities except he can't be a good son at the moment because... the parents are still in Malaysia... he really see Maria's growth... he took her first shower, first bath, uh I think except breastfeeding, he did everything. (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

May's cheerful, enthusiastic personality and past career masked her initial anxiety about her new identities as a first-time mother and as a person needing to re-enter the employment market after the birth of her child. But she gradually adapted, especially after hearing this phrase from her mother:

If I can do it, I don't know why you can't. I can't even speak a word of English and I survived it well. (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

Like Mark, she gradually became open to and felt more positive about the changes in her identity. May, and Mark, (as described by May), embraced the prevailing philosophy of the Australian ECEC system because of how they perceived their identities as parents:

You have to do it because it's here. So, norms, mindsets, the environment, they just influence your life and I think it affects the way that we brought up... the way we do things with the children, yeah. (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

May described a citizen of the world as a person who is adaptive and respectful of others:

I want her to know that you are not alone. You must know what's happening around you... To be a citizen of the world, there are many matters that would not be up to you, you must learn about everything. So if you are sensitive to your surroundings I feel there is much you can do... You must adapt. That means you must manage. You have your own personalities. You need to send your messages across at the same time you are able to adapt [to] what's happening around you. (May, Interview 2, May 13, 2013)

Parenting. May instilled the values of awareness to surroundings and empathy for others by maintaining Maria's connection with their extended family, to let Maria "not be alone". By so doing, not only is May building a strong support network for her family but also is assisting Maria to build resilience. While analysing May's interview contents, it gradually became apparent that May and Mark took into account their social context and were attuned to Maria's temperament and being. They were relationship directed (Tuttle et al., 2012) in their parenting, not only because they were attuned to Maria, but also because they encouraged Maria to attune to them and also to others. May feels that this is part of her role as a mother:

As a mum, taking care of her physical needs is expected. But I feel that as mum the most important is to fulfil her emotional needs. I believe in emotional development, strongly believe... I'm a mum, I'm not a superwoman. I have my difficulties. I tell her off when I'm really upset. I'd say "Maria, I'm upset. I don't want to talk about it right now, ok. I will try to talk about it later." And I will tell the truth... I want her to respect me in that way... as a mum you should let child understand what is happening around her. (May, Interview 2, May 13, 2013)

Here, May's perception and behaviour as a parent clearly reflect what Tuttle et al. (2012) refers to as a parent who engages as a person with needs and feelings with their children. The emphasis they place on connecting with other people and having a strong support network is also reflected in their choice of ECEC setting, where May points out that she values the people working there over the facilities:

I start picking her into where she goes currently where, uh, where the carers are beautiful. I think the carers are the key elements, the key learning elements to Maria, as well. So, I want to make sure that the people, like, okay, clean is one thing. Yeah, one thing is clean, but I don't fancy... they must have fancy toys... beautiful stuff, um, not really into me. I want the carer to be really dedicated. (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

At times, May, and Mark (as described by May), were also independence directed (Tuttle et al., 2012) in their parenting, especially because of Maria's growing vocabulary and independence. They appeared to place emphasis on developing Maria's autonomy and responsibility for self as a respected individual:

... sometimes you know like, if she wants to do certain things... like Maria doesn't speak baby language. We never speak baby language to her. I tell her very strict, "Maria, you only have two choices. You are getting only this or that. You cannot get

everything. I'm sorry but that's how it is". She'll look at me and okay, I'll pick one. Yeah, so sometimes in a way she's matured. She knows that she doesn't get everything... (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

May also revealed how the arrival of their second daughter, Kim, born just a month before my 2nd meeting with her, had seen Mark encourage Maria to express her opinions, thoughts and needs more in a more responsible manner. Reflective of the different roles a person holds according to status or hierarchy in the family, common in many collectivistic societies (Yip & Fuligni, 2002), Mark connected being more expressive and more responsible to Maria's upgraded status as an older sister:

Daddy would just say, "Don't cry at me like that. I don't want to see you cry like that. If you want anything, you talk to me." Ah, Dad do that a lot right now [laughs] (May, Interview 2, May 13, 2013)

I connect the arrival of Kim to the increased emphasis on developing Maria's autonomy and sense of self. This could also be why a local school that helps students develop their sense of self-identity appealed to May and Mark at this stage of their parenthood. A person with a sense of self is confident and has healthy self-esteem, and is therefore resilient and adaptive to various situations (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006).

Language. May also attributes a Malaysian person's multilingual ability to this adaptability. I felt her sense of pride as she associated being Malaysian with being multilingual:

I think that's one good thing about Malaysian. Because we have multiple languages and we can adapt to environments very well. We go anywhere, we're so down to earth like you know, and I want her to have that quality... my Malaysian customers and friends, because they came here like 20 years [but] their children don't speak Chinese

at all. And I said, what a pity, you know, like we all Malaysians are bilingual, multilingual. (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

What I thought were accidental decisions to juggle multiple identities turned out to be not so accidental. They were conscious decisions to highlight the culture and gender aspects of their social context as they negotiate identities:

Yes... I would need to cultivate her good character... I need to let her know that if your thoughts are bad and your character is bad... no good even if you have a good heart. I feel that this is important of a mother. Nowadays there would be much news about women. She's a daughter... it's difficult enough being a person, even more difficult being a female person... So need to make her understand that it is not easy being a woman. (May, Interview 2, May 13, 2013)

In addition to culture and gender, May and Mark also made the conscious decision to maintain their mother tongue, Mandarin, at home with Maria:

... that's the only thing I put her through [laughs] but the rest I don't... more purposeful in this matter, more purposeful in maintaining her mother tongue. (May, Interview 2, May 13, 2013)

Language maintenance was a component of their identity as Malaysian-Chinese, which they were adamant in passing on to Maria:

We were really... demanding like speak Chinese... we only speak Mandarin with her at home... I put Chinese CD in the car... watch Chinese cartoons... I make sure my parents speak to her in Chinese... Languages and her roots, her identity, we really like put her into that mindset. (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

According to May, other ways in which they maintain their native language included sharing bedtime stories in Mandarin and watching Korean television dramas dubbed in Mandarin. She

has also considered taking her to a Mandarin class when Maria is older, and has even once briefly toyed with the thought of taking Maria to Malaysia for a month of Mandarin lessons.

This aspect of their identity reflects the strong connection between language and cultural identity, which is why language is perhaps the most frequently cited contributor to cultural identity (e.g. Phinney et al., 2001; Voon & Pearson, 2011). It reminds them of their cultural heritage, of who they are and where they came from. Due to this strong wish for Maria to maintain her native language, I was expecting May and Mark to be insisting that Maria spoke in Mandarin with some of the educators at the childcare centre. I was surprised to find out that, instead of insisting, they communicated their expectation of the educators to encourage Maria to use the language only when she is happy to:

If she wanted to speak Chinese, encourage it, I'm fine with it... I'm not fussy that she has to write her name by 4-years-old, she has to count one to 20 by 5-years-old, I'm not very fussy with that. But I'm fussy about if she's happy to speak her own language, please encourage her. (May, Interview 2, May 13, 2013)

Own childhood experiences and upbringing. At this point of my data analysis, I realised that the language maintenance was not entirely for pragmatic reasons. I realised that, although they are Acceptors, language maintenance was a way in which they overcame and negotiated the disjuncture that they were experiencing as new parents. By retaining their native language as parents and maintaining this language in their children, they were upholding an aspect of their identity that seemingly was of great significance to them – the Malaysian-Chinese identity:

Uh, I don't want to lose the identity, to be honest... and we always tell her that her... parents from Malaysia... it's a self-identity. You'd have to have that... there's nothing to be ashamed of, you know. You know you are very different from the Australian. I think Australia is growing very multicultural... but what's wrong if you know where

your mum and dad come from... my root is still there... we are Chinese but they thought we are from China but we are not... So Malaysians is special. (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

This upholding falls into what is referred to as the assert-define stage in INT by Ting-Toomey (2005). The significance placed on a particular aspect of their identity is influenced by their own childhood experiences and upbringing (Tuttle et al., 2012). This builds on the beliefs, goals and understandings they have as parents of young children (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008), consequently influencing the ECEC decisions they make for their children. As such, May and Mark are proud of their Malaysian-Chinese identity, and this has influenced some of the ECEC decisions they have made for Maria; and in this case, an obvious decision was to maintain the Chinese language.

The influence of May and Marks' childhood experiences and upbringing were also reflected in how they are open to and accept the prevailing philosophy of the Australian ECEC system. For example, May's own ECEC experiences in a private school that used a British curriculum was very similar to the ECEC Maria is experiencing in Australia. Although the interactions they experienced with their immediate social context had influenced who they are as parents, their upbringing had more significant impact:

So it's not about where... no! It's not about where, which country, it's about you. It's about the parents' bringing up... I think it's about the way that you were bring up. But at the same time we were actually influenced by some of the cultures over here... (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

May and Mark's Malaysian-Chinese identity and Malaysian ECEC experiences appear to give them a sense of self-worth and confidence, almost a kind of reference point, when facing and overcoming challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings during a state of disjuncture. With this fixed element of their identity, they are able to open up their minds to new ideas,

such as the prevailing philosophy of the Australian ECEC system that they are unfamiliar with. They are able to not only be open to this new system, but also to understand and embrace it fully. Although May sounded like she was joking, I felt that there was a lot of truth in what she said:

He wasn't proud of Maria [both laugh] but he was really proud of the centre, the way they brought her up and he was really happy. You can see that... they sit there and eat by themselves, they go to the toilet, they do their toilet training, they sleep you know, and they came back, they tell you about what's happening. He likes that, yeah, so... I think he's an advocate for the local childcare system! [laughs] (May, Interview 1, December 18, 2012)

I began by introducing the Acceptors as parents who accept and support the prevailing philosophy of the systems that encompass the ECEC settings their children attend. The Acceptors are parents who reflect much satisfaction with the ECEC that their children are experiencing at the ECEC settings and I think this phrase from May sums up my introduction quite succinctly:

They have their own philosophies. If you want to put her there, you believe in them, you don't interfere, don't intervene, you know. (May, Interview 2, May 13, 2013)

In the following, I share my findings on Negotiators, who in many ways share similar ECEC philosophies with Acceptors. Although similar in philosophies, they are different in the way they realise these philosophies, in that there are some differences in the roles and responsibilities they attach to their identities.

Negotiators

Negotiators define characteristics of their multiple identities in various ways. While some Negotiators are able to clearly label their identities, some have a more descriptive self-

perception. Negotiators who clearly identify themselves do so by attaching their identities to their roles, for example, a father, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a beautician, a lecturer and so on. Negotiators who are more descriptive in identifying themselves attach their identities to the responsibilities and feelings evoked, such as provider of family, multitasker, worrier and nurturer, among others.

Negotiators meet, negotiate and overcome the challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings by viewing them objectively and referring to their own childhood. The influence of their childhood on their parenting approach is strong, in that they want to repeat their happy childhood memories with their children and leave out the not-so-happy ones. Most Negotiators do not want to emulate their parents' approach, but the influence is still evident, especially in their priorities in cultural maintenance, which they refer to when experiencing stress. To the best of their abilities, they provide for their children what they did not have during their childhood, to ensure that their children do not need experience their own feelings of neglect and unimportance. They also fall back on their inherent beliefs that parents have the responsibility to bring up children well.

Education and respect for other people are viewed as important aspects to pass on to their children, and thus are included as part of their responsibilities as parents. However, Negotiators also share their uncertainty when negotiating the challenges they face when their children begin ECEC, because of multiple approaches to parenting. Learning to be parents and the action of parenting occurs simultaneously, as they often use trial-and-error to understand not just their children but also themselves. As such, they overcome this uncertainty by encouraging their children to learn at their own pace, while their responsibilities as parents are to guide, and provide opportunities for optimal development. They are confident with their own judgements of settings, and therefore trust the educators at the settings to do their job. However, they offer at home what they think is missing from their

children's experience at the settings. It is not that they do not agree with the philosophies embraced by the settings. Instead, it is more that they accept and respect those philosophies but feel that it is also their own responsibility to also make visible at home their own philosophies that are not readily and completely visible at the settings.

Negotiators view their evolving identities as a natural process of change. To the best of their abilities, they negotiate and overcome issues as they emerge. Because they perceive it normal to change according to situation, their identities evolve accordingly: how much of their malleable identities are negotiated influences how their identities evolve. However, the clear ideas they have of the roles and responsibilities attached to their parent identity help them determine the goals, beliefs and understandings that they are willing to negotiate when deciding a setting for their children. These clear ideas also help Negotiators decide the goals, beliefs and understandings that they are relatively adamant about retaining in parenting.

The evolution of their identities is also influenced by their children. As shown in the case studies, they perceive that their approaches to parenting change according to the changes that occur in their children. The roles and responsibilities attached to their identities are thus also negotiated with their children, as their children's interests and abilities are taken into consideration. External factors, such as the opinions of other parents or the apparent developmental achievements of other children, can also influence Negotiators' self-perception of their evolving identities. The influence may not necessarily be negative. For example, comparisons with cousins may strengthen a parent's notion that every child develops differently and has a unique disposition. While Negotiators are mostly independence directed in their approach to parenting, they may also display some rule directed characteristics, especially when approaching Confucian-informed teachings. However, they are aware that their approach to parenting, although Confucian-informed, would have to be adapted

according to more current expectations of parents and children, and also according to the evolving identities of themselves and their children.

I now share the story of two families who exemplify characteristics that are representative of the majority of Negotiators. The family from Kuala Lumpur is represented by the father, while the family from Sydney is represented by the mother.

They Do Their Job, We Have Our Responsibility: Case Study of Negotiator

Family in Kuala Lumpur. Luo was 38-years-old when I first met him at his workplace, the newly-built campus of a private tertiary institution just over an hour's drive from the city. A lecturer in Mathematics and Science, he lectured at and was also the person-in-charge of the foundation programmes (pre-university) offered at this institution. His daughter, Jee Shuen, was 3.5-years-old at the time of the first meeting. In addition to Jee Shuen, he also had two younger sons, who were 1.5-years-old and 1.5-months-old. He is the youngest of three children, after a sister and a brother. He revealed that, even prior to the arrival of Jee Shuen, he spent time observing his older siblings' parenting practices and had sometimes sought their advice regarding certain matters, as he was anxious being a first-time father and hoped to overcome this state of disjuncture. After the arrival of Jee Shuen, he continued to actively seek the opinions of other more experienced parents, read widely, and often discussed parenting matters with his wife, Xin:

... whatever negative things that happened to other family I learn and then I avoid. I also read, read a lot of magazine, internet, article, everything... Of course I also talk around then er... I also check for a few more websites to verify it. After verified then I can conclude then I talk to my wife to change. We will make, make different arrangement. (Luo, Interview 3, July 10, 2012)

Different cities, different priorities. Originally from East Malaysia, Luo moved to Kuala Lumpur to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Physics at one of the

largest public universities in Malaysia. Also known as Malaysian Borneo, East Malaysia is separated from Peninsular Malaysia (or West Malaysia) by the South China Sea and consists of two states and one federal territory. Although East Malaysia is geographically larger and is richer in natural resources due to its oil and gas reserves, it is less populated and less developed than Peninsular Malaysia (Krimi et al., 2010; Marshall & Taylor, 2005). From our first conversation, I found out that he decided to stay on in Kuala Lumpur because his hometown was comparatively lacking in infrastructure and technology:

Big in terms of area... but it's not developed very well. In terms of facilities, in terms of infrastructure, will be something 10 years delay compared to Peninsular... and including mindset, interest and many other things... recently, something like year 2000 we have Internet. And then people, er, they don't have much entertainment... renting DVD and watching at home, no, no, they don't have that lifestyle yet. (Luo, Interview 1, May 15, 2012)

Luo maintained that this delay in the advancement of infrastructure and technology may have influenced the importance parents attach to educational attainments and expectations:

Education, most of the parents don't really take education as a very important issue because... even [if] they don't have any qualification they can earn a lot of money. They can get a job, they can get a civil life, and they are satisfied with that. They can do all kind of things but they are satisfied with what they have now. Some of them they just stay in the small villages... they are quite satisfied with that. (Luo, Interview 1, May 15, 2012)

During our conversations, Luo appeared to compare himself to others, suggesting that perhaps much of self-perception is influenced by where he situates himself in what Morris (1994) refers to as a web of relationships. He pointed out how other parents who have stayed behind in his hometown have different life goals and expectations, how they are not qualified, how

they view education, how they are happy with life in a small place. It was as though he was implying that he was unlike them: he moved away from his hometown, he chose bigger life goals and expectations, he chose to be a qualified person, he viewed education as important, and he chose to move to a more developed place. This reflects Assumption 8 of INT by Ting-Toomey (2005), whereby personal, and situational variability influence the meanings, interpretations and evaluations of identity. This means that Luo's beliefs and values influenced his self-perceived identities, his perceived identities of others, and how the interplay of these identities were reflected in his verbal and non-verbal communication.

Own childhood experiences and upbringing. Comparing self to others was also evident in Luo's reflection on his childhood. There was constant mention of his older siblings and, in particular, comparisons with his elder brother. He seemed to feel that, despite his differences to his brother's childhood achievements, his current situation is the same, if not better than that of his brother's:

I am a slow learner. My brother is a, is a, consider a genius, first, second in class kind of people. So I'm the 10th, 11th, 20th placed, it's not the top you know. But I can, I can get the degree, I can get the Master, I can be a lecturer. No big deal. Now, today, I look at my brother. I got Master, he got degree, he got family, I got family, I got nothing lose [out] you know. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

In many Asian societies, it is common for boys to have preferential treatment (Choi & Thomas, 2009; Das Gupta et al., 2003) and for relationships to be characterised by a Confucian-influenced hierarchical structure (Chao, 1994; Gao et al., 1996). Luo, being the youngest child, may have unknowingly revered his brother's academic achievements, family affection and perceived status in the family hierarchy. In addition, as the youngest child, Luo would have assumed the lowest, least powerful status in the family hierarchy. Such preferential treatment is even more likely for Luo's brother, who was not only the eldest son

but was also the one who excelled in his studies, an act that is deemed as bringing honour to the family by Chinese parents (Chao, 1994, 2000; Hartley & Maas, 1987; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). This preferential treatment is significant, as it highlights the interplay of power and relationship in the family. This interplay of power and relationship portrays the importance of the values of respect for figures of authority and hierarchy. According to Confucian teachings, these values play an important role in maintaining group harmony, where hierarchy and respect for elders are highly valued and constantly practiced values (Gao et al., 1996; Wu, 1996). According to Confucian teachings, it is vital for children to learn their place in the hierarchy, and to learn the roles and responsibilities attached to the different relationships they have with different people at any single given time (Morris, 1994). In Confucianism, this web of relationships helps children and adults alike learn their place in society and to maintain group harmony. This interplay of power and relationships is also reflective of Assumption 9 of INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005), as Luo learnt to appropriately manage his identities according to situation.

The preferential treatment was extended to Luo's childhood experience of inheriting hand-me-down toys:

The toys I got is the broken toys. And I will not allow this thing happen to my third kid. Because [my] parents have the mindset, "Buy this again. Isn't there one at home?" It's broken. "You can still play with it!" But I am willing to buy another one. I'm okay with it because I know that toy is very important... this is my method and this not happening to my parent. Because... my brother can choose his desired toys... When at home brother's is brother's cannot... touch... only see, "That's your brother's, don't touch." I don't get to play with it. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Luo decided not to replicate this experience with his children, which he felt may potentially lead to feeling neglected or unimportant. He shared an experience of how he felt unimportant when his siblings received watches from his parents while he did not:

Everything for my sister and brother most of the times and I don't have. Let's take for example, watch. At the moment they have watch [but] I don't know how to see time yet [so] don't have watch. But I feel that watch is very important... Now, even though my daughter doesn't know how to see time she knows there are two types of clock, digital and the minute hand. She knows this is clock, that is also clock [points at his watch and then at wall clock] ... So you ask me [if I am like] my parents, no, no. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Although parents within the same family tend to adopt a similar parenting style to previous generations, it has been found that mediating individual characteristics or significant later life experiences may result otherwise (Friesen et al., 2013). As Luo's own upbringing most likely formed a mental representation of himself and others, consequently influencing his own parenting, experiences such as the above-mentioned may have resulted in his reluctance to adopt a parenting style similar to that of his parents. One other experience he shared was his relationship with his father, one he described as rather distant and not the kind he wants to have with his children. This exemplifies how the quality of the parent-child relationship either largely accounts for or reduces the same parenting behaviours in following generations (Friesen et al., 2013). He shared that his father is a figure of authority whom he approached only when his school reports needed to be signed and because his father equated good grades to being knowledgeable and smart, Luo's self-proclaimed lacklustre academic performance suggested that he was not knowledgeable or smart in the eyes of his father. He disagreed with his father's definition of knowledge, where it was only considered knowledge through formal assessment methods:

Because we can only test the knowledge by black and white paper. But black and white paper is not the proper assessment for knowledge... Even though someone fails everything... it doesn't reflect the knowledge not there. Knowledge... we have to observe, talking to her like that day I talked to my daughter about the cow, the cat issue, she knows then I know she knows what is cat and [when] I talked [to] another kid... I know that kid don't know what is cat. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Parenting. Unlike his father, who sounded like the *traditional* or *stereotypical* uninvolved breadwinner father (as described by Cheah, Bayram Özdemir, & Leung, 2012; Daly, 1993; McGill, 2014; Thompson et al., 2013), Luo decided to be more involved in his children's lives. He felt that parenting is a shared responsibility, not one that falls solely on his wife's shoulders:

... of course there are many other family where mother is taking care of everything... father is just the person to take care of discipline... Um, but er, I try not to be that way. There are a lot of issue when I brought my son or daughter to the clinic... the nurse also ask me, "Where's the mother?"... their culture is like that. It's supposed to be mother. How come the father here, something wrong with the mother? They have that kind of mindset but er, I have to accept it. I can't change them... I just play my part. (Luo, Interview 3, July 10, 2012)

Although he believed that it is a social norm for mothers to be responsible for children's well-being, he was open to challenging that norm, reflecting the new father ideal reported in the literature (e.g. McGill, 2014; Singleton, 2005; Thompson et al., 2013). It is evident that Luo's childhood experiences have informed his parenting in that he tries not to emulate his father's approach. This desire is consistent with previous fatherhood research by Daly (1993), as well as Sriram and Navalkar (2012), who found generational differences in the roles and expectations attached to the father identity resulting from fathers who were deemed

inadequate role models. At times, it even sounded like he was compensating for his own childhood by employing a parenting approach that is different and “better” to that of his parents:

That could be the reason because they are like that [gestures right hand] so I'm like that [gestures left hand]. So, that would be reverse reaction, totally opposite. I don't want to be like that. So I do it better... (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

This contrast in parenting approach has also influenced the meaning he attached to learning and learners, who in this case are his children. This reciprocity reflects what Tuttle et al. (2012) argue as central in a parent-child relationship. A parent's approach is influenced by the child's and, in turn, the child's by the parent's. For Luo, instead of insisting that his children's learning occurs at the same pace as other children's, he felt that his role as a father is to encourage them to learn at their own pace:

Kids learn according to their schedule, no one can push, can only encourage, this is my concept... differentiate slow learner, learner and fast learner. Learner, learner, learner, it's a learner. Learning. Who cares how fast I learn, how slow they learn things... they learn things eventually, right? (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Formal ECEC. From the first meeting with Luo, he clearly justified his reasons for enrolling Jee Shuen in formal ECEC:

There're a lot of things that parents could not, er, kids, they're young, don't have knowledge and skill. The knowledge and skill need to come from someone else. It could come from parents, if not it could come from some other people... and in one way, in term of time, I'm unable to educate her myself because I'm working. Secondly, my position, her father, there [are] a lot of things that father could not teach a kid. The need to come to others, then kindergarten is a way, is a right way. (Luo, Interview 1, May 15, 2012)

Whether by design or accident, he was clearly pointing out his multiple identities: a person who does not have the knowledge and skills needed to be with young children, a first-hand father, a working parent, and a time-poor person. These multiple identities, combined with his beliefs, goals and understandings during this state of disjuncture, led him to the decision of formal ECEC for his daughter. On top of that, he differentiated education and care, that education occurs formally while care does not:

Yeah, first baby feel nervous and then don't know everything, look for kindergarten, look for babysitter, worried... And then compared... babysitter only takes care of food, sleep, bath... but when come to knowledge, practical activity, nothing. Talking also talking Cantonese, Hakka, it's not what I want. Three-years-old I think could learn very fast. So I have to send... to kindergarten, at least learn from formal person. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Additional discussion on the topic of learning during our third meeting further explained his decision on formal ECEC for Jee Shuen:

... teach her to talk, guide her to talk like, that is very important. Someone needs to tell the... this is "pen". If you tell her 10 times probably she can respond once... and at babysitter's side no sufficient input... there is someone taking care of her in terms of food [but] not the knowledge, not the development part. So we decided... it's time to send her to someone er, at least more professional in terms of giving knowledge. (Luo, Interview 3, July 10, 2012)

With the need for formal ECEC arising, he developed criteria to help him weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the ECEC settings he visited:

I want Jee Shuen to mix with Malay and Indian as well. I don't want her to only speak with Chinese. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

It needs to be clean and tidy. It reflects systematic. It reflects that the persons are professional, experienced, they have even qualification. Not the cert, I mean they have the skills, they have the knowledge and they're willing to work for kids because taking care of kids is very challenging, very hard... and when I go there, after talking to them, after interviewing them, a few questions see whether they can answer accordingly or not, then we know how much they can do. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

One of the many ECEC settings he approached was SA, a new ECEC setting located only a 7-minute drive away from his workplace. SA was housed in a three-storey commercial building, one empty lot away from a car workshop. It was easily noticed, as it had a large brightly-coloured signboard that faced one of the arterial roads of the suburb:

It's got to be convenient to my work place. And then it needs to be good. I don't want the best, I don't want the best. The best means everybody will send the kids there. I don't like. I like just something suitable, not... too big, not the type that [has] no student – there are, there are kindergarten that... no student. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Luo's desire for a setting that was not the best reflects his realisation of the difference between being idealistic and being pragmatic. From our conversations, it appeared as though he was able to negotiate his ECEC goals and philosophies when he pointed out that, ideally, SA did not meet all his requirements but pragmatically, he was able to accept what they offered. An example he cited was the impression SA gave parents of their level of safety and security:

Security, impression for the parents. It needs to be a door that safe, and then er, student unable to open it easily. I do have my own criteria but it's only ideal, very ideal one... (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

SA was owned by Leona (referred to at SA as Miss Ting) and was her newest after two were already operating in different suburbs. William, the appointed manager, helped supervise the overall operations of SA and was the person-in-charge when Leona was away at her other settings:

... if they are unable to answer the questions this is not what I want. Then I go there I talk to Mr. William... I do ask this kind of very challenging question. They are quite experienced they know how to handle... Miss Ting is very successful in this way. She welcome her, happily, and then she guide her around the whole places... after a while she's happy. Then at home I ask her, you want to go or not? Want, want, want. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Leona's reported warm welcome and professionalism suggest that children's well-being and sense of belonging to the setting were prioritised at SA. This led to Luo and Xin feeling assured and willing to trust in Leona and her team. A safe and responsible environment promotes trust and confidence because routines and stable relationships with adults and children alike can be formed (Fiese, 2002). These are important in building resilience and consequently, adaptability (Y. Y. Kim, 2005), reflecting the adaptation stage of the ICTC-CA (Y. Y. Kim, 2001). The resilience and, adaptability from routines and stable relationships also reflect Assumption 7 of INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005), where routine is needed to form identity stability, in turn promoting Assumption 10: feeling positively valued by the group despite different personal identities (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Jee Shuen's willingness to join SA was reinforced by Luo and Xin, as they encouraged her to share her day at the setting. Each day, they also revisit the written work she completed at SA to help her predict what may be learnt the next day. This appeared to be their way of incorporating routines and a sense of security:

I do research, in order to prepare a kid to go school is to talk... everything about the school. Let her talk. I ask a lot, "Today you eat anything, play anything? Got play with Wanteng or not? What colour Wanteng wear?" Everything I ask. And then my wife also asks. Sometimes she just tell... non-stop. Then she some kind of doing revision for the day and then she'll remember and then she'll [have] some kind of expectation... then she'll be very happy to go to school. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

One other routine that Luo strictly implemented was Jee Shuen's daily attendance at SA.

Along with the trust he had in SA, he carried out this routine confidently:

There are situations... like today you go to school it's a must. No matter how hard you cry, I'll put there, "Bye bye". She'll cry loudly. I will...let the teachers taking care of her. But normally, according to Mr. William, er, after I left... then within 5 minutes, within 5 minutes she'll stop. Well, not that worried lah. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Nevertheless, Luo revealed that, because Jee Shuen has a rather quiet and timid personality, he and his wife would from time to time wonder if she genuinely enjoys her time at SA:

Whether she able to handle or not? Whether if she face some problem she know how to look for help or not? Or anyone give her trouble or not? Then this one we need solve. (Luo, Interview 3, July 10, 2012)

They wondered but were not overly concerned with how her personality may affect her ability to learn at the same pace as other children. He particularly highlighted her writing skills:

She's the only person there unable to write, now, within her class... She'll do whatever nonsense... In terms of progression she's a bit delay compared... to others... in her age group, but I'll not be worried because this is kind of normal... within her class [her] standard [is] actually [the] best of what... they declare... as under-five...

So that one I'm not that worried. Wait until... and see how. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

On the contrary, the people who were more concerned were members of the extended family, who compared Jee Shuen's abilities to those of her same-aged cousins. While some parents may dislike the competitive feeling, Luo and Xin seemed to take it in their stride:

Compare to her cousins... a cousin, er... twelve days younger than her... can do so many things, beyond four... something like... five to six, in between. Kind of very, very smart... So her grandmother, aunty, uncle will compare. Then this one more stupid, could be some kind of malfunction somewhere. Then they advise the father [points to himself] to bring her to see some specialist. From time to time she will face this kind of problem, for sure. But as a parent we will... take it easily. We don't... be too serious... (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Learning. Due to Luo's childhood identity as a "slow learner", he appeared to empathise with his daughter's current situation, whereby she is similarly labelled due to her comparatively slower learning progress to that of her same-aged cousin. Luo's empathy is exhibited in the way he defines knowledge and learning. As mentioned previously, his definition is not limited to only the formally assessable category of knowledge and learning, he also includes knowledge and learning that is assessable using other informal ways. Informal ways of assessing learning is also advocated in the NPCCS document under the fourth assessment standard, which stipulates the use of assessment methods that are legitimate and authentic according to the child's development (MoE, 2010). Further elaboration made it apparent that it was neither the pace nor the extent of Jee Shuen's learning that was of importance to Luo. Instead, it was her ability to transfer the content of her learning, to apply her knowledge in different contexts:

My daughter know, cow. Picture of cow, the actual animal cow, is the cow, is the concept. But the cousin know video cow, picture cow, photo cow, desktop wallpaper cow, that cow. But actual animal, moo, it's supposed to be this tall, this big, got horn, very smelly, do you know that? ... So, I, I achieve that part, my daughter know this is cow... so she links everything already. So the knowledge-wise I not that worried. She's a slow learner but she did learn. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

The priority Luo has on Jee Shuen's ability to transfer learning is inconsistent with my observations of the children's learning experiences at SA where Jee Shuen spent much of her day seated at a table with a book laid open and a pencil in hand. Her educator spent all if not most of her time at the table with Jee Shuen and her group of five other children correcting their tracing of alphabets and numerals, as well as sight-recognising words off flash cards. Although the NPCS overtly does not recognise formal assessments and paper and pencil testing in ECE settings (MoE, 2010), SA, like many other settings, administer them as a way to better prepare children for the formal environment of primary school. This is common in Malaysia and in Singapore, as successful transition to primary school is a crucial deciding factor in ECEC setting selection, resulting in many settings adopting a more academic and structured approach to their ECEC goals and philosophies (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011; Mustafa & Azman, 2013).

The sharing of knowledge that occurs between Luo and Jee Shuen suggests that he knows of the mismatches in ECEC goals and philosophies and therefore complements Jee Shuen's learning at home using informal ways. Despite these and other previously mentioned mismatches in ECEC goals and philosophies, Luo's and Xin's conscious decision to enrol Jee Shuen at SA demonstrates their trust in the setting's teaching methods and care arrangements:

We have to trust them... of course we can't trust anyone 100%. We've got to observe, we've got to monitor, and then we keep on question my daughter on how is things

going on in school in case there's something happen which the school not willing to tell... Whenever we have doubt sometimes we do call, not that we want to do spot-check or whatever but we just need to know how they reply. Whether they're aware what happen, or they avoid to answer... (Luo, Interview 3, July 10, 2012)

They allowed the educators to carry out their responsibilities without much question:

But of course others, study what, learning what we seldom ask because we know things are going on we are not going to check for it. (Luo, Interview 3, July 10, 2012)

However, despite not approaching the educators at SA directly, Luo still attempts to find out whether they deliver what they promised at the time of enrolment. The method he uses to do so, by asking his daughter, was also mentioned during our second meeting:

That's what they promised. That's why every morning... every Monday I check, "Today did you go up there and play?" She said yes. Got swing, at least got swing. And then the floor soft type... This is what they promised. I, I keep on checking, Monday. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Luo realised that the education and care Jee Shuen received at home was incomplete, especially in terms of skills linked to literacy and numeracy:

They did guide, yah, they told me, then at home I did practice also but she's that type, she can't grasp it, because of finger muscle, because of lazy, because of not so serious yet, very playful, very hard to discipline in terms of hand. In school sitting down, follow instruction, that one no problem. Singing, dancing, no problem. When come to pencil and paper, ah, there's a problem. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

While Luo followed advice given by SA that related to literacy, he also requested SA to work with him on matters related to Jee Shuen's character-building. One such matter is her reportedly expressed dislike of educators who are of a different skin tone:

You have to expect other teachers to fetch you in and not pick. If you pick, pick forever. I not allow that. I talked to William, I talked to Miss Ting, please... take turn. And at home I talk to her... this is neighbour, my neighbour one is Malay, Indian, Chinese, everything is around. I have, you have to say hi. I don't care what [skin] colour is it. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

The importance Luo placed on building Jee Shuen's character reflected the importance he also placed on what he previously labelled as informal learning:

But I don't say the informal learning is not important, it is very important in terms of manners, discipline. Like we go home meeting Grandmother and then how to talk to Grandmother, how to greet people, that is informal. That is very important. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

It appears that instilling good manners and respect for elders was part of building Jee Shuen's good character. Chinese parents from several locations around the world (e.g. Singapore, New York, Hawaii) have been found to develop children's moral character such as good manners and respect for elders (Wu, 1996; Yim et al., 2013). This building of good character reflects the sense of responsibility he felt he has towards the younger generation (Leung, 1996), which Luo upheld as part of his identity as a parent. Building good character is also included as one of the core modules of the NPCS document, and is referred to as Moral Education (MoE, 2010). Values that form part of the Moral Education teaching scope include cooperation, fairness, honesty, respect for others, and courtesy. These values are not taught through formal lessons but are incorporated into daily routines.

Partnership. Due to the trust Luo had in SA, he was able to work in partnership with them in the best interests of Jee Shuen. He followed their suggestions and vice versa. He most likely felt that his thoughts were respected and therefore, Luo and Xin reciprocated by valuing and incorporating feedback in the home setting:

Of course they support... let's say we want to get rid of the pee in the pant issue, they give us feedback, which is what we request, "If you have anything let me know, anything let me know. I don't care negative positive let me know." They do so we can make decision, we can change, we can adjust based on their feedback. Without their feedback it's very hard for us to know the development, how's going on, many things, they do give us. (Luo, Interview 3, July 10, 2012)

Luo would try his best to carry out the suggestions SA provided, but was sometimes unable to for pragmatic reasons – his younger children:

But there are things that I am unable to do, because they said, I [should] let her play with plasticine, grab or anything, that's a good toys. At home I can't do that because the younger one take and eat plasticine. So I can't do that. So I have to think of something else. Some other methods, other toys. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Although Luo appeared to be working in partnership with SA, he did not view this relationship as a partnership:

We pay for it, they do their job, we [have] our responsibility. It's their responsibility to, to give feedback but sometimes they're too busy to do so. Er, sometimes it's more than... their job scope ... but some of them they're willing to do it... really help us a lot. In terms of partner, I don't think so. I don't really love that school... We pay, we send the kid there, we pay, they do the job, it solves our problem of no-one taking care of the kid. Then we got what I want, that's it, that's the relation... It's just a school, they're just doing their job. (Luo, Interview 3, July 10, 2012)

His definition of a partnership appeared to include the element of affection, an element he felt did not exist in the relationship he shared with SA. The relationship was one that was professional, where all parties involved had specific roles to play and responsibilities to fulfil.

Nevertheless, from the multiple conversations with Luo, it was evident that Jee Shuen's well-being and happiness mattered most. He was confident that his choice of ECEC setting was a good choice because it is reflected in Jee Shuen's willingness to attend SA:

She's not... worried to go to school, she's actually happy to go to school. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

Although there may be ECEC goals and philosophies that Luo does not share with SA, he has felt reassured of his choice of ECEC setting from the conversations he holds with Jee Shuen and also through his daily observations of SA:

She has two more [kindergartens] means she is very successful in this business... she got no... worry about student number, then she can do the job... this is what I trust... But... we are the first batch of students. Oh, how good is good I don't know but I go there, I can see some of the things are systematic, they have a lot of precaution like the floor mat, I... saw they change the mat. Some kindergartens never change forever... anything. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

I like most is the bed... assembly-able, cleanable, light carry-able, everything. That, that kind of bed, I know is very expensive and... the school willing to invest on that, that is a very good one... you can't find it everywhere... I like the bookshelf is well organised. And then they don't have a very clear separator for different kids, different group of kids... but... they won't disturb each other... (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

... that group, I can say loudly speaking out the words, selamat pagi⁹ and this kind of thing, this group is quietly doing the cutting and then doing some activity. Yup, the disruption is there but it's not really disrupting anything – this is what I like... If you

⁹ *Selamat pagi* is Malay for good morning.

separate them... then they won't be close... So basically they know each other. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

... there's no such thing as colour issue. My neighbour all are Indian. Even Indian girl, Malay girl, they play together. I don't think Jee Shuen will be racist or anything, no. When come to this one, I'm happy that we have Miss Prima, we have Miss Ting, another Malay lady, a kakak behind there. (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

It was evident that Luo placed much importance on exposing Jee Shuen to a diversity of ethnic groups, as this was mentioned several times during our last two meetings. From his gestures and facial expressions, it appeared imperative for Jee Shuen to be at an ECEC setting that comprised the main ethnic groups of Malaysia (Malay, Chinese, Indian), to assist her in learning to be a part of this multi-ethnic society:

This is Malaysia. I don't want to train her to avoid other race of people since young. This could, could lead to something negative, which is what I don't want. That is a place where she got the opportunity to meet with Malay, Indian and Chinese, then go for it. (Luo, Interview 3, July 10, 2012)

He felt that it is part of his responsibility to guide Jee Shuen in genuinely embracing multiculturalism. This sense of responsibility regarding educating future generations implies a notion of contributing to the country's human capital and consequently for a common good. This fits in with the Humanity Core of the NPCCS, which espouses the development of children's understand of self, the relationship between self and family, friends, community and nature, the culture and traditions of various ethnicities in Malaysia and subsequently, engaging in community activities and celebrations of various ethnicities (MoE, 2010). Luo's desire to work for a common good also exemplifies the cultural role of parents in educating their children (Downie et al., 2007; Wu, 1996). According to INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005), how

beliefs and values influence parents' thinking about their identities is reflected in the way they communicate. As such, Luo's belief that good character in children is cultivated, and not innate, is influenced by how he views his identities, including the roles and responsibilities attached to these.

Negotiating multiple identities and overcoming challenges. The belief that children's good character is cultivated is also evident when he thinks that there are decisions that he, as a father, has full authority over. This is an example of how, Luo, as a Negotiator, although more independence directed in his parenting, would sometimes orientate to being more rule directed, adapting according to situation:

Yes, the parents need to have er, we need to decide, we need to let the child know there are things she cannot change, even whatever, food, toys... (Luo, Interview 2, June 12, 2012)

While Luo constantly negotiates his identity boundaries and meanings according to Jee Shuen's responses, the fluidity of negotiating independence and rule directed parenting elements strengthens the notion of how identity consists of both fixed and malleable constructs, as also discussed by A. B. Anderson (2001). Luo's identities, including the roles and responsibilities attached to these, were clearly defined even from our first meeting:

I'm a teacher. I need to be example at least example for my students, for my other colleagues and then for the parents, for everything. For my kids as well. (Luo, Interview 1, May 15, 2012)

I'll first look at the person... there are so many types of people. They could be my neighbour, could be my colleague, could be my student, or maybe... just some sales person... then I'll tell them different things, tell them different things because [it will be] different topics we're talking about. (Luo, Interview 1, May 15, 2012)

He seems to define his multiple identities more as others perceive him to be, which would suggest that he is constantly doing something referred to as negotiating identity boundaries and meanings (Luke & Luke, 1999) according to the person he meets. This also clearly reflects the notion of identity as an ever-occurring responsive process of conceptualisation (Hall, 1990). From the three meetings with Luo, it became apparent that his problem-solving scientific background guided much of his identity negotiation:

No-one, study or study of parenting courses... no-one [gets] trained to be a parent. Just when they got kids they automatically upgrade to be parents... mean, mainly to deal with the kids... become a responsibility of a person who taking care of a kid... So, we just solve problem... I believe every parent who have kids they experiencing something similar to what I experienced. Nothing special. (Luo, Interview 1, May 15, 2012)

It appears that his states of disjuncture, such as being a first-time father, choosing informal and formal ECEC, as well as organising family routines, were problems needing solutions. They were nothing special and were simply problems that needed resolution. He even professed, that between he and Xin, he was the problem-solver, because she panics easily. Thus, he basically solved these problems after he analysed, researched and discussed each issue or disjuncture as they surfaced. An example was how he articulated the change in his self-perception, his identity, from someone without children to his identity as a parent:

... compared to I'm not a parent. I'm... very childish. I can't really manage my own time, I mess up a lot of things, cannot do a lot of things on time, not punctual also. But when come to as a parent I got no choice, I had to. And I did it and totally change. Like everyday 7 o'clock for 3 years. (Luo, Interview 1, May 15, 2012)

Of course I change my, I change my entertainment way and style, comparing from cinema to download and watch TV. [Laughs] Anytime, any moment I can pause, I can continue... (Luo, Interview 1, May 15, 2012)

The manner in which Luo articulated his change during this state of disjuncture very much reflected the assert-define-stress-adapt-change dynamic of the CATF. When viewed through the CATF lens, Luo's own comparison of himself before and after becoming a parent would be referred to as assert-and-define. Luo's unfamiliarity with being a first-time father needing to sort out ECEC matters and organise family routines would be referred to as stress. An effective way to manage this stress would have been to adapt and, for Luo, he did so by solving these problems systematically. In time, change would occur in that Luo would constantly negotiate his identities with the continuation of events. He continued to elaborate on how his own beliefs, goals and understandings evolved as he overcame the disjuncture he faced. This in turn influenced the manner in which he perceived himself and the many identities that he may portray to others:

There are so many things that I don't see, I don't know yet until me myself experiencing it... before I become a parent I have my expectation... But is it the same as what I have now? That's not the same... it's not supposed to be the same. Because for a person that, just like you are looking at me, you're looking at some others parent, but you yourself are not experience it yet... and you won't understand until you see it yourself... (Luo, Interview 1, May 15, 2012)

Luo's perception of his evolving identities is an example of the definition by Rutherford (1990) that describes identity as the combination of social, cultural and economic relations past and present, as well as traces of what it is to become. There are similarities between his perception of his evolving identities and those of Jia Ling, the Negotiator in Sydney, whose case study is presented in the next section of this chapter.

We Are Working Together Like, Maybe In Synergy: Case Study of Negotiator

Family in Sydney. It was a sunny weekday afternoon at an agreed time after lunch that I approached the last house at the end of a long driveway in one of the suburbs on the Lower North Shore of Sydney. It was the home of Jia Ling (33 years), and her family comprising her husband, Mitch and two children, Colin (3 years 10 months) and Angeline (almost 5 months old). Jia Ling and Mitch met at the same university in Sydney, where they were both doing their undergraduate degrees. Jia Ling graduated as a pharmacist while Mitch graduated as a lawyer. Coincidentally, they hail from the same city in East Malaysia. Although both are Chinese, Jia Ling is Cantonese while Mitch is Hakka. Both also belong to the G3 group of Chinese in Malaysia (see Chapter 3 for more details about G3). While Jia Ling spent all her schooling life in a national-type Malay school, Mitch spent the first-half of his schooling life in a national-type Chinese school.

Relocating to Sydney. As I walked on the brick path separating a gravel driveway from a grassy front lawn, Jia Ling saw me and waved from behind the window. She offered me something to drink and we settled in the living room, which was where all our following meetings took place. Jia Ling, the third of four children (three girls and one boy), had lived in Sydney since 1998. She chose to attend university in Sydney because this was where one of her two older sisters was already living:

... here I stayed with my sister. But coming here I had to learn everything, how to cook, how to do your own shopping. She really had to look after me so I felt as a 17-year-old, very useless... (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

It appears as though Jia Ling's experience of disjuncture began with her move to Sydney as a student from the familiar environment of home to one with which she was totally unfamiliar, despite her sister's presence. She had to overcome her stress of feeling "useless" by adapting to her situation and she did so by learning to be more independent:

You know, back home, like, a lot of things, like, I don't do like, you know, most Malaysians have maids [laughs]. So you don't... you don't do your own laundry. You know, don't do your own dishes. After drinking water, you can just leave the table and it will be clean, you know. Here it's not... it will pile up... the clothes, you have to clean, so everything I have to do myself here... So in a way, it makes you more independent... (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

The independence that she gradually developed would be what is referred to in the CATF as change. The change that occurred due to Jia Ling's adaptation to stress returned in a different form when she became a mother. According to her, experiencing the state of disjuncture of being a first-time mother proved to be difficult to overcome without the support of family:

Um, as a parent, it's hard without family around. Um, because I've never, you know, had any experience when I was younger with children. I've never babysat anyone, I've never looked after kids, I don't have like little cousins or... I have niece and nephew but they don't, they're not here so I hardly see them – once a year or maybe once every 2 years. So being a new mum, was quite mm, scary, yea. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

She did, however, receive support from other people and places:

Because I have no idea... so at first, it's like really scary... but the midwives at the hospital were really good. They showed me a lot of things... From the early childhood centre, got in touch with the mothers' group and we still keep in touch, even now. So, I think that helped, like having the support group. So, like, we're all going through the same thing so it's good to hear from each other and like advice each other... (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

She was, therefore, very thankful that her mother-in-law travelled from East Malaysia to be with her, to help her through the first few months after Colin's birth:

But I did have my mother-in-law here. 'Cause my mum couldn't help, 'cause she had backaches so she couldn't really help very much anyway. Yea. My mother-in-law came, which was really good. Got along really well with her. We get along really well. So, she stayed in my house and helped... for... a few months. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Becoming a parent. Even though, originally, Jia Ling maintained that it was difficult at first without family support, she sounded like she enjoyed the process of overcoming her disjuncture. She realised that she enjoyed the process of adapting to the change in her life. She also noticed that there were changes in the way she viewed the roles and responsibilities attached to being a mother after becoming a mother herself:

I had very sad ideas of myself like I thought, I'd finish pharmacy and get married and have kids eventually but I won't be the stay home mum... I will be like a career woman... for the longest time, that's all I thought of. So, my perception... a stay home mum... is like useless, you know like, they call it 黄脸婆 [huang lian po] and all that right? So, I've always had that misconception. And then when I became a mum myself I was like, no, it's actually, I really do enjoy staying at home, you know like, but I still like work so I have a balance of both. Now I look at mothers differently, you know. Before that it's like, shopping centres... like kids throwing tantrums on the floor, or shouting I'd be like... I'd give them the look – control your child – my child would never be like that [hand gesture]. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Previously, she referred to a housewife as a *huang lian po* or “yellow face wife”, a derogatory term used by Chinese to label a middle-aged married woman who has children and does not make a conscious effort to care for her outer appearance (P. S.-y. Ho, 2007). However, because she was experiencing motherhood herself, she began to empathise with the difficulties faced by other mothers, which gradually changed her negative perception of

housewives into a more positive one. The process of adapting to motherhood was a state of disjuncture that also made her redefine her identity as an individual. There were modifications made to her personal beliefs, goals and understandings, resulting in new roles and responsibilities attached to her self-perception:

Yeah, so in a way, I learn a lot about myself, as well. Like I underestimated myself... I think I learn a lot about myself being a mum actually because I always thought that like when I was pregnant with Colin, I felt really scared. I thought that I was going to be quite a bad mum, like incapable, no idea what I was doing but why am I getting into this, a lot of fears. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Whether I'm going to be a good mum or not you know, but, you learn on the job lah¹⁰. So in a way, that has been good um, I surprised myself, and then my husband, Mitch, is very hands-on, as well. So that helps, yeah. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Jia Ling's empowered self-perception was further strengthened by the help she received from Mitch, who, like Luo, the Negotiator father in Kuala Lumpur, sounded like what is described as a new father who is involved (McGill, 2014; Singleton, 2005; Thompson et al., 2013):

But for him, he's always been a very hands-on dad so he, he understands. Whereas the older generation, my mum was telling like older generation men they really don't do anything. It's even harder I think. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

She made comparisons between Mitch and her father, the latter sounding like the traditional father who lacked familial involvement (Thompson et al., 2013). As she reflected on her own

¹⁰ Lah is a local Malaysian expression adopted from the Malay and Chinese language used for either emphasis or reassurance and is a common characteristic of informal Malaysian- and Singaporean-English conversations (Preshous, 2001).

childhood, she realised that, without much assistance from her father, it must have been difficult for her mother to simultaneously work and care for four children. It made her appreciate her mother more. After becoming a mother herself, she felt that her relationship with her mother improved due to the empathy she later developed:

Like... I've changed, like I know her point, like her point of view like, how should I say... like I put myself in her shoes in a way... It was tough on her you know, full-time and four kids, no help. So, now that I am in this role I can understand, you know like, what she went through, so I'm also more understanding... Because of that, our relationship also got better. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

So, I guess more empathy for, yeah... it's very different. If, if someone has never been a parent, yeah, cannot see it through parents' eyes, so a lot of things, a lot of my perceptions changed, yeah. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Jia Ling recalled disliking her childhood. She compared her childhood to those of her friends and those portrayed in the mass media, which was strongly influenced by American popular culture. She felt that her childhood experiences made her feel that her parents were not “normal”:

I used to like, resent so much, you know like I am first in class, I told them, they are like, “So?”... I remembered that for so long... but at the same time I was striving even more to excel like, improve... because I wanted their approval so much... for them to say well done... I pushed myself even further... to excel even more. So yeah, good and bad but then I used to be like, why can't you be like normal parents who say like, you know, what we watch on American TV... (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Why are the parents so different? They give them hugs, how come I don't get hugged, you know. I don't get praised, you know. They'll tell you, oh yeah, wah¹¹, the standard in your school so bad? Things like that, you know [giggles]. So, same treatment okay, same treatment. That's the Asian style. Most, most of them. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

She expressed preference for her own interpretation of normal parents: parents who are expressive of their feelings and thoughts similar to American parents in a study by C. S. Cheung and Pomerantz (2011). These parents expressed their love towards their children by also cultivating their children's social and emotional adjustment, in addition to their academic adjustment. In contrast, C. S. Cheung and Pomerantz (2011) found that parents in China expressed their love towards their children by cultivating their academic adjustment, also referred to as *governing* to ensure that their children excel academically (Chao, 1994; Tobin et al., 1989). However, since becoming a mother, Jia Ling understood the reason her mother approached parenting the way she did. She came to realise that it was also out of love, tough love:

So all like first-time parents right, we don't have a manual like, okay, this is how you're supposed to be, you know, so for her, like my mum for instance, was also raised like that. That's all she knows! Tough love, you know. So, like, I had more understanding of that, yeah. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Due to her desire to be the "normal" parent of her childhood, she is keen not to replicate her parents' approach to parenting. However, she did not have an actual role model of a normal parent, only fictional role models. Hence, she doubted her parenting ability and was unsure if she would be able to realise her ideal normal parent definition:

¹¹ Wah is local Malaysian expression adopted from the Chinese language used to signify awe and amusement and is a common characteristic of informal Malaysian-English conversations (Chye & David, 2006).

I've never seen my parents hold hands or hug each other. They are not expressive so they don't tell you... good night, I love you, see you tomorrow. Nothing like that. So, I didn't want that. I wanted to show my children that I love them, that I want them to feel loved, to give them lots of hugs, lots of kisses so that they're more secure in that sense. So, it's different. So that's why it explains the fears that I had because I didn't know whether I would be able to do differently. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Although she now knows that the strictness her parents practiced was out of love, she pointed out that she did not feel the same while growing up. Instead, she felt oppressed, unappreciated and neglected. To overcome these feelings, she devoted even more effort to excelling at school to gain her parents' recognition and to bring honour to the family. She did not want her children to endure the same feelings, and therefore approaches parenting differently:

Yeah, the way I want to teach my... so I guess living away from them, in a way it's good because it allows me to be independent and create my own path rather than you know, living under the same roof and say this is how we've always done things, you know, like being influenced. Not that it's negative, just that it's different to what I want to, how I want to raise my children. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Jia Ling having her own ideas about raising her children is similar to the findings of research conducted in India with parents who attempted to create their own models of parenting (Sriram & Navalkar, 2012). This suggests that there is continuity and change in the expectations parents set for themselves. Subsequent meetings, with further sharing, exemplified some of the changes Jia Ling experienced since becoming a mother, such as more frequent communication between her parents and herself:

... even like I cook something for Colin, he's like it's the best meal ever, even though it's like you know, very simple meal but the way he said it, it really made me very

happy, you know. So I think as adults, I should do it more often. Even now, every now and then I would text them like, you know, "How are you? How's your health?"

Whereas before, mm... no. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Own childhood experiences and upbringing. Although Jia Ling wants to create her own parenting model or a parent identity that does not reflect her parents' one, her parenting is still influenced by her parents in that she tries not to emulate them:

I guess um, we model our own parents... as a child, I wasn't close to my parents. Now, we are closer, so when I became pregnant, I can only you know, think of, you know, how did my mother do this or how did my dad do this... I was afraid that I might, you know, do things that my mum did... you know, just that fear, that... so, you know, having my own children, I go, hang on, I don't have to actually do what my parents did. I could do, I can be my own parent, like, I can be... (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

However, she pointed out that there are values she deems worthy of maintaining, suggesting a conscious cultural maintenance effort on her part:

Yeah... I mean certain values we'll definitely pick on like, you know... like both parents they don't smoke so, even now... I still don't like the smell of it, yeah. So I try to like rule of base, no smoking... So certain things like that or, like, to be kind to people. Values, I would think that like most Asian parents would teach their children. Yeah... respect their elders. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

In addition, there are elements of her childhood that she would like to maintain in her children, such as her reported preference for the Asian way when it came to her relationship with her children:

Over here, it's like different, so I think, it's a very different culture. I want my kids to actually adopt the Asian way because I still want to have a good relationship with

them when... I mean, I don't expect them to stay with me, which is very sad but maybe close by... [laughs] (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Like oh, for them, they believe once you're 18 you live out away from the house. For Asians, I think no. The longer you stay at home, the better. But here it's like, oh, you're a loser man, you're still staying at home? It's like different, right? You're still staying at home with your parents? Like they look at you funny. Whereas back home, it's like different you know. What's wrong? Why you're not staying at home? (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Maintaining close relationships with family members, including members of the extended family, is common in societies that are characterised as collectivist (Triandis, 1994, 2001); and because Malaysia represents a culture that is collectivist (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009), maintaining close relationships with family members is a common practice. There are differences in the way individualism and collectivism influence parenting, in the way attitudes and values are transmitted from one generation to the next (Triandis, 1994, 2001), and this connection with family, especially the older generation, is deemed crucial in maintaining culture:

Yeah, relatives yea, is important yeah, and because of that you, I guess there's that identity that you can learn about the culture as well. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Yeah, it's good because my parents are getting older, they also want to see their grandchildren. Yeah. They grow up so fast... so both ways, both ways I want my children to see the grandparents, and also the aunties and uncles. That means my siblings. And also for my family to see them as well. To have interaction. And I also

believe like they can learn from them as well... Yea, the children will learn from them, the elders. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Another Asian attribute she showed preference for was the practice of using honorifics as a sign of respect:

I think Chinese we really, really emphasise on that... even now like if I see someone older, I will still... if Aussie, I won't call by first name, I will still call by Mister something something or if I see like a Chinese or Asian, I will still call Uncle something or still call something, 先生 [sin sang]¹². I feel a bit uncomfortable calling them by first name unless they keep telling me like... then okay, I'll call them... [Both chuckle] (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

It is evident that Jia Ling finds the roles and responsibilities attached to the parent and the child are different in her home country of Malaysia from those of her adopted country of Australia. Unlike her parents, who were raising a family in their own country, Jia Ling is raising Colin and Angeline as an immigrant. Being born in Australia, her children are first-generation Australian. Her reference to “over here”, “back home” and “Asian way” implies her observation of the differences in culture between her and her children. It also demonstrates the constant negotiation of her identities as a Malaysian-Chinese, a mother, and an Australian resident.

The comparisons she makes between both cultures show that there are fixed elements of her Malaysian-Chinese identity, which she asserts and is unwilling to negotiate. She also uses this comparison of cultures to negotiate her beliefs, goals and understandings, as the boundaries of her identities continually change according to situations at hand. Her identities evolve, as she redefines and adapts her group- and person-based identities to help overcome

¹²先生 (sin sang) is Cantonese for the honorific Mister.

the disjuncture she experiences, by incorporating what she deems are beneficial from both cultures:

Balance out. So, actually there's good in both cultures. I wouldn't say like it's completely not good but I'm taking maybe the good things from both. So I guess in terms of expressing, like, like, expressing my love for my children, I'm adopting the Western way like hugging them, praising them... but in terms of Asian like respecting, their manners and all that... visiting anyone's home it's a must to call either older brother or older sister or uncle, aunty, you know. It's a must to call. I will like, you know, make sure he says something. If he doesn't say, I will keep saying it. Even though my friend will say it's okay, it's okay, no, he has to say it. It's a must to call. That's how I was brought up, yeah. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

The comparisons Jia Ling makes between her own childhood and that of her children also imply that she has a clear definition of who she used to be and who she is now. When asked to describe what she thinks of herself during our first meeting, she did not need much time to ponder on her reply:

How would I describe myself? Okay, um, independent, uh, resourceful, um, organised, mm, happy, contented, uh, busy [laughs]. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Her self-description comprised more characteristics of her self-perceived identities, more of the feelings she felt as a person. During our second meeting, she revealed more of her self-perceived identities as she relates to others, such as her identities as a wife and a mother. She also included more definite roles and responsibilities that were attached to these identities and how her self-perception changed according to the importance she placed on those roles and responsibilities:

Well, I guess my own perception, which now has changed that at home, it feels like... financially useless like that lah. It's like using my husband's money but now... having

the second child like I find that no, that my role is actually not less than someone who goes to work, you know because my role is very important being a mother at home and giving the best care I can... and also teaching them plus doing other things like... running the household! Yeah! ... Now my perception actually changed already. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

She was also aware that who she is in the future will change according to the situation, especially in response to her children's identities:

... like early days you're more of like a caring... sort of like cleaning them up and all that, feeding them. But now because he could do that himself, it's more like teaching him the right way to do things. If he makes a mistake, explain to him so different. If he's not feeling happy you can talk to him like what's wrong... nurturer. Rather than early days it's like... a care provider rather than... now it's both I guess. Educator, nurturer, encourager... (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Jia Ling's self-perception of her evolving mother identity reflects the thoughts of the Malaysian-Chinese families in a study undertaken by Keshavarz and Baharudin (2009), who also changed their interactions with their children according to age:

Yeah, yeah! Has to evolve, like as you grow older, the way I talk to him also is a bit different. I can't be like do this, sit down, you know like, you can't imagine telling someone who is 20-years-old something like that, you know. It has to evolve. I have to evolve, yeah, accordingly to his stage of life as well. He can't be like 40 and I'm like you know, scolding him. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

The roles and responsibilities attached to her mother identity only became more apparent over time, learning from experience as Colin grew:

That's one of the things that I learnt. You know, Colin used to be terrified of the grass... Being the first child, oh, don't play with sand, it's dirty, don't go to the grass

because later have to clean up and everything so like, so messy. But because of that, he didn't like sand, he didn't like grass. It's our own fault, you know... We don't let him learn through his environment, so after that we changed. But now he loves sand so you can see that we have a sandpit outside, play in the garden, yeah. Part of the learning process for us as parents. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

She confessed that she engaged in much “trial-and-error” due to the lack of ideal parent role models, but instinctively she knew that developing Colin’s independence was part of her roles and responsibilities as his mother:

Trial-and-error, a bit clueless, don't know like what's next and just, just try to rush him like grow up grow up so that you can be more independent right? (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

The emphasis on independence is also reflected in how she has already started preparing Colin for formal school:

I'm teaching him how to make friends, how to introduce yourself. Make friends because it'd be different teachers. I've been telling him like, you won't see these teachers, like I would name the teachers. For instance, Yina. You won't see Yina at your big school and he would ask me why. Because she would stay at the little school. You're going to big school because you're big boy. So prepping him now. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Partnership. In contrast, Jia Ling did not prepare him as much for his enrolment at Little Kingfishers, the ECEC setting that he currently attends. Although Little Kingfishers is only a 5-minute drive away from her home, Jia Ling initially preferred a preschool that may offer more “formal” learning, such as early literacy experiences:

Initially I thought in preschool they would do more of this you see, like wording, like alphabet, phonics, mm, they're not allowed to. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

... I think for Colin he will benefit if he knows something before he enter school or else he might feel left out lah if he doesn't know anything... because the school he's going to... Eighty per cent Asian and being Asian I think most of them would have started doing like, lettering, alphabets, phonics and all that. So if he has zero knowledge when he goes to school I'm just worried that he might have the anxiety of not knowing anything?... I don't... expect him to be like, a prolific reader by the time he enters school... but for him to know something, you know? Then when he goes it's not as bad, at least, "Oh, I know that!", makes him a bit more confident. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

When she found out that all licensed formal ECEC settings are guided by the same national curriculum framework, she chose Little Kingfishers:

So for instance last focus week I said like I want him to do more lettering at childcare because I'm doing that at home, then they said okay, we'll try that. Then technically, not supposed to focus on... because it's apparently Department of Education says that you have to learn through play. So you cannot make them sit down and then like write "A". Okay, "B" [index finger traces out shape of letters]. Cannot. They say the Department doesn't allow them to do that. Hm, oh, okay... apparently, preschools are also not allowed to do that here. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

For them it's more important to be socially confident, interact with other people, obey instructions when they are at school. So I guess we already had a talk, I guess set my

expectations so I don't expect him to do that but at the same time I would love for him to do a little bit of that. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

Other than “formal” learning, she outlined the criteria that convinced her that Little Kingfishers shares her ECEC goals and philosophies. She started with the physical environment, as that is the most tangible criterion:

Um, whether they have uh, you know, the cleanliness. Whether the children looked happy [both laugh]. The food, what are they serving you know, the menu. Um, outdoor area was important as well. Yeah whether they have enough equipment outside, um, I didn't want those that's so close to the train station or so close to... even though this is next to the main road but it's quite okay. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

She liked Little Kingfishers in comparison to a different ECEC setting. She liked their cleanliness, the food they serve, their outdoor environment, their play equipment, and how the children looked happy being there. Her dislike for the other ECEC setting was amplified with an insect episode:

But there's some like it's quite dark, a lot of plants and I got bitten by mosquitoes when I was there. Oh, I don't want to leave my child here. You know just, yeah, just a few... (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

In addition to the physical environment, she pointed out the criterion of educators who are clearly passionate about their work with children:

Yup, it's just they gave me a good vibe when I went there to talk to the staff, look at other kids. And also the owners are there all the time. So I think that makes a difference. Um, and they always have the same staff. I haven't had anyone leave. Yeah. So, I mean, from time to time they have new faces but like students and all that but there's always the same staff in every room. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

She expressed much satisfaction for her choice of setting:

Just observing how they interact with other children, apart from Colin, when I'm picking him up or dropping him... I can tell that you know, they really care for the children. Like when they are talking about planning the curriculum, planning what they're going to do, this and that, they get excited when they pick up a new toy so, little things like these, makes me feel like, they care and I feel like my son is learning from them. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Feeling that they genuinely care for Colin gives Jia Ling the impression that he is in a positive, safe and secure environment that would help with his learning. She shared that Colin's attachment to his friends and his apparent increased independence also reinforces her confidence in Little Kingfishers being the right choice:

But he told me he misses school, he said. [In voice imitating Colin] "I miss my friends, can my friends come for my birthday party?" Because we celebrated his fourth birthday in KK. No, they're not flying over. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

And like clearing his table once he's finished his breakfast, lunch of dinner, 'cause they do that at childcare. Once they finish their afternoon tea or morning tea, they put the empty glass, they stack them up in the dirty section there, and then the plates they put it there [hand gesture to show separate sections]... Yeah... so he picked up good things from them, like, more independent lah. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

The increased independence that Little Kingfishers encouraged brought much pride to Jia Ling, as she explained the differences she noticed between him and his cousins in Malaysia:

They won't feed the children, they won't put the shoes and the socks. So they have to learn lah... Initially he'll come back and then [laughs] the socks are inside out, or the

pants are backwards, or his shoes are left became right, right became left, you know, like, but, which means I know that he did it himself so eventually got better at it... When we went back to Malaysia, er like other parents saw him, "Huh, he knows how to wear his shoes and socks? How old is he? He's only four." And he was feeding himself, ate himself. So they were like quite impressed with him lah... (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

There is continuity of the skills Colin learns from Little Kingfishers, as Jia Ling has the same expectations at home:

No, no running away. I want him to do it... like when I'm busy with Angeline I'll say, "Can you do it first and then I'll tend to you later?" and he'll say, "I can't do it". "Yes you can, you do it at little school" and then he's like, "Oh", nothing to say... Because they do everything themselves! (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

The continuity works both ways, where concepts practiced at home, such as courtesy and respect, are reinforced at Little Kingfishers, assisting Colin to internalise these concepts at a faster pace:

Yeah, like uh, he... we teach him all the time, you know, say no thank you, or say you're sorry, but he picked up the concept like quicker... (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

The reciprocity that appears to have emerged from Jia Ling's relationship with Little Kingfishers is indicative of mutual respect from both parties. Jia Ling feels like her opinions matter to Little Kingfishers' staff, that her mother identity is recognised. She particularly highlighted the implementation of a "Progress Week" at Little Kingfishers:

... like for instance they have Colin's, they call it Progress Week, so um in that week they will try to do different activities with him and they will ask me for my suggestions

like what you'd like him to do and all that. So they're always doing that. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

I like it because in a way it's getting me involved. Then I can also learn what he's been doing at school, talking to the teachers. So, by them having the Progress Week, I felt like my child is... they are giving attention to my child rather than just be a child-minding service. That they are actually, that they are interested in his learning. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

There is also a "Focus Week", which she likes because it shows that the setting is actively involving parents in the design of their program. She also feels that by doing so, there is consistency across home and Little Kingfishers:

The point of Focus Week is to voice any concerns or do you want them to focus on certain things that he likes doing. I guess, getting feedback from what we are doing at home so that they can do it, incorporate it at school as well, at day care. Um, yeah, I think that's the main point of that. So there's a consistency. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

In addition to implementing children's home experiences at the setting, Little Kingfishers also suggests to parents skills to practice with the children at home. This engages parents such as Jia Ling in continuing the skills learnt at Little Kingfishers:

[Nods] Yes, yeah... oh no, something that he has difficulty with like they were doing arts and craft and um he couldn't hold the pair of scissors... so the teacher just said, he's not very good at it, can you do more at home? [Nods] ... So he has improved, so at least like, speaking to teachers, at least I know what he needs to improve on at home that I can do so, I think it's very important. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

I'm always interested in like how Colin is doing there. Whether he's like, with other people, how does he interact with other kids, adults, and all that, you know? Whether there's something we need to work on at home, or, like positive things like they can see that there's progress like, compliments, constructive... [laughs], constructive feedback. [Laughs] (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

At home, Jia Ling reciprocates the efforts of Little Kingfishers because she perceives that learning begins at home and it is her responsibility as a mother to “educate” Colin:

Because I think learning starts from home as well. So I can't just say like oh, okay, I expect the day care to do this, or the preschool or kindergarten, or primary school or high school to do this, but at home actually I should be doing it as well. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

I don't expect them to like, teach them, teach him everything he knows, because I feel that it is also my responsibility as a parent to teach him and educate him, so we are working together. I don't see them, oh, I depend on them too much or they depend on me too much. We work together. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

Such partnership is included as one of the guiding principles of the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a), whereby parents are identified as the first and foremost educators of children (Spencer, 1983). A strong partnership between educators and parents is a characteristic of a high quality ECEC setting (DEEWR, 2009a). According to Jia Ling, this characteristic seems evident at Little Kingfishers:

Erm, I guess that, I hope like, we are working together like, maybe in synergy, like... because he spends like the whole day, 3 days a week at day care, I hope that, you know, that we like sort of partnering together? Like, the outcome would be so that my child would be... socially confident, you know, he's learning through play. Then I

hope to do that at home as well, like so I guess we're partnering when I am doing that.

(Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

A strong partnership by Jia Ling's definition, is one that enables parents to work together in synergy with staff at the setting and would help develop children who are confident and sociable. Her definition and speculated outcome of the partnership she shares with Little Kingfishers especially resonates with the fourth Learning Outcome in the EYLF, that children are confident and involved learners (DEEWR, 2009a), in that she collaborates with them to help develop Colin's dispositions for learning, such as confidence and cooperation, so that he knows how to resource his own learning through socialising with other people. Her partnering with Little Kingfishers implies that there is understanding, respect and mutual acknowledgement between them. Jia Ling felt that this partnering was fostered by the constant meaningful communication that occurs:

Then at least we can tell them what they've been doing at home... for instance... he wasn't interested in writing his name... but I wanted him to do it at school, so I told the teacher like, can you incorporate this. And then the teacher tried. He was not interested. Not interested at all. So he, she came back to me and said like, I've tried but he's not interested. Why don't we do something else? I was like, okay, she's tried... So I guess, it's the feedback, like learn at their own pace rather than forcing on them. So... if I haven't spoken to the teacher, I wouldn't, you know, know what he's like at school. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

So, communication lah, I think that's good. So at least I know that they are actually focusing on him, things he need to work on, and then any concerns they have or any concerns I have at least will tell each other... So at least there's consistency. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

This communication between Jia Ling and Little Kingfishers has also introduced Jia Ling to a new method of learning, learning through play. Jia Ling had to redefine her understanding of learning, as she negotiated her own experience of learning with the current experience of her children:

I was like, how do you learn through play? I remember speaking to the day care teacher like, she showed me like, what toys they have and what they do there, like what activities so I was, like, oh okay... like growing up with a babysitter and a maid, I don't remember doing all these things... that was like a new world to me and then I looked online, what other games you can play, what other activities you can do with your child that helps them to learn and play at the same time. So I was like... that's very interesting, yeah. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

I find it quite interesting. Not heard of that term until he started day care but then they showed me what they were doing like some games they have... makes it fun rather than, "Sit down! Do your stencil." (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

Once they explained to me, so I said okay. So I incorporated that at home as well. Tried to make it fun lah, you know, like when we were driving, or when we were going to the super mart I'll say like, "Can you help me to pick three apples?" you know, like, red apples, green apples, like that. Learning through that way lah. While driving, "Oh, what does that sign say? What does that octagon sign say?" Something like that. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

Such understanding, respect and mutual affirmative valuation are important for developing flexibility in identity negotiation (Ting-Toomey, 2005). The flexibility is apparent in the way Jia Ling negotiates her understanding of learning, in that she accepts the new concept of

learning through play and further investigates this concept to better incorporate it at home with her children. Her actions of investigating by questioning educators and searching for information from other sources, such as online media, again reflects that there is continuity and change in the expectations parents set for themselves (Sriram & Navalkar, 2012).

Education. The reason Jia Ling was unfamiliar with the concept of learning through play is strongly influenced by her childhood. Jia Ling was more familiar with the concept of learning through formal means, such as studying, as a means to obtain education:

So to me, even though I want to let him learn, be a child and learn through play, but I would also like him to, you know, learn his alphabets and numbers and all that.

Because, I guess, that's how I was brought up. Like, my dad always says that we need to have formal education, we need to have a paper, you know, that paper is very important. [Both laughs] So from young we were like, sort of, drilled in to our mindset, that it's important. Education is very important, yeah... (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

It's very important to get education. Even from young we were like, you know, drilled... like education is very important, education is very important. So, that's what, there's where it came from. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Due to the influence of Confucian teachings (Bui & Turnbull, 2003; Yim et al., 2013), education is a strongly maintained and highly upheld element of the Chinese culture (Chao, 1994; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Voon & Pearson, 2011; Wu, 1996). For Jia Ling, in addition to the formal type of education that she is familiar with, education also includes appropriate behaviour when socialising, good manners and doing the right thing:

Education not just necessarily like alphabets and all that but education in terms of like, on like social etiquette, like you know what's the appropriate behaviour and

what's not, like socially. Like what is uh, what can you do in public and what can't you do, what can you say, I think that's part of the education as well. Manners, so, I think both, not just watching over him but actually teaching him to right thing to do, what's not right to do, I think that's important also. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Respect for elders is also an important appropriate behaviour according to Jia Ling:

Important [nods]. Respect, yeah. Or else I find that if I don't do that then... living here there is no, like, I can't help it, they will, when they go to school, they have like Aussie friends and all that. Eventually, they will pick up the Western culture... But, as much as I can help it, then, I will instil the Asian values, yeah. (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

The Chinese way, Chinese values... one very good example. [Laughs] When... my son goes to anyone's house, always expects him, and he knows it, regardless whether you're Asian or non-Asian, you know, Indian whatever, hello Uncle, Auntie so-and-so, always... you know? This is how I was brought up, right? So I expect my kids to do the same... in terms of Chinese values, you know, respect elderly, I think I have done as much as I could. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

This mirrors the importance of perfecting morality in Confucianism. According to Confucian teachings, education is not solely an action of attaining formal education. Education includes the perfecting of morality through cultural values, such as benevolence and courteousness. Benevolence is the value that promotes the learning of interacting with others, while courteousness is the value that characterises the appropriate behaviour for these interactions (Yim et al., 2013).

Although Jia Ling expressed keenness to not emulate her parents' approach to parenting, the importance she placed on education implied a direct influence from her upbringing. The importance of education was repeatedly highlighted throughout our meetings, suggesting that it is a relatively permanent part of her identity. It is evident that, while she negotiates the meanings attached to how education is experienced, the attainment of education is not negotiable. Since she is unable to attain the formal education that she desires, she complements, at home, the learning through play that occurs at Little Kingfishers. This is because the roles and responsibilities that she attaches to her mother identity include ensuring that her children attain the best education possible. Thus, to the best of her abilities, she provides for Colin and Angeline what she deems is the best ECEC, as a tool to create better life opportunities, to be the best possible versions of themselves:

Um, because other opportunities... I don't want them to bum around [both laugh]. I want them to have a goal in life, because I think if you don't have a goal... you don't have like a target to look forward to, then there's no, no focus... I would want them... to take hold of every opportunity to be the best they can be in anything, whether it's... the exams or in sports or in music you know. If they are given the opportunity, then I think they should take advantage of that and be the best they could be, yeah, and I'm there to support them, and help them the best I can, yeah. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

She feels that it is her responsibility to help develop the next generation into individuals with a sense of responsibility and who are respectful of other people, social justice and the environment:

Um, someone who looks after, I guess who is engaged in the community, local community, um... try to do the right thing. I guess obey the laws and regulation and look after the environment. Um, look after our next generation leaders, mm... educate

them the best we can to look after the world around them. And try to be at peace with people from different cultures, different upbringing, different socio-economic status. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Yeah, social commitment and also... I guess I want to be proud of them. Yea, it's my pride and joy so I want to... raise children who have you know, strong moral values, who are kind to other people, who are generous... I mean, the reason why you bring them into the world is to teach them so that they'll be good citizens of the world. Good to other people and not be criminals or do things that are against the law. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Jia Ling's sense of responsibility regarding educating future generations implies a notion of contributing to the country's human capital for the common good. The need to account for how different cultures attach different meanings to education is highlighted, as the quality of ECEC is influenced by these meanings. It is important to consider these differences, as it has been found that attendance in high quality formal ECEC settings produces positive long-term effects (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Bauchmüller et al., 2014). This sense of responsibility is also related to the notion of family honour, because the cultivation of good behaviour and provision of good education is regarded a collective effort (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). Similar to a group of Chinese-American mothers (Chao, 1994), Jia Ling felt that children's good behaviour and academic achievement reflect good parenting and would bring honour to the family:

You want to be proud of them, like you want to leave a legacy, I suppose, that when people look at my children I want to say like, you are who you are because, hopefully, that's because of... your parents [purse lips] ... Rather than you know like, oh, no

family upbringing... That would be like, my worst fear you know, to you know, for them to be like that. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

She seems to assess her parenting by reference to the perceptions of her children by others, and also by comparing her children to other children:

It does feel like pressure... But then I look at it and I said oh, he's very well-behaved. People have commented he's very obedient... we had an incident where the cousin came... when you compare the two, one... must win... would not give up anything to anyone... my son, will listen lah. If I see something not right, then I'll like, sternly like, tell him? Then he'll like, okay, listen to Mummy. The other one would like, wail and cry. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

Previous research has found that good parenting is reflected in not only how well children perform at school (Chao, 1994) but also how well-behaved they are, or how much listening-centredness is exhibited (Gao et al., 1996). Jia Ling's perception of good parenting aligns with these notions:

They both want to play at the spot where someone was resting. I said, "No, you've the entire place for you to play this is, this person's resting you must be considerate." Colin just listened. The other one "Whoa!" started crying, so sensitive. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

According to Gao et al. (1996), good children in a Chinese family are children who show listening-centredness, as in children who respect and do not challenge their elders. This is due to the cultural belief that forthrightness is a sign of disrespect. This is even more so when it happens in public, because public disagreement is deemed a disgraceful act or an act of losing face that dishonours the family:

So, like I was thinking: I don't think I was doing that bad a job! At least my son is... I teach him to be considerate about other people, the world doesn't revolve around

you... I know you want to play there but... there is the whole place for you to play... I was just trying to like reason with a 4-year-old and a 6-year-old. My son will understand. He wants his way but if you tell him he will listen. Then okay, play somewhere else. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

Negotiating multiple identities and overcoming challenges. The negotiation of identity requires adjusting boundaries and meanings (Luke & Luke, 1999). Jia Ling's mother identity appears also to be guided by this, as she adjusts her boundaries and meanings according to the expectation of others:

I think more, more pressure from externally. Many questions like, are you doing enough? I'm already like, trying my best. So I have to sort of like, think, reflect lah like, maybe I should be doing this differently. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

The expectations of others, and also her own, guide Jia Ling's ECEC beliefs, goals and understandings. She admitted that she has high expectations, and attributes this to her Asian identity:

Yeah, I think I have high expectations. Yea, I have. And I know that the school he goes to is also, it's like 80% Asians, right? Asians are well, normally... very kiasu in terms of academic, music, you know everything lah! (Jia Ling, Interview 2, January 18, 2013)

Kiasu is a Hokkien expression that means *fear of losing out*. It refers to a person's "innate unwillingness to be disadvantaged or always wanting to be ahead of others" (J. T. S. Ho, Ang, Loh, & Ng, 1998, p. 363). This term has the connotation of over-competitiveness (Bach & Christensen, 2016) and mothers who are identified as *kiasu* are often likened to Chua's (2011) *tiger mother*. Jia Ling's demeanour and conversation led me to believe that she is proud to be associated with that connotation, and appears to gain much affirmation from it. Her identification with being Malaysian-Chinese is apparently a fixed component of her identity

negotiation. It is an identity with boundaries and meanings (Luke & Luke, 1999) that she asserts with conviction:

So even now, if you ask me where are you from, I would say I'm from Malaysia. Malaysian-Chinese... Because I'm proud to be Chinese... (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Her identification with being Malaysian-Chinese is marked by using language as a cultural maintenance tool. Language, a contributor to ethnic and cultural identity, is a widely used cultural maintenance tool by immigrants of various ethnicities around the world (Pattnaik, 2005; Phinney et al., 2001), including Chinese immigrants (Voon & Pearson, 2011; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). She appears to be aware of the contributing role of language to identity definition, as she clearly linked language to identity:

So I think like, and also I feel that, because they live in Australia, if they don't learn Chinese, I'm afraid that you know, they... not lose their identity but be like more [grins] Aussie... [both laugh]. Like be a banana¹³, you know. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

I think, yea... because if he doesn't know any Chinese and you tell him he's Chinese he'll say, I'm not... is it because I have black hair? Or I have this skin tone? You know. But if he has the language at least I think he can relate more than someone who can't. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

Jia Ling's use of Mandarin and Cantonese as part of her children's socialisation is due to the importance she places on their Chinese identity and their multilingual ability:

¹³ *Banana* refers to a person living in a Western culture who has lost touch with the cultural identity of his or her parents. Primarily used by East or Southeast Asians, a banana is used because of the fruit's colour, which is symbolic of a person with such characteristics –“yellow on the outside, white on the inside” (Ang, 2005, p. 200).

So now because of speaking to her [Angeline] in Cantonese, Colin would ask, “What are you saying to her?” Because of that he’s also picking up a few words... To me it’s important. If he can have the chance to be bilingual or something, then why not? I think it’s an advantage. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

He’s asked me, why must I learn Chinese, Colin. “Why I need to learn Chinese?” He’s already like, asking already, why? ‘Cause everyone at school speak to him in English. I said, “‘Cause you’re Chinese... and you’re going to this school... there’ll be a lot of people who speak Mandarin and Cantonese, you need to know what they’re saying.” (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

As she has found her multilingual ability to be advantageous, she would like to develop this ability in her children. She finds it especially beneficial when communicating with people from non-English speaking backgrounds at work, thus inferring the same possibility for her children in future:

... for instance from my experience... they always hire Asians... so there’s just more opportunities rather than you know like, we’d have like Chinese customers come in and they see someone Asian or someone who looks like Chinese, they go and approach them and start speaking in Cantonese and then the, my friend would be like, she was brought up here, ABC¹⁴, she’d be like, “Oh, I don’t speak Chinese. Wait, I’ll get Jia Ling for you.” (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

In addition, being multilingual would also provide broader work prospects, with increased employment opportunities in other countries:

Yea, be able to communicate... Like you don’t have to just speak to your Caucasian friends but have the extra language to like maybe work in Hong Kong next time, or in

¹⁴ ABC is acronym for Australian-born Chinese.

China or just communicating with like... and to you know, learn Chinese at school then, hopefully they will be more tolerant of others and if they move to Hong Kong or China or wherever to work then at least they can have that language skills to go there to work. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

Although she previously expressed much dissatisfaction with her father's approach to parenting, his influence was apparent regarding to language. She specifically recalls how he once jokingly theorised that their multilingual ability allows them to think better according to different situations:

My dad has a very interesting what you call, theory. He said that, you know, you count yi, er, san (Mandarin for one, two, three) right so quick right, I can think so quickly. In Malay... satu, dua, tiga, empat (Malay for one, two, three, four) [laughs] like so long the words, like it takes twice as long to do... That's how I learnt... how he taught me lah. So when I count money or anything like that I still count in Chinese... I think in English but when I count it's in Chinese. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

This is an example of how families share literacy conventions and “children bring their individual dispositions and differences to understand and construct meaning” (Diaz & Harvey, 2007, p. 208). Due to her multilingual ability, Jia Ling is able to navigate various linguistic and cultural fields to construct her own understandings and meanings of herself and also of her surroundings, supporting the notion that language is used as a problem-solving strategy (Diaz & Harvey, 2007). Being a multilingual person helps with identity negotiation because of the movement across cultures.

Language. Jia Ling noted that her language maintenance efforts brought about challenges for her to overcome, as she distinguished her children's current Australian environment from her own Malaysian environment:

In Malaysia because we're... exposed to different dialects, languages right, so easy to learn. Here, tsk, can't. If I speak to them in Cantonese, they'll probably be speaking to me in Cantonese... but don't practice with friends. But the public school here is good because... Eighty per cent of the students are from non-English speaking background. A lot from China, so it will be good because all of them will learn Mandarin. (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

So I guess... I feel bad being, being Malaysian living overseas, I want them...when I compare my childhood, I can speak all these dialects but I also have to remember... they are not in Malaysia, they're here, you know. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

[Growls] You think I don't want him to learn Chinese? I'm also trying but if I'm the only person... it's very hard. You can say whatever in Malaysia... you go to school, you go to the shops, everybody speaks Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, Malay, you learn, you're exposed to it. Here... no, and in school as much as you get, even though there are parents... who comes from mainland China they have to speak in English to other children there, you know? Of course English is going to be the main language, I'm trying my best – I will send him to Mandarin classes when he starts, you know. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

Her desire for her children to learn Mandarin is evident in her choice of formal school that Colin will attend. I found out that, although she speaks, she does not read or write, Chinese, and therefore engages external assistance:

In the public school here actually has Mandarin classes. And there's a lot of like, tuition centres here they teach Mandarin. I would like them to read and write, too,

because I can't... I can read a little bit but not too much. I can speak but... (Jia Ling, Interview 1, November 17, 2012)

In addition to her childhood and later life experiences, such as her move to Sydney, her multilingual ability has most likely informed the negotiation of the different characteristics of her identities. The flexibility in her negotiation of her multiple identities as Colin begins ECEC is evident in the manner in which she approaches her parenting. This includes her inferred partnership with Little Kingfishers to negotiate their philosophies of ECEC with those of her own. However, it is apparent that her Malaysian-Chinese identity, and the cultural roles and responsibilities attached to it, is a constant aspect of her identity; because, in her opinion, she is inherently Chinese:

So, but culturally I think if they know Chinese they have some a sense of identity, like they know that, even though they brought up or raised here, they're born here, but they're Chinese. That's what I'm trying to be – a Chinese. (Jia Ling, Interview 3, March 15, 2013)

The importance of cultural maintenance in Jia Ling's approach to parenting reflects the importance of a cultural identity in parents such as her, who are also immigrants. In a similar vein, Luo, the Negotiator parent in Kuala Lumpur, displays keenness in reinforcing the Malaysian identity in his daughter by learning to respect people from other ethnicities. In the next part of this chapter, I share my findings on Challengers, who also view cultural maintenance as crucial in their parenting approach.

Challengers

As with the Acceptors, only two families were identified as Challengers from the analysis of data. Instead of actually labelling their identities, Challengers use more descriptive elements when defining themselves.

For Challengers, their self-perceived identity as protector is influenced by the mismatch of ECEC philosophies between them and the settings. It is also largely informed by their own childhoods, as they protect or assert their existing beliefs, goals and understandings. They view such a mismatch as dangerous and unacceptable, which in turn discourages the establishment of trust between parents and settings. For example, the Challengers in Sydney felt very strongly about providing academic learning as part of their child's ECEC, which is a philosophy the setting their child attends does not fully embrace. The Challenger in Kuala Lumpur felt that her mother identity was not respected by the educators at the setting and, with constant change of educators, she felt that her belief in routine and stability was compromised. This mismatch may also be the reason for the Challengers being the only group that list non-ECEC philosophy as important criteria contributing to their choice of setting. Instead, they cite more pragmatic criteria, such as convenient location, convenient opening hours, and the age at which children are accepted into the setting. Lack of development of trust was further exacerbated by a lack of communication between parents and settings, which prevents both parties from understanding the mismatches during this state of disjuncture. Without mutual understanding and respect, it is more challenging to build a meaningful relationship that will develop a sense of belonging and empowerment. Seemingly unable to find the setting that best suits their children, Challengers feel that avoiding seems to be the best way to overcome the challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings, often realised in the form of discontinuing attendance at the setting.

While Acceptors and Negotiators also had characteristics of their identities that were fixed, they were willing to negotiate the boundaries and meanings of their existing identities. On the contrary, Challengers are unwilling to negotiate the boundaries and meanings of their existing identities. This, among others, is the biggest difference between Challengers on the one hand, and the Acceptors and Negotiators on the other. Challengers perceive their existing

identities to be fixed, and are not readily accepting of new ideas. Therefore, there is little negotiation of identities, as they revolve around the stress stage of identity negotiation more, during disjuncture. Stress stems from their existing identities not receiving understanding, respect and mutual affirmative valuation. Without these elements, Challengers would not feel a sense of belonging to the collective, because of a low sense of self-worth and little confidence their existing identities are helping them overcome challenges. Challengers reject the challenges they meet, and employ parenting approaches that they are most familiar with, effectively negating the need to adapt. They assert their existing identities strongly, and because their identities are largely informed by their childhood and cultural expectations, they employ parenting approaches that are apparently more rule directed. A reflection of this is in how decision-making is based on parental authority: it is more important for the parents to find a setting that matches their ECEC philosophies, than is their children's willingness to attend the settings. Their children's thoughts and needs regarding the setting are subordinate to those of parents.

I now share the story of these two families who exemplify characteristics of Challengers. The interview with the family from Kuala Lumpur involved the mother and grandmother, while the interview with the family from Sydney involved the father and mother.

It Felt Good That I have Pulled Him Out Of This Dangerous Place: Case Study of Challenger Family in Kuala Lumpur. Michelle was 20-years-old when I first met her at her home. Her son, Edwin, had just turned two and was the youngest child at the ECEC setting he attended. The ECEC setting was only a 5-minute drive away, as it was located just one street from their home. She was a homemaker and lived with her husband, Neil's, family – his father, his mother (Poh) and his twin brother. In addition to Edwin, she also had a

younger daughter. Poh was present at all interviews because all interviews were conducted in her home, as Michelle requested.

Michelle is a middle child with a brother a few years older than her and a sister who is 11 years younger than her. She described her parents' wholesale retail business as unstable, and due to that, her family had to move many times during her childhood. This has resulted in the family having resided in the southern, northern and central parts of Malaysia. According to Michelle, the constant moving caused her to transfer schools every year or two. Constant moving to new neighbourhoods and changing of schools, such as Michelle experienced, often arises when a divorce takes place (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). Another common finding that accompanies divorce is the continued discord of parents (Amato & Cheadle, 2005), which Michelle also experienced:

Because my parents divorced... Dad and Mum had fought very often. I felt the family was far from perfect... I saw the state my family was in and said to myself that when I have my own family I would want a better home... when we were young my parents' fighting affected us, affected our studies. Kept wondering why Mum and Dad acted that way. I've experienced it so I do not want my children to go through the same.
(Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

Unlike May from Sydney, who felt that living in different places has made her a more adaptive person, Michelle felt that the constant moving during her childhood has instead instilled a sense of insecurity:

When you keep shifting from one place to another you will feel that no one place is permanent. When you move from one place to another, going from one school to the next, yes, you will have many more friends but each place will feel unfamiliar and you will need a lot of time to... I didn't like moving from one place to another; better to be

settled in one place. When I was young my parents moved around a lot; I didn't like it.

(Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

She did not like how her mother did not take into consideration her desire to join the same high school her group of friends were attending, thus referring to it as the “wrong” school. She did not like how she was not welcomed by her classmates. The feeling of not belonging was so strong that it deterred her from attending classes. She confessed to truancy, even during the final year of high school, whereby she would spend school hours at her then boyfriend, now husband's, home:

When we moved to Suriayu, Mum put down the wrong school for me so I ended up in a school where the discipline was bad and the teachers were not that good either... the first school where I have been called “stupid” for smiling at them. I thought that was strange... It was very disappointing. I told my mother I did not like going to school...

(Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

Becoming a parent. Despite her dislike of school during her adolescence, Michelle made plans to continue her studies, but these plans had to be put on hold due to falling pregnant with Edwin:

After I finished high school there were plans for further studies. Then I got pregnant and got married. I was pregnant for 2, 3 months with Edwin when I stopped working.

(Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

She acknowledged that she was considered very young at the time of her marriage, and was aware of possible judgements by others, for which she mentally prepared herself. However, she looked at the positive side of being married, and casually compared her life before and after marriage:

... It's better after having got married... Although people say it's not good to get married too early, each one of us have our own opinion. For me, if you can find a

good husband it's fine but if you get a lousy one it cannot be helped... So it is different being single and being married. The thinking is also different. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

However, she also shared a more serious side and pragmatic views of being married: the additional responsibilities to shoulder and new identities to negotiate:

I feel that if you got married too early you would regret because you have not enjoyed yourself enough, although I myself have never regretted. But marrying young brings on a heavy burden – you have to be responsible for many things. Like, when you have a child you need to have some money, you need to have a sense of responsibility, you must be able to handle this whole matter. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

From the way Michelle was sharing her thoughts, it was as though she was trying to tell me that it would have been that slightly better if she was older before being assuming these responsibilities. Her concerns regarding money and responsibility are examples of the negative implications for young marriages noted by Uecker (2012). Despite not regretting her decision to marry, the heavy sense of responsibility she mentioned above has made her hope that her son will not make the same life choice:

I'm young and I got married young and I hope my son would not get married too early. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

Parenting. From conversations with Michelle, it became evident that Edwin, as the first grandchild of the family, received much affection from all members of the family. Being a grandson made him extra special, especially with his grandparents, as in many Asian societies it is still common for boys to have preferential treatment over girls (Choi & Thomas, 2009; Das Gupta et al., 2003). Michelle, being the daughter-in-law, would sometimes feel helpless, as Edwin is allowed to do whatever he wants and gets away with disobedience when

his grandparents are around. Now that he has a younger sister, she feels that Edwin misbehaves to attract the attention of the adults:

Sometimes when you tell him not to do something he would go right ahead and do it, like when we were watching television he would go away and do something else so that you would pay attention to him. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

He would do all sorts of things to attract attention... he would dig through my pile of newspaper, some of it current. When I found him I scolded him and kept the newspaper in the cabinet. He would take them out again. When I scolded him again and kept the papers again he waited until I was gone and then went to take them out again... When you tell him not to do something he would purposely go ahead to do it to spite you. It makes me mad. (Michelle, Interview 2, June 20, 2012)

Michelle considered Edwin's behaviour to be somewhat negative and attention-seeking. To her, Edwin was intentionally ignoring her to make her upset. She lamented that it did not help that, whenever she chastised Edwin, his grandmother, Poh, would intervene and protect him, a reaction I happened to notice several times during our meetings. For Michelle to explicitly mention that Edwin's behaviours are intentionally negative appears to imply that she is not used to looking at the situation from Edwin's point of view. She found it difficult to also respect Edwin's feelings and thoughts when her own feelings are discounted with the constant intervention of her mother-in-law. Thus, extra pressure is placed on Michelle to perform her role as a mother, as she was learning to negotiate concurrently her multiple identities as mother, wife and daughter-in-law.

The contrast in the different approaches to Edwin from his mother and grandmother would influence the way he learns of his place in the family: his identity as an important person amplified by the identity of himself as the first child, first grandchild, the only son, the

only grandson. These identities are expressed as significant in the Chinese culture, very much a rule directed way of parenting according to Tuttle et al. (2012); and in this case, a rule directed way of grandparenting. As such, Michelle decided that one way for Edwin to not continue receiving preferential treatment at home would be to attend an ECEC setting as early as possible. In general, formal ECEC begins at 4 years of age, according to the NPCS document (Ministry of Education, 2010):

I wanted him to go and learn more good things so I sent him earlier. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

Poh was excited for a different reason: she felt that Edwin would learn to talk more and would therefore be able to socialise more:

We saw that he's not yet talking but he could go socialise a little. (Poh, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

However, they were anxious because he was very young and this was the first time he would be spending time away from the family, in an unfamiliar environment with total strangers.

Michelle felt anxious about his first few days at the setting:

I wanted to know more about how he was in school. I asked the teacher how he had been and if he had cried on the first day. And I was apprehensive thinking what he would face the next day – would he cry? Would he learn things? Good things? (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

She encouraged Edwin to help him overcome his separation anxiety:

Give him more encouragement: you are going to school tomorrow, you must be good, don't cry and be a good student. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

Prior to enrolling Edwin, Michelle and Poh visited a few ECEC settings to assist with deciding on the setting that best matches their requirements. In addition to its convenient

location, Michelle also cited the setting's willingness to accept a 2-year-old and passion for children as reasons for deciding on this setting:

They seem to have passion for the children. So I thought to enrol him. Secondly, they took in children of his age so I wanted to let my son try to socialise with other children. In choosing a kindergarten I would want it to be passionate about children. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

She also tried to establish a partnership with the educators at the setting, working together with them to help with Edwin's apparently developing habit of bad manners:

I did request for them to talk to him about being obedient to his mother. To encourage him to address "Mum" and "Dad". (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

Michelle sought the assistance of the educators because she felt that she is not receiving sufficient support regarding this issue in the home setting. She shared how living with parents-in-law has its pros and cons. Although she is grateful that she need not care for her two young children on her own, she also feels helpless when her parenting style is at odds with that of her parents-in-law:

When you discipline... when the old folks see it, they would feel that in their time they had disciplined children differently, especially that my son was much loved – they would buy everything he wanted. And often... when I scolded him I got scolded, when I caned him I got scolded, when he cried I got scolded. I felt victimised. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

In addition, she does not receive support from her husband:

He would throw a tantrum. He would cry at every little thing. Crying all the time; I could not take it. So I spoke to my husband that it was not on. That when I reprimand him, there should be no interference. I am his mother it's my responsibility to punish

him, it's my right to punish him. My punishing him was to teach him good, not to make him bad. Because of this we quarrelled often. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

From Michelle's tone of voice and body language, it appeared that she feels inadequate and challenged in her current situation. Without anyone to support her point of view, she feels disempowered, not just as a mother but also as an individual. When Michelle's approach to parenting is not aligned with Neil or Poh's, Edwin receives three discreet sets of social expectations within the home setting.

Michelle reasons that, because she foresees behavioural problems should Edwin's current behaviour continue, she chose to not treat Edwin in the same manner as everyone else at home. She emphasised several times throughout all our meetings that the decisions that she has been making and her parenting are all essential elements of her role as Edwin's mother:

If we don't discipline him now it would be extremely difficult later. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

I don't want him pampered that when he grows up, I don't want him pampered that in future... some children are spoilt rotten. I don't want him that way. He is very reliant on us, he loves to be pampered. That's why I am guarded against this. Here everybody pampers him, me, as mother, cannot pamper him. (Michelle, Interview 3, July 18, 2012)

She also explained how the different viewpoints on parenting between herself and Neil have created contrasting identities in their children's eyes. She felt that she would be identified as the bad person while her husband would be identified as the good person:

Very different. Dad is the good guy, Mum is bad. (Michelle, Interview 2, June 20, 2012)

It is significant for Michelle to feel that she is the "bad person", as she is aware that her children, even at a young age, are able to tell apart the different roles that different individuals

play in their daily lives. Children are able to make connections with other individuals and know who they are able to negotiate with more. As children absorb all that they see and hear, it usually is partly the role of the adults in their lives to guide them into differentiating acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Here, this role is carried out more by Michelle, as Edwin's mother. This notion of power and relationship portrays the importance of the values of respect for figures of authority and hierarchy. This is significant because, according to Confucian teachings, these values play an important role in maintaining group harmony, where hierarchy and respect for elders are strongly emphasised and constantly practiced values. According to Confucian teachings, it is vital for children to learn their place in the hierarchy, and to learn the roles and responsibilities attached to the different relationships they have with different people at any single given time. In Confucianism, this web of relationships (Morris, 1994) helps children and adults alike learn their place in society and to maintain group harmony. This notion of power and relationships is also reflective of Assumption 9 of INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005), as Michelle and Edwin learn to appropriately manage their multiple identities according to situation.

Own childhood experiences and upbringing. Michelle draws from aspects of her own upbringing when carrying out her guiding role as a mother to her children, despite accepting that her own childhood experiences need not inform those now experienced by her children. She feels that there are elements of her childhood and upbringing that she has found beneficial, and deems them relevant as part of her children's early childhood. These elements were mainly passed on to her by her uncle, not her parents:

When I was young my uncle was my guide – very strict. Like, at a meal you must greet everyone, wherever you go out you must inform someone of your intended whereabouts and it must be done politely, there must be a time for meal, a time for bed – a routine, pottering about was not allowed. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

I must thank my uncle, if not for him... you know, the home environment is not good it would affect the child – to pick up bad values... His guidance was directed at me, Mum and Dad did not have time to guide me so Uncle was my teacher. Sometimes having committed wrong – talking back or something, [resulted in punishment like] ear-pulling in front of the altar. That's how we were taught... (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

Actually I would not use them again. But... hit if they do wrong, I mean if they do something wrong I would hit them but I would not want them to kneel at the altar – that's a very old way. Children nowadays don't like this anymore. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

One element Michelle deems relevant and vital to instil in her children is the importance of good moral character, a widely maintained Confucian teaching (Gao et al., 1996; Leung, 1996; Voon & Pearson, 2011; Wu, 1996):

Education is also very important. Like if at a meal and you did not acknowledge me I would find it strange... It's proper manners. If you did not acknowledge the people there it would show poor upbringing. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

No matter how good academically, without good attitude and good habit, it is of no use. In the end you would be like an uneducated person. (Michelle, Interview 2, June 20, 2012)

Michelle's selective reference to her uncle's teachings is significant, as it reflects suggestions by cross-generational parenting studies that have found that successive generations within a family tend to employ similar parenting strategies (Conger, Belsky, & Capaldi, 2009). This also means that Michelle's upbringing may have influenced her

definition of family, whereby her exposure to her parents' divorce and constant conflicts may also affect her own marriage and parenting (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). However, she told me, in a firm tone of voice, her intention to prevent her children from experiencing what she did as a child:

Whatever mistakes made by the adults, the children should not be affected. I did not have a good home myself so I intend to give my children a good home. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

Michelle's determination to not let her children have the same or similar experience is related to her emphasis on good moral character. She noted that the strong influence of her uncle's guidance and teachings helped her make better life choices. This suggests that her uncle's guidance and teachings potentially buffered her against commonly reported negative implications originating from a single-parent family or where parents are separated (Amato & Cheadle, 2005; Halpern-Meekin, 2012; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998), and with this experience, she would like to help build her children's resilience towards adversity by providing the same. This is crucial in influencing her children's adolescence and parenting outcomes, as it has been found that the quality of earlier parent-child relationships has a small but significant influence on their parenting when they themselves become parents (Friesen et al., 2013). This reflects Assumption 8 of INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005), where her cultural, personal and situational experiences have influenced the meanings attached to her multiple identities.

Sense of responsibility. Michelle confessed her desire to be what she deems a good mother, as one who has a sense of responsibility, expectation and betterment:

Ah, sense of responsibility. Really, you have carried him for 10 months and you suffered great pain to give birth to him and you don't want to care for him... you bring him to this world you must care for him. (Michelle, Interview 1, May 23, 2012)

Being a mother is really difficult. The responsibility is heavy. You set plenty of targets but to achieve them is so difficult... A mother's responsibility is great, the burden.

(Michelle, Interview 2, June 20, 2012)

It's because I wanted to teach him, to teach him to be good... because if the child is pampered too much from young it would damage him... If he would choose to take the wrong path it would be my doing. I do not want this. (Michelle, Interview 3, July 18, 2012)

Michelle's emphasis on ensuring that Edwin is on the "right" path proposes that her parenting decisions and her mother identity are somewhat influenced by her parents' separation and her own childhood experiences. The sense of responsibility and betterment she feels as a mother may have been magnified due to her ECEC experiences. One of the more obvious direct influences in the decisions that she has made for Edwin's ECEC is the setting's sense of responsibility, which, incidentally, is also shared by Poh:

If you are willing to take in the child you must be prepared to care for him. If you did not and if something had happened to him, it would be bad. (Poh, Interview 3, July 18, 2012)

I felt that they did not have a sense of responsibility. Later my friend called to tell me that Chris had not been to work for a month, they did not know why, and all the teachers were exhausted. They were exhausted teaching the children. (Michelle, Interview 3, July 18, 2012)

She also lamented how she felt that the person-in-charge, Chris, and the educators, were not responsive to Edwin's well-being needs and her identity as both a parent and a customer.

Their nonchalant attitude towards the goings-on with the children in their care made Michelle feel as though they took their responsibilities as educators lightly:

Actually, I have pointed out to them many times but they did not show any reaction. Edwin often sustains injuries in class. When I asked them, they said Edwin, my Edwin had knocked against the desks... But, it's nothing really, but they did not respond in anyway at all. (Michelle, Interview 2, June 20, 2012)

I put him in there and I told the teacher to watch over him because he is so small. They did not pay any attention... did not look after him. Most kindergartens would record injuries sustained by children in a record book, they did not have. Or afterwards some would inform parents at home, but they did not. So when I bathe him I would notice an injury on his backside, his legs, on many, many occasions. (Michelle, Interview 3, July 18, 2012)

This sense of responsibility regarding educating future generations implies a notion of contributing to the country's human capital and common good. Similar to Leanne (Acceptor parent in Kuala Lumpur), Michelle is most likely unaware that her concept of educating future generations is reflected in contemporary research, the outcomes of which can be used to advocate for early investment to potentially increase human capital and decrease inequality later in childhood and adolescence (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Bauchmüller et al., 2014). In addition, the provision of high quality ECEC has been found to produce positive long-term effects (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Bauchmüller et al., 2014).

Michelle's desire to work for a common good exemplifies the cultural role of a parent in educating their children (Downie et al., 2007; Wu, 1996). According to INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005), how beliefs and values influence parents' thinking about their identities is reflected in the way they communicate. As such, the belief that good children are cultivated

and not born (Leung, 1996) influences how parents view their identities, including the roles and responsibilities attached to these identities. This explains Michelle's belief that it is parents' responsibility to bring up children well, as well as Poh's belief that, if an ECEC setting is willing to accept children into their care, it is their responsibility as educators to educate them well. Although this notion of the learner child seems more passive than active, it is a deeply ingrained cultural view of the child, especially in societies where parenting is traditionally influenced by Confucianism (Chao, 1994, 2001; Wu, 1996). This does not mean that the child passively waits to be educated. Instead, it implies that there is more mention of parents' roles in modelling, guiding and imparting experiences and knowledge to ensure a better brought-up child, in literature relating to parenting in Chinese culture (e.g. Chao, 2001; Downie et al., 2007; Leung, 1996; Luo et al., 2013; Pearson & Rao, 2003).

While Michelle's view of her role as a mother includes sense of responsibility and commitment to a common good, this view is evidently not universally shared. In fact, the importance of parents in shouldering this responsibility is also not apparent in the NPCS document (MoE, 2010), where the role of parent in the NPCS is as assistive to that of the educator. There are cultural implications, mainly of hierarchy and social order, that are highly upheld in many societies consisting of large Asian populations (e.g. Chao, 1994; Gao et al., 1996; Wu, 1996; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). The hierarchical positioning of parents' roles in this document may be due to the implicit cultural view that educators are traditionally revered, as they are deemed highly knowledgeable experts in their field, especially in the Confucian tradition (Leung, 1996). However, parents such as Michelle may not easily adopt the apparently superficial role of parent as per the NPCS, and in ECEC in general, as parents are the first and most important educators in a child's life (DEEWR, 2009a). It is vital to include the cultural role of parents in long-term considerations of how to involve families, to

empower them to collaborate with educators and contribute more meaningfully for a common good, in future versions of the NPCS, for it to be a more inclusive and sensitive document.

Michelle's strong sense of responsibility as a mother made her feel as though the setting did not respect her, as there was little to no communication about Edwin's time at the setting. Without communication, there is no opportunity to build respectful and meaningful relationships and partnerships between the family and the setting (e.g. De Gioia, 2009, 2013). As her beliefs, goals and understandings for Edwin's ECEC were not met, she first shared her consideration of relocating him to a different setting during our second meeting:

Ah, couldn't handle it all. I'm thinking of stopping him. I'm thinking of putting him into a different school. (Michelle, Interview 2, June 20, 2012)

One month later, during our third and final meeting, she told me that she realised her consideration by removing Edwin. At that time, she had not decided on a new setting. On top of that, Michelle gradually found out that there was another issue that she was unwilling to negotiate for the well-being and quality ECEC experiences of her child – hygiene:

Because this place... here... I don't know what the problem is... their hygiene is also not too good. Not hygienic... The most important thing for a child is cleanliness in every aspect. They did not have that. (Michelle, Interview 3, July 18, 2012)

She said she took a month to decide to discontinue his enrolment, because she decided to give herself and the setting another chance at working out their partnership:

But just recently I have ceased his placement at the childcare. I think this kindergarten really has problems. (Michelle, Interview 3, July 18, 2012)

So I said I would give it a try. I did not expect such problems. When I saw my son suffered that illness I felt... so I... Now I have taken him out and I will find him a better school. (Michelle, Interview 3, July 18, 2012)

She was happy with her decision to discontinue his enrolment at this setting:

It felt good that I have pulled him out of this dangerous place. (Michelle, Interview 3, July 18, 2012)

The setting that Edwin attended, although initially portrayed to be welcoming, understanding, and respectful of their families, was later realised to be otherwise. More significantly, the setting was not in line with the ECEC philosophy expounded in the NPCS document, especially where local community involvement is highlighted. From Michelle's experience, this setting showed little cooperation with parents and did not involve families in the life of the setting. Meaningful partnerships in Edwin's ECEC setting would be difficult to establish without cooperation and family involvement, as there is a sense of distrust and insecurity towards the setting from parents. Although the role of parents, according to the NPCS document, is assisting educators instead of as respected partners, it would be unfair to expect parents to assist when they are not informed of what they are expected to do at home to support the ECEC at the setting.

Negotiating multiple identities and overcoming challenges. Michelle's determination has also portrayed her to be a person who is not as open and flexible to negotiation during a state of disjuncture, which in this case is the mismatch of her ECEC philosophies with those of the setting. She has chosen to negotiate her multiple identities and to overcome the challenges to her beliefs, goals and understandings, not by adapting to the stress experienced, but instead, she has chosen to assert and define her identities as mother, wife, daughter-in-law and customer by not accepting the prevailing ECEC philosophies of the setting. Her choice of doing so is related to her determination in providing a better family life for her children, which in turn is related to the importance she places on a sense of responsibility, good character and implied duty of care towards successive generations (Leung, 1996). This, in turn, is related to the notion of educating future generations for a common good.

Michelle's identity negotiation and parenting choices would be referred to as rule directed (Tuttle et al., 2012) in many aspects. Not only is she rule directed in her parenting, this is also true in previous and current relationships. The rule directed aspects of her parenting are evident in how Edwin's needs and feelings are subordinate to hers. Perhaps because she feels unappreciated and thus has a negative sense of self-worth, she is struggling to assert a positive sense of identity herself, and in the process has neglected Edwin's needs and feelings. A positive sense of self-worth is crucial in developing a positive sense of identity, as it provides validation (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). The interactions she has with Edwin are mostly expressed through cultural roles, where Edwin is expected to be obedient and show respect for his mother. There is also an emphasis on respect for hierarchy, typical of Confucian teachings. Her decision to enrol him in formal ECEC was also based on parental authority: to decrease the preferential treatment from other adults in the family so that her role as a mother is more easily achieved. Similarly, the rule directed aspects of the relationships she had as a child are evident in how her feelings and those of her siblings were not considered when her parents divorced. Under the care of her uncle, she was educated according to cultural roles where respect for elders, listening-centredness and obedience were prioritised.

Dong Bing and Annabel, the Challenger family in Sydney, like Michelle, made a decision that was based on parental authority regarding their daughter's attendance at the setting. In the following, I present their case studies. Their story shares similar sentiments regarding the mismatch of ECEC philosophies with the setting their daughter attends.

All They Do Here Is Play: Case Study of Challenger Family in Sydney. It was a sunny Sunday morning when I first met Dong Bing, who came to take me from the train station in his little red car. Dong Bing and Annabel have a daughter Queenie, who had just turned four when I was introduced to them. They live in one of the Western suburbs of

Sydney, but commute daily for 45 minutes to the city for work. We casually chatted about the weather during the 5-minute car ride to Dong Bing's home. He briefly explained the suburb that he lives in, noting the change in demographics and facilities through the years. As soon as we arrived at his home, he directed me into the inner living area. His wife, Annabel, was cleaning the kitchen when he interrupted her to introduce me. She apologised for not being part of the interview and was about to reach out to shake my hand but realised that she had her rubber gloves on.

As per usual interview protocol, I informed Dong Bing that the handheld digital voice recorder will be switched on and thanked him for allowing me to conduct the interview. For us to get to know each other better, I started by asking background questions that did not require much thinking, also referred to as factual knowledge questions (Morse & Richards, 2002). Dong Bing was turning 48 and is an IT contractor for government departments. While he is based in the city, he travels frequently interstate for work.

I found out that Dong Bing first arrived alone in Sydney in 2000 to advance in his career. In 2004, he returned to Sydney to continue with his work, with the addition of Annabel. For Annabel, the journey to Sydney was not for a job, but to start a new life and a family with Dong Bing. Annabel was turning 40, and is a manager of a well-known international hotel chain. She, too, travels frequently, especially to Asian countries. They do not have other members of the extended family living in Sydney. Queenie was born in Australia and is their only child.

Before making the decision to move to Sydney, Dong Bing was working in Singapore as an IT engineer. He attended a polytechnic institution in Singapore and then completed an IT engineering degree in 2 years at a university in the United Kingdom, before returning to Kuala Lumpur. It was after working for a short time in Kuala Lumpur that he took a job in Singapore, where he met Annabel and got married. When he returned to Sydney with

Annabel, they enrolled part-time in postgraduate courses. While Dong Bing completed a Master of Business, Annabel completed a Master of Business Administration. They wanted to put their spare time to good use, especially at a time when they did not yet have children.

As it is a common stepping stone for Malaysian students who plan to acquire their diplomas or degrees in Singapore, I asked if he also attended a Singaporean high school. While he agreed that it is a common phenomenon, even within his circle of friends, he revealed that he did not attend high school in Singapore. Instead, he completed his high school education at a well-known Chinese independent high school in Kuala Lumpur. “Yeah, I am Chinese-ed. Are you?” I shook my head but revealed that my mother is. She too attended another well-known Chinese independent high school in Kuala Lumpur. He looked surprised.

I shared my background, of how my brother and I were educated in national-type Malay primary schools because my parents felt that being fluent in Malay and English has an advantage over being fluent in Mandarin. I also lamented how much of a handicap it is to not be fluent in written Chinese, especially in Malaysia. Dong Bing seemed to understand what I meant by being handicapped by limited Mandarin knowledge:

Yeah, I know what you're talking about, to not know Mandarin Chinese at all... you don't really have to be very strong command in Chinese but if you can read some and write some simple... that would help. (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

When asked if there was the possibility of enrolling Queenie into a Mandarin class in future, Dong Bing revealed:

Yeah, yes, in fact, we might send her one year to Malaysia before she's going to the proper preschool and elementary school. Public school. Before she start the public school, like have... one year... maybe only... thinking of leave her with my parents-in-law because they quite flexible. Maybe it's an opportunity for her to exposed to the Malaysian values, yeah. (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

I was taken aback for a few seconds, as I was not prepared for a reply that included leaving his child in a different country. Unsure, I asked why, and his justifications included similar sentiments shared by the Chinese diaspora around the world, such as exposure to Chinese or Asian values and maintaining family ties (e.g. Chao, 1994, 2001). Ideally, he would like Queenie to experience these before commencing classes at the public school:

But when she starts proper Year One, Year Two, probably it's no longer easy for her to like, get out of the education system and then come back again. Then to get her to get use, to fit into the education system... Because now it's like, before she really start proper like, official like preschool, Year One, so we might take this opportunity. (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

Education. Dong Bing's reply reflects the clear-cut dichotomy in the meanings attached to education and care that is common in many Asian cultures (Tobin, 2011). Education is considered learning that occurs in a formal, paper and pencil learning environment, whereas learning that occurs through play and experimentation in an informal environment is not considered education. Therefore, it is possible that Dong Bing and Annabel find it acceptable to disrupt Queenie's current ECEC experiences. On the contrary, they find it unacceptable to disrupt her learning when she enters the public school system because it will then be a formal learning environment with "proper" and "official" learning occurring. The formal-informal dichotomy became more apparent when Dong Bing and Annabel compared their Malaysian experience with their Australian experience of ECEC. They considered the Malaysian ECEC setting a "school" or a place where education occurs, while the Australian setting is for exploring and playing. It appeared as though Queenie's academic learning (e.g. reading) takes precedence over her decreased fear of new experiences (e.g. touching sand). Learning to overcome her fear of and to play with sand was not considered learning:

Every time we come back, her shoes usually a lot of sand. Uh, [In Australia], I was expect a bit more, let's say, reading, learning. Um, but I do understand that it's totally, absolutely impossible to have that aspect... So, I think childcare... may not be so much on really learn... the really fundamental things to learn [are] things that she still needs to learn at home, uh, [for] parents to teach her... There's no proper, write ABC, no. [Not] like [in] Malaysia, [where we have] got full [writing] exercise... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

Teach them arithmetic like plus, minus, multiply, divide, I find that childcare centres here don't have these kinds of stuff... That's why Malaysian childcare is much better... Here, all they do is play... They don't really teach." (Annabel, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

Queenie's writing skills appear to matter very much to Dong Bing, as he repeated that he teaches her to write at home:

At home, it's more the writing because I think the focus is definitely one-to-one like writing, definitely have to hold her hand. Wherever those things that is not possible to hold hands, handheld, hand-holding in school, I will do it here. (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

Dong Bing showed me the iPhone app that he mentioned and shared that he even utilises his train travelling time to help Queenie with alphabet recognition:

Tracing, yeah... We can do it on train... nothing else to do, just sit there. Partly because every time you've done that, you'd give a sticker... here [in the iPhone app], after you've finished, they'll tell you that. After you've finished one, you do another one, so each one... it collects stickers... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

It seemed to me that Dong Bing and Annabel did not have confidence in the ECEC setting providing Queenie with the kind of learning they were expecting. I associated their worries with their education and care experiences. With their postgraduate qualifications and work experiences, Dong Bing and Annabel are highly educated and are considered professional or highly skilled workers in the Australian and Malaysian labour forces. Although they obtained their qualifications in English-speaking settings, they were educated and cared for in Chinese settings during their childhood and adolescence. These settings are typically hierarchical, emphasising the importance of education and promoting values that are common in collectivist societies, such as group harmony, listening-centredness, and respect for the elderly or persons of a higher hierarchical status within the organisation (Chao, 1994; Gao, Ting-Toomey & Gudykunst, 1996; Wu, 1996; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). However, Dong Bing did acknowledge their own inability to provide Queenie with many different kinds of learning:

Well, but have to compliment some of the things there. I don't think I can provide all of that kind of education at home. Whereas in the centre itself, what she can learn much is... like story-telling, sharing of what you like, like that's how she learn volcano that kind of thing, fire engine, ambulance. They have pets, we don't have pets here... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

Cultures and values. To reaffirm the importance that he and Annabel placed on Queenie's ECEC and maintaining her ethnic identity, I remarked, "So it sounds like you actually place quite a lot of importance on her learning like, still learning the Malaysian culture and values, and to think that she's still Chinese". Dong Bing reaffirmed:

Yes, yes, although she thinks that she's more like Australian! Because she mingles with a lot of Australian kids, more, she doesn't mingle with those Chinese speaking children... at school she's supposed to have all the teaching about, know about identity, Australian culture... But she still stick to English most of the time... we do

... speak to her uh, she do understand... but she doesn't speak. She doesn't want to respond in Chinese... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

During my observation at the setting, while I did not feel that they were intentionally ignoring other languages and cultures, I did find that most of the children, including Queenie, communicated more confidently in English. I also detected a slight tone of sarcasm in Dong Bing's tone of voice, but I, too, felt that the ECEC setting Queenie attended did not provide for a meaningful multicultural learning context. For example, not only did the French class mentioned by Dong Bing not get much attention from the educators at the ECEC setting, it did not arouse the interest of the children, either. Coincidentally, French class was scheduled on the day I conducted my observation at the ECEC setting.

The children formed a line in train style, where they had both hands on the shoulders of the friend in front of them. "Okay Dandelions, what do we have to do when we walk down the corridor?" Niki asked, as she reminded the children to walk along the wall. A French woman, Anna, conducted the weekly French class. The 30-minute long class was held outdoors, in a reading corner near the entrance. The main office that owns the franchise business of this ECEC setting made arrangement for this French class. Anna was the only adult with this group of children. The educators were all indoors. (Queenie, Centre notes, October 16, 2012)

It appeared as though the main decisions for the learning context of this ECEC setting are directed from an external office. This made me feel that the educators were not interested in this class, as they left Anna alone with the children. I felt the children sensed the educators' disinterest, which seemed to have affected their interest in the class, too.

Throughout the class, Queenie listened but did not respond to any of the questions. However, she made all hand actions to the words "big", "small", "guitar" and "house". She joined in the singing but only with hand actions for the first time. She

could not follow the singing, as she seemed rather lost and just mumbled along. After that, she just stood still and observed... When time was up, Niki appeared from behind the glass door to signal Anna. She then transitioned from French class to outdoor playtime by asking the children, "Do you have your hats on? Yeah? We're going to play outside for a while before we go inside for lunch." (Queenie, Centre notes, October 16, 2012)

This observation made me wonder at the purpose of that French class, as I found it a tokenistic way of including other cultures. When asked if were the multicultural aspects of the ECEC setting that attracted them, he denied they were reasons he and Annabel chose this ECEC setting for Queenie:

Again, we're very pragmatic. Not so much of the values, rather, is the location as well as the timing, because we work long hours and they open until 7:00p.m. (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012).

As a result of their work locations, Queenie attended a long day care centre in the city 3 days a week. Annabel added that, in addition to opening hours, cleanliness is an element that she will not forsake when considering an ECEC setting for her daughter. Dong Bing specified one element of Queenie's ECEC experiences that he felt should be discouraged:

Oh, here I found that one characteristics, not sure if you have it in [Malaysia and] may not be so good is... Show-and-tell but the thing is now... it's more like a show off... it's more to do with showing off but they say [it is for] the confidence. To them, they say confidence because it's kind of a competition because other children also bring it, that's why she also thinks that she must bring the same thing... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

As though bringing personal belongings to the ECEC setting was insufficient, Dong Bing complained that Queenie began to request costumes worn by other children. To him, it is

unacceptable to flaunt or show off, as his upbringing in a collectivistic environment prioritised group-harmony and humility. In addition to this being contradictory to their beliefs, they also find it more difficult to instil group-harmony and humility in Queenie, as not only is she the only child, she is also in a more individualistic environment that places more weight on personal agency.

This made me curious as to how the family might react to Queenie living with extended family in Malaysia; I asked, and while Dong Bing admitted that he and Annabel were anxious, they posited that Queenie living with her extended family would give more peace of mind, especially when both their work places increased their interstate and international travel. They decided that living in Malaysia was the best option but had alternative plans should Queenie not adjust:

If she can settle well in Malaysia, certainly keep her [there] for a year. If she can't, then we might think of taking her back, and yeah, depends on the situation. (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012).

The aspect of Queenie living in Malaysia with extended family that seemed to bother him more was the possible language barrier:

... It will be a bit of a culture shock when we send her back to Malaysia... because she is very behind in Mandarin... my father-in-law speaks English so she likes my father-in-law a lot because she can interact with him in English whereas my mother-in-law is not so good [at speaking English]. That's why she keeps some distance with my mother-in-law [when] in fact it is my mother-in-law who looked after her... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

Open-mindedness. Although Dong Bing admitted that being multilingual has advantages, he did not find that his multilingual ability, Malaysian background, and

experience living in different countries were helpful in adapting to life in Sydney. However, he felt that being Malaysian helped more to have an open mind:

Personally, I wouldn't say it really helps so much but if I compare... I feel that maybe we are in a bit of a better position in a way because... like at work, if they are from Hong Kong or China... they might have a bit of difficulty in adapting to the culture here because they live in a homogenous society... But typically I would say that we have to be more open-minded and be open to all the different cultures and willing to mingle and absorb new values and the new environment. This usually helps a lot.

(Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

There was no apparent reflection of disjuncture experienced when sharing this view, likely mitigated by his open-mindedness. I probed further to find out if any disjuncture was experienced with the birth of Queenie. Dong Bing recalled the inconvenience of not having family members in Sydney, especially during the confinement period. He compared to experiencing the same situation in Malaysia, but and although he felt that they might be better off in Malaysia, he chose to look at the positive aspects of their experience in Sydney. In addition to confinement matters, he and Annabel had to make decisions that took into account the new child:

... the reason that we looked for the house, like the terrace housing with more spaces to park, of course one of the main reasons is to, for the kids, because provide more space for kids... that kind of environment... of course now have to put her as priority. Yeah, last time we think about ourselves only. (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

His open-mindedness was also apparent when he shared his view on the inclusion of male educators at Queenie's ECEC setting:

... Recently I found my centre... they started to choose to have some male educators. So I think male educators is more to do with demanding, more engaging, like more teaching. Yeah, of course there's a balance... I think probably more for boys not so much for girls, that you need to have some male, father kind of role, yeah... But there's certain limitation for the male educators like usually you don't expect them to change nappies and all these things... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

In spite this open-mindedness, he still related to the convenience of exchanging beliefs, goals and understandings with like-minded people or with individuals from the same cultural background:

... because that one happens to be an Indonesian Chinese, can share more. Other Caucasian, they don't really share that much... [The Indonesian Chinese teacher is] more friendly... Asian, they do share some things that you don't expect the [others] to... share but it all depends yeah, different kind of approach, yeah... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

Parenting. I associate Dong Bing's ease at approaching educators from an Asian background to his own experiences of fatherhood. Dong Bing explained that his own experiences of being a father are deeply rooted in culture. He compared being a father in Australia who is more involved in the child's daily well-being to being a father in Malaysia who is more concerned with cultural expectations and values of speaking at least one Chinese dialect, respecting the elderly and filial piety. Such cultural expectations and values have nuances that are understood better by people of a similar culture. Despite this, he pointed out Australian values that he perceived, and could accept:

I don't want to send her to a childcare in Australia that is predominantly Asian. I don't want to do that. Yeah, I want her to mingle. While here, you should mix with other people because there is some good values from the Westerner also, it's just that

we are not aware of, yeah... like even if they are under 18, they can be assertive and have a say... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

Dong Bing's recognition of children's agency is contrary to a rule directed relational orientation where children are subordinate to the family's needs and interactions are expressed through culture roles, as well as family hierarchy. I associate this to his open-mindedness, his thinking, "be open to all the different cultures and willing to mingle and absorb new values and the new environment", shared earlier. He also recognises the complications involved in implementing an ECEC philosophy that is inclusive of moral values of every ethnic group present in Australia:

It may not be easy for Australia because Australians, all the while, they don't emphasise so much that one. Unless they physically have to be courteous, say please, thank you all that. Not much more than that... the Three Character Classic, Disciples' Regulation all that... you can't get here. That's... the plus point to send to Malaysia is at least she has a bit of exposure to that... because, how [are they going to teach these moral values]? (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

However, Dong Bing felt that he was lacking in his role as a father. One aspect he cited was that, while they are a dual income-earning family, they are time poor:

Yes, because due to work, we may not have time and efforts to instil all the values to them (the children) but I do notice that sometimes she (Queenie) does learn some of the values that has been instigated from the childcare. For example, like don't waste the food... but maybe she copied from there (the ECEC setting). Although, she still wastes a lot of food but at least... she can remember that someone has told her to not waste the food, yeah. (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

In addition to academic learning, he was unable to provide opportunities for extra lessons in music and swimming, which is the expectation in Malaysia. Compared to the first interview,

the Malaysian parent identity was asserted more during the second interview, when there was some negotiation of Malaysian and Australian parenting:

You have to make sure [Queenie] studies, learns, yeah. Here we are really lacking, because a lot of children in Malaysia, like learning piano is very important. For us also, but we missed out on that part already. Stuff just like piano and you know, swimming and all these things, we missed out. Here, we don't have much luxury time to do that... (Dong Bing, Interview 2, November 18, 2012)

While he and Annabel would have liked to enrol her in extra-curricular classes, they cited a lack of time to do so. As they travel for work at different times, they were not willing to enrol Queenie for classes that were conducted on weekends. In addition, they did not want Queenie to feel like she did not have a weekend to spend quality time with family.

By the third interview, Queenie had been sent to live with extended family in Malaysia to receive what her parents deemed “better” education while her parents remained in Australia:

I don't have direct interaction with her. In a way, it shouldn't be like this but I am not as involved anymore, but at the same time, I'm still concerned with whether she is on track. At least, I want her to achieve something, to learn counting, writing, spelling, the fundamentals... (Dong Bing, Interview 3, January 20, 2013)

Dong Bing was concerned that Queenie was not learning basic literacy and numeracy skills in Australia, and this was partly the reason he and Annabel decided to send her back to Malaysia. I was surprised by this action from Dong Bing and Annabel, due to their long exposure to Australia. However, this action is common in the USA among professional Chinese immigrants who feel that ECEC in the USA did not meet their expectations (Wang, 2009). It is also common among Chinese immigrants in Australia to leave their young

children in China to be cared for by their parents, a pattern of child care referred to as “transnational grandparenting” (Da, 2003, p. 96).

Again, during the second interview, Dong Bing realised that his being a father would be more than how his father was a father to him and the family, reflective of the new father ideal reported in the literature (e.g. Singleton, 2005; Thompson et al., 2013):

When I was growing up, my parents didn't have the luxury to really explore how we feel, because it was really hard to earn money. Last time, it's just putting food on the table. It used to be “whatever educating just leave it to teacher” but now, it's like you also have to know what they think, to detect how she feels, interaction and all these... self-esteem, confidence and check with how other kids are doing. (Dong Bing, Interview 2, November 11, 2012)

Dong Bing's reflection of a new father is like the father in the Acceptor family in Sydney. This brings to light the socioeconomic status and the sociocultural ideology factors of Dong Bing's childhood, and that of his daughter. While he is a professional or a highly-skilled worker and belongs to the higher socioeconomic group now, he spent most of his childhood in a lower socioeconomic group. Furthermore, while the main sociocultural ideology of his childhood was influenced by the Malaysian context and his Chinese pedagogy, that of his daughter is influenced by the Australian context and pedagogy.

Own childhood experiences and upbringing. It was found in the USA that, although these factors do not directly affect, they do appear to influence, the effects of parents' roles and involvement in their children's learning (C. S. Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011). Although this was found in adolescent-aged children, it is highly likely that the influence of these factors also affects children of early childhood age. For example, parents from low-income families place more importance on providing financial stability and material needs for the family, due to having fewer economic resources. They also feel less comfortable interacting

with educators due to feeling less capable than more advantaged parents in helping their children with their learning (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). In addition, cultural background shapes parents' views on parental involvement (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011).

Dong Bing's "check with how other kids are doing" thinking is most likely influenced by his own experiences as a child, those that he recounted as "totally lost":

My experience is, I didn't have much background in my old environment, what's that, kindergarten. So when Year One, 7-years-old that time, totally lost. Everyone knows, I don't know. (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012).

He felt that it was strange that he did not seem to be aware of what everyone else around him was aware of. Often, he was laughed at by classmates when he could not articulate the phonetics of the word on the board when it was his turn to do so. Therefore, if possible, he would like to prevent Queenie from going through a similar experience. However, he saw the positive side of what sounded like a negative experience:

... but needs to have a little anxiety. Anxious. To know that you are left out then pick up again. Because if it's too smooth, all the way smooth sailing, also not good... That's why sometimes... I want to tell her she don't know a lot of things [but] then I also [get] a little anxious... (Dong Bing, Interview 1, October 7, 2012)

His belief in teaching Queenie to "get up after a fall" is his way of teaching her to overcome and adapt to stress during a state of disjuncture, his way of building resilience in her. This resilience is gradually built, as he teaches her to take responsibility for self, to problem-solve, to cope with downfalls.

When Queenie was first brought to Malaysia to begin her ECEC there, Dong Bing and Annabel had the opportunity to observe her at the ECEC setting. When they compared the Malaysian setting to the Sydney setting that Queenie used to attend, the Malaysian parent

identity became more apparent as they expressed a preference for the “proper” academic education environment in Malaysia:

Her teachers are like proper teachers, not childcare, not so much games. A bit more emphasis on learning and writing and reading, that kind of thing... (Dong Bing, Interview 3, January 20, 2013)

It's a proper school... that environment is better... Actually, Malaysia is not bad after all, education-wise. (Annabel, Interview 3, January 20, 2013)

During the first interview, Dong Bing revealed his willingness to negotiate Malaysian and Australian values in his parenting. However, this was not so by the third interview. By this interview, it was apparent that Dong Bing and Annabel did not accept the Australian ECEC philosophy and actively challenged the system. Adding his thoughts to Annabel's, they are adamant about Queenie learning and maintaining her mother tongue, as well as instilling values such as filial piety, respect for elders and manners. They are accustomed to these values due to the hierarchical structure common in collectivist societies. The parent-child relationship of this family is more reflective of one that is rule directed (high hierarchy and high connection), shaped according to societal and cultural roles and rules (Tuttle et al., 2012). This is reflective of Confucianism members of the family being socialised according to societal position and emphasis being placed on respect for hierarchy (Chao, 1994; Gao et al., 1996; Wu, 1996; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). According to Dong Bing and Annabel, these values are all part of the education system in Malaysia, something that they find lacking in the Australian system:

... go back [to Malaysia] and don't come back [to Australia] ... For her own good. If she's here, she won't learn Mandarin, definitely won't. Because I'm Chinese-educated, I feel that it's pivotal for now because when she's back there, my parents

can help care for her... I feel that children here have no manners... They teach that as part of the education over there. Here, they don't. (Annabel, Interview 3, January 20, 2013)

We found that here, we don't seem to be able to apply too much [Asian values] on her. (Dong Bing, Interview 3, January 20, 2013)

Change. A few months after the third interview, however, Dong Bing and Annabel informed me that they brought Queenie back to Sydney because they felt that, although the ECEC system in Malaysia is one that they are familiar with, it was one that was unfamiliar to their daughter. In the end, they had to make a decision about Queenie being disoriented versus learning her values and maintaining her mother tongue:

We miss her. After all, we are her parents. I think it is better for us to look after her ourselves. We shall see what happens. I still have plans to bring her back to Malaysia but this time, I will be going with her. (Annabel, Interview 4, August 3, 2013)

But if not for her waking up in the middle of the night crying and her uncle and aunt not knowing what was really the reason even after a while, we would not have brought her back to Australia. (Dong Bing, Interview 4, August 3, 2013)

Although at the outset, they displayed open-mindedness, it was apparent that the decisions underpinning choice of and access to ECEC for Queenie were influenced heavily by Dong Bing and Annabel's own upbringing, and were ways of asserting their own identities as parents according to their Malaysian beliefs, goals and understandings. Rather than overcoming the feeling of disjuncture with the Australian ECEC system by learning the conventions and expectations, Dong Bing, and more so Annabel, were critical and challenging of the system. This resulted in Dong Bing and Annabel parenting their Queenie from afar for

half a year. However, the unexpected decision of having Queenie reunited with them in Sydney suggests a change in their perceptions towards themselves as parents. The decision to be responsive towards Queenie's insecurity and disorientation and to prioritise her emotional well-being over her educational attainment, shows how Dong Bing and Annabel's identities were also influenced by their daughter. They were also prepared to be more flexible in their decisions to overcome the disjuncture of Queenie's insecurity and disorientation in Malaysia.

I have presented the findings of my study in this chapter. In the following chapter, I discuss these findings in relation to my research questions, and also their implications in relation to the ECEC frameworks that guide both countries.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings derived from my study of 21 parents in Kuala Lumpur and Sydney. I identified three groups of parents, namely Acceptors, Negotiators and Challengers, and used case studies to exemplify the characteristics of each group of parents. In this chapter, I shall discuss my findings in relation to the research questions that guided my study:

1. What are the characteristics of Malaysian-Chinese parents' identities?
2. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings during a likely state of disjuncture?
3. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents perceive their evolving identities?

Characteristics of Malaysian-Chinese parents' identities

The multiple interviews with the Malaysian-Chinese parents in my study resulted in the occurrence of many sharing sessions. As the interviews were semi-structured, I was able to conduct them in a conversational mode. Although much information from these sessions was in reply to the guiding questions from my interview protocol, many other thoughts, feelings and personal stories that were not always immediately related to the topic of discussion were also shared. According to Yin (2011), conversational sharing of information contributes to the individualised quality of the relationship between the researcher and participant; in my case, between myself and the parents. Cannold (2001) also posits, that when participants feel that their thoughts and feelings are understood and validated, they are more forthcoming and honest. Although Yin (2011) has also pointed out that it is more challenging when the researcher and participants speak in the same tongue due to “presumptions” (p. 136), it seems that the parents' sharing of their personal stories with me was an indication of trust and connection, at varying degrees, that they developed with me. I

found my insider knowledge (details on my insider position as researcher were presented in Chapter 4) to be advantageous, in that there were many personal stories that the parents may not have disclosed had I not shared the same tongue and background. From my discussions with the parents, some of which were presented in the case studies, I found that their identities are mostly signified by three main characteristics: perception of self, education, and perceived power structures.

Perception of self. The parents in my study all view their multiple identities in various ways due to the myriad of historical, cultural and political backgrounds they have experienced, are currently experiencing, and will continue to experience. As explained in Chapter 2, identity is an ever-occurring production of self that includes thoughts of a person's past, present and future. Therefore, a person's current identity also includes what that person is to become, as cultural baggage assists in mapping future decisions regarding identity formation (Hall, 1990; Vasta, 1993). As identity is strongly informed by culture and context, every person has unique memories and experiences that influence the ways in which they view themselves, as well as others. While every person has multiple identities, each identity may vary in significance (Ryder et al., 2000).

According to Hall (1990, p. 225), "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within". Some parents are able to clearly label their identities, while others have a more descriptive self-perception. Parents who clearly label their identities do so by attaching their identities to their roles, for example, a father, a wife, a daughter-in-law. Some who clearly label also base their identities on their occupations, such as beautician or lecturer. Parents who have a more descriptive self-perception attach their identities to their responsibilities and the feelings these evoke, such as provider of family, multitasker, worrier and nurturer. There are parents who also base their identities on their religion. They seem to combine labelling and describing, for example, a mother who

calls herself a Christian and then goes on to explain that her Christian beliefs guide her character and her parenting approach.

The most prominent aspect of these parents' identities is their cultural identity. While, cultural identity is the foundation of other identities, because it provides a stable point of reference that underlies shifts in context and time, the manner in which cultural identity is developed is emergent (Hall, 1990). Cultural identity is considered a stable point of reference because it is made of up a shared culture, or historically shared cultural codes that transmit information about how to do something and when to do it, or the like (Chase, 2006). However, the transmission of information is strongly influenced by the transmitter and the context of transmission, which may assign modified meanings to the information being transmitted. Therefore, cultural identity is emergent, as it is a reproduction of the historically shared codes that are redefined to better suit emerging contexts (Hall, 1990).

Cultural identity is more apparent in the parents in Australia due to the additional identity of immigrant. One parent in Kuala Lumpur, a Negotiator, also claims a type of immigrant identity due to his movement from East to West Malaysia. Parents' reported that transnational and interstate movement for personal and/or work purposes influences many of the decisions they make for themselves and their families, including decisions pertaining to ECEC. While there are parents who live in Australia with members of their extended families, there are some who only live with their partner and children. Although all parents relocated to Australia some time ago, they all offered detailed information about clear connections to their Malaysian identity and heritage. Especially with fellow Malaysians, they can switch to speaking Malaysian-English, or Manglish, a colloquial variety of English with borrowings from the Malay, Chinese and Indian languages (Abdullah et al., 2013). In this sense, Manglish is a form of affiliation, and depending on person and situation (Young, 2008), acts as an

expression of identity that makes them uniquely Malaysian (Preshous, 2001; Rajadurai, 2007) in a non-Malaysian context.

Similar to the experiences shared by the Malaysian-Chinese participants in an earlier research (Martin, 1998), the parents maintain festivals and related traditions. For example, they give out red packets and gather for family reunions during Chinese New Year; eat glutinous rice dumplings during Dragon Boat Festival; light lanterns, eat mooncakes and moon-watch during Mid-Autumn Festival; and eat glutinous rice balls during the Winter Solstice Festival. They express fondness for and continue to seek Malaysian cuisine, suggesting that “as worldly cosmopolitans based overseas, they still maintain a connection to their homeland through taste memories of a diverse, ‘mixed’ cuisine, associated with place identities of childhoods or more recent pasts” (Duruz & Khoo, 2015, p. 5). By reference to the CATF, switching to Manglish and maintaining festivals and related traditions appears to provide all parents, regardless of category (Acceptor, Negotiator and Challenger), with a stable reference point to define their person-based and group-based identities. These characteristics of their identity appear to be fixed. In this sense, all parents reflect a rule directed way of maintaining these characteristics of their identity; but while maintaining them, they may demonstrate other relational orientations (e.g. relationship directed when celebrating a festival).

Education. Parents in all categories (Acceptor, Negotiator and Challenger), regardless of geographical location, place high value on education as an important aspect of their identities. However, cultural maintenance is a primary foundation of their conceptualisation of education. This is important, because education is a longstanding aspect of the culture that makes up the Chinese identity and is one that has been highly regarded in China and beyond for some time, including in Sydney, Australia (Voon & Pearson, 2011); Shanghai, China (Wu, 1996); Sendai, Japan (Stevenson et al., 1990); Singapore (Wu, 1996); Southern Taiwan (Wu,

1996) and Taipei (Stevenson et al., 1990), Taiwan; and Chicago (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009), Los Angeles (Chao, 1994) and Minneapolis (Stevenson et al., 1990), USA. In addition, although not immediately visible, in order to provide ECEC that also develops cultural competence, it is of immense importance to know that parents' definitions of education encompass cultural maintenance. In turn, cultural competence assists in the development of the transformation of self (Vasta, 1993). Such development enables the parents to link their cultural baggage to their current situations. Cultural competence is highly contextualised, and because the NPCS and EYLF both place immense importance on context, understanding the subtle nuances of cultural maintenance in its varying forms is crucial. Making explicit the tacit significance of cultural maintenance is paramount to developing meaningful partnerships among diverse groups of educators and parents. This is also exemplified by the parents in my study, in that they highlight the importance of cultural maintenance occurring simultaneously with the formal education that their children experience.

Education may have been manifested as learning through play, in places such as Australia, as proposed by the EYLF (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009a), Europe (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Whitebread, 2012) and USA (Bodrova & Leong, 2005), or as learning in a more didactic sense, in places such as Hong Kong (C. K. K. Chan, 2009), Malaysia (Hewitt & Maloney, 2000; Mustafa & Azman, 2013) and also the USA (Fowell & Lawton, 1992). In addition, as education has been argued to be a type of socialisation process (Jackson, 1990; Wortham, 2006), cultural maintenance could thus be considered a kind of hidden curriculum. A hidden curriculum can be defined as a curriculum that is "not intended or planned... and so tends to remain unnoticed" (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 2). It is a "set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes" (Skelton, 1997, p. 188). Usually, a hidden curriculum also consists of a moral element in that educators have the

moral obligation to either discourage subtle negative attitudes or to encourage subtle positive attitudes (Portelli, 1993). The hidden curriculum is significant as it is a crucial determinant of school culture, which may either encourage or hinder the learning that occurs within the setting (Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012).

Although existing literature considers the hidden curriculum within formal primary (Dessel, 2010; Wren, 1999), secondary (Hargreaves, 2012; Tao et al., 2006) and tertiary education settings (Blasco, 2012; Cotton, Winter, & Bailey, 2013), my findings show that the hidden curriculum can also be found within early childhood contexts. The emphasis parents place on education, respecting elders, good manners, good morals and listening-centredness, the emphasis reflects what Tobin (2011) refers to as “implicit cultural practices” (p. 4), which he and his colleagues argue are undervalued by demands for accountability by policy-makers and for more globalised ECEC approaches and standards. These implicit cultural practices reflect the longstanding influence of Confucianism on parents’ cultural identity, through their maintenance of the five core Confucian values of benevolence, righteousness, courteousness, filial piety, and wisdom (Yim et al., 2013). These implicit cultural practices are contextually-based, evolving according to a person’s historical and relational experiences.

While the underlying elements of Confucianism that influence the hidden curriculum are not visible in the NPCS and EYLF, they are visible when the principles in the documents are implemented, because they are embedded as part of children’s contexts. As children’s contexts are explicitly valued by both the NPCS and EYLF, it is therefore important to make explicit the hidden curriculum. Making this hidden curriculum explicit does not necessarily imply including it as part of regulatory frameworks. Instead, making it explicit suggests a continuation of these implicit cultural practices through a strengthened understanding of cultural maintenance by educators that is more tailored to the specific needs of parents, brought about by respectful and prolonged relationships.

Acknowledging the coexistence of Western, Chinese and other non-Western ECEC ideals is vital, due to the value that the NPCS and EYLF place on such acknowledgement of the range of ontologies that underpin an ECEC setting. Although not explicit, both documents, and also prior research pertaining to parenting styles of Chinese immigrants (Chao, 1994, 2000, 2001), Confucianism (Cline, 2015) and working in partnership with immigrant parents (De Gioia, 2009, 2013), show that it is important to acknowledge the coexistence of home and host cultures, especially for parents from immigrant backgrounds.

Perceived power structures. In discussions with parents pertaining to education and cultural maintenance, their more tacit understandings of perceived power structures surrounding their relationships with ECEC settings were uncovered. How parents position themselves and develop their identities during the state of disjuncture (discussed in more depth in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5) they experience when their children begin formal ECEC is influenced by where they position and view the identities of the educators with whom they engage. Traditionally, educators or teachers hold revered status in Confucianism, as they are perceived to have attained high levels of morality through continual self-improvement (Tao et al., 2006; Yim et al., 2013; You, 2014). Thus, it is common to find in many Asian education settings the practice of referring to the educator or teacher by title, such as Mr., Mrs., Miss, Madam, Teacher, Sir and Professor (You, 2014). An example is Luo's case study.

Parents in different categories interpret the traditional revered status of educators differently. While still highly respected, the hierarchy or perceived power structure is reduced for the more relationship directed Acceptors, who reportedly felt that it was more a friendship. For the more independence directed Negotiators, there were more displays of overt respect compared to the Acceptors, and even more so for the more rule directed Challengers, who were evidently disappointed when they felt that the staff at their children's ECEC settings did not live up to their expectations. Developing an identity as a parent at this state of disjuncture

is very important, as there is an imperative in both Malaysia and Australia to develop relationships with parents, educators, community and so on. However, there are differences in how the NPCS and EYLF conceptualise the types of relationships between educators and parents.

While parents' involvement as respected partners is championed by the EYLF, the same is not portrayed by the NPCS, where parents' roles are not as evident. In Australia, this involvement is relatively easier for Australian parents due to their familiarity with their respected partner identity, whereas for Malaysian-Chinese parents in Australia, there is a stage of adaptation to the disjuncture due to their own views of the educator as a dispenser of knowledge rather than a co-constructor or partner (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011; Hewitt & Maloney, 2000; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; You, 2014). This may be the reason for most of the parents in my study being categorised as Negotiators, as they attempt to maintain a balance between the educator as dispenser of knowledge and educator as co-constructor. For Malaysian-Chinese parents in Malaysia (Mustafa & Azman, 2013), like Chinese people from other parts of the world, including Singapore (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011) and USA (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009), this hierarchical power structure does not pose an apparent problem during this state of disjuncture because of the accepted cultural role and position of educators in society.

While all parents in Sydney made connection between their parenting approach and the Malaysian-Chinese aspect of their parent identity, only one in Kuala Lumpur, a Negotiator, did so. It is possible that parents in Sydney feel a stronger connection to their Malaysian-Chinese identity due to their immigrant status. Being immigrants, it appears they feel that it is important to retain their Malaysian-Chinese identity because it represents who they are. Therefore, they are more assertive of their immigrant identity and the roles and responsibilities attached to it. Significantly, the only parent in Kuala Lumpur who felt the same way moved from East to West Malaysia. The movement from East to West Malaysia is

a similar kind of uprooting to that of the parents in Sydney who moved from Malaysia to Australia, and would have repercussions in the ways they modify their self-perceptions. I found the Malaysian-Chinese aspect to be a relatively constant aspect of their multiple identities, as they all demonstrated at different levels, whether in Kuala Lumpur or Sydney, an unwillingness to negotiate the meanings and boundaries of their Malaysian-Chinese identity. For example, all the families in Sydney referred to their Malaysian-Chinese identity and upbringing to gain confidence during their states of disjuncture. This confidence is from feeling a positive sense of self-worth and support from an identity to which they comfortably relate. In addition, the Negotiator in Kuala Lumpur encouraged his daughter to respect people of other ethnicities, because he deems it an important characteristic of a person living in Malaysia and is what a Malaysian must do.

By understanding this characteristic of perceived power structures in parents' identities, educators are able to engage in more meaningful and respectful communication and ultimately relationship building with parents. They would, therefore, be able to help parents' adaptation during this state of disjuncture, helping parents to develop a positive sense of self-worth that in turn develops a connection to the group (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). As immigrants who have to discover a sense of direction during this state of disjuncture, this assistance is even more crucial for the Malaysian-Chinese parents in Australia. Without this connection, parents may not feel a sense of belonging to the setting, and may not be able to work in partnership with educators in providing seemingly holistic ECEC that meets their beliefs, goals and understandings while also aligning with recommendations of the EYLF.

The characteristics of the parents' multiple identities discussed above influence the ways in which they meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings. The characteristics that carry more significance would be points of reference during a state of disjuncture, such as when their children begin formal ECEC. In the

following, I discuss the strengths portrayed by these parents as they meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings.

How Malaysian-Chinese parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings during a likely state of disjuncture

From the analysis of the conversations with the parents, I found two overarching considerations when they meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings, as their children begin ECEC in Malaysia and Australia. These historical and relational considerations were the reference points and strengths often underlying decisions relating to their children's ECEC.

Historical considerations. All the parents in my study, for various reasons and personal capacities, are influenced by their upbringing or their own childhood experiences. Some parents consider upbringing because they want to replicate their childhood experiences, while for others they are keen not to do so. Some parents use this aspect to meet, negotiate and overcome challenges by reacting against their own experiences of childhood. From their upbringing, a strong reference point for parents to meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings is cultural maintenance. Cultural maintenance, as discussed earlier in Chapter 5, is considered a way of learning; and the parents in my study reflected aspects of the Chinese learner.

Traditionally, it has been argued that the Chinese learner has been described as a rote learner, a passive learner and a submissive learner (Barker et al., 1991; Samuelowicz, 1987). While aspects of traditional notions of the Chinese learner experiencing learning in academic and structured environments are evident, the parents in my study also incorporate elements of what appears to be the opposite of traditional views of the Chinese learner, a learner who is more active (Biggs, 1996; Nield, 2004; Tweed & Lehman, 2002), participatory (Cheng &

Wan, 2016; Nield, 2004) and vocal (C. S. Lim, 2007). In addition to the immigration of Chinese people to many Western contexts, such as Australia (Martin, 1998), Canada (Costigan & Dokis, 2006) and USA (Chao, 2001), the conceptualisation of the Chinese learner has also evolved due to increased global sharing of information and access to different views of learning that are more interactive, less structured and more formative (C. K. K. Chan, 2009; Tobin et al., 2009). These historical considerations underpin many ECEC decisions parents make for their children, including but not limited to the setting that their children attend and the parenting approaches employed at home. For example, cultural maintenance is reflected in their choices of setting, either reflecting their own strict, teacher-directed upbringing, or not.

While at the moment, it may not be a prime consideration in Malaysia due to the familiarity these parents have with the prevailing ECEC philosophies, it will be more so in Australia when they experience a disjuncture between their upbringing and the prevailing Australian ECEC philosophies. Furthermore, historical considerations regarding education may be considered less by Acceptors and Negotiators when they meet, negotiate and overcome challenges, because this state of disjuncture may not be strongly felt due to their open-mindedness and willingness to negotiate the meanings and boundaries attached to their identities. Acceptors also have an additional consideration during this state of disjuncture: their educator identity, knowledge and understanding, as well as professional experience. In addition, disjuncture may not be felt because they have chosen the settings accordingly; unlike Challengers, who referred more to their historical considerations regarding education, because of their reportedly stronger feelings of disjuncture.

In future, some experience of disjuncture may develop for parents in Malaysia. According to a recent announcement by the Education Director-General of Malaysia, some 5 million students in Malaysian primary and secondary schools will be experiencing newly

revised curricula that will focus on student-centred and differentiated teaching, a project approach to learning, and a streamlined set of subjects or themes and more formative assessment (Nasa, 2016). The implementation of the new curricula in 2017 may provide more incentive for early childhood professionals in Malaysia to fully implement the NPCS in its truest form, whereby structured forms of learning and summative forms of assessment are discouraged (MoE, 2010). Structured forms of learning and summative forms of assessment have been offered by ECEC settings, due to the demand from parents as a form of preparation for primary school (Hewitt & Maloney, 2000; Mustafa & Azman, 2013). However, the implementation of the new curricula in primary and secondary schools would provide continuity between the teaching and learning philosophies espoused in the early childhood years and those characterising primary and secondary schools. The new curricula would also bring them closer to the Australian curricula.

Relational considerations. All the parents in my study include relational considerations when they meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings, when their children begin ECEC. These relational considerations refer to the communication that occurs between parents, their significant others, and educators. Communication, or lack thereof, involves varying levels of trust. Not only do parents have to trust in themselves to make decisions that will be beneficial towards themselves and their families, they also have to feel that the trust they have in others is reciprocated. However, trust is influenced by the level of communication that occurs, for it is more challenging to develop trust when communication is lacking (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Halgunseth, 2009; Knopf & Swick, 2007). The stress that parents feel when they do not feel trusted is likely to hamper their identity negotiation during this state of disjuncture, in turn affecting their group-based identities and sense of belonging. Therefore, communication and trust go hand-in-hand,

and are decisive factors in establishing a sense of belonging, respectful relationships, and genuine partnerships, all main principles of the EYLF.

From my discussions with the parents, the first people that the parents have to communicate with and trust are the people closest to them: their partners and other family members. It is evident that support in varying degrees from partners and family members assists with identity negotiation, because of a prevailing sense of trust. For example, Acceptors and Negotiators owe their flexibility and confidence in overcoming challenges to their parents, who they trust would provide support when required, in turn facilitating identity negotiation. However, while the Acceptor in Sydney also had supportive parents-in-law and husband, it was not so for the Acceptor in Kuala Lumpur. The process of identity negotiation was hampered because of the added challenge of negotiating the boundaries of their parent identity and those of their parents-in-law and husband. The Challenger in Kuala Lumpur also shared the same problems, as she did not feel fully supported by her family members due to opposing aspects of their beliefs, goals and understandings. She also had to negotiate the boundaries of her parent identity and those of her parents-in-law and husband. The Challenger in Sydney, on the other hand, received familial support in retaining their existing ECEC beliefs, goals and understandings. This resulted in the decision to leave their Australia-born daughter in Malaysia to experience what they believed was ECEC that more closely matches their beliefs, goals and understandings.

Communication and trust is also reflected in the different parenting approaches employed by the parents. For example, Acceptors, who are more relationship directed in their parenting, engage in more communication due to expressing their needs and feelings. With more communication, more understanding and respect is gained, therefore facilitating the development of trust. Negotiators, who are more independence directed in their parenting, also communicate their needs and feelings but are more selective with their communication.

The type of trust that Negotiators develop is thus selective, as is their communication.

Challengers, who are more rule directed in their parenting, engage in communication that is expressed through cultural roles, and make little effort to explain those roles to others who may not share the same understanding of those roles. With little communication, understanding and respect are lacking, therefore hindering the development of trust.

All parents have trust in the educators, but for varying reasons. Depending on the category of parent, there are different types and also different levels of trust that exist in the relationships the parents have with educators. For example, while Acceptors and Negotiators trust the educators to deliver education (learning experiences) that is aligned with their ECEC philosophies, Challengers trust the educators to provide care more so than education, due to the mismatch of ECEC philosophies. This reflects the findings of previous research on parents' dichotomised notion of education and care (e.g. Chiam, 2008; Sims, 2014; Van Laere et al., 2012), and on parents' perceptions of the difference between parent and educator roles and responsibilities (e.g. S.-C. E. Ho, 2003; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Tobin et al., 2009). Developing a sense of trust in the educators is one way that parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges, but trust is a very malleable concept. It comes in various forms, and those forms are evident in the different categories of parents in my study. Acceptors fully trust educators and do not seem to distinguish between the education and care provided. Negotiators have some trust in educators but ensure they check if the educators deliver their responsibilities as they say they would. The dichotomy of education and care is more apparent in Negotiators, and even more so in Challengers. Challengers trust the educators to deliver a basic level of care (children will be clean, fed and safe) but they do not trust the aspects that Acceptors and Negotiators trust regarding education, how it is defined, possibly or not including Confucian ideals. Therefore, they do not trust educators completely, and fill the gaps themselves.

In my study, there is little need for the parents in Malaysia to accustom themselves to new cultures, but they do need to build their support networks again because they have relocated away from familial and other support structures. For the parents in Australia, in addition to relocating, they have to negotiate their new physical environment, aspects of Australian culture, as well as unfamiliar social and structural systems. There are also new conceptualisations of child and education, which may be different to what they were used to in Malaysia. They may view their evolving identities as more trusting than initially foreseen. They negotiate these differences while firmly retaining their belief that education is extremely important. As previously discussed, cultural maintenance forms a large portion of education and the identities of the parents, a responsibility they all seem to take on themselves. They accept and are happy to maintain Chinese practices at home because they understand that, at ECEC settings, educators may be unable to carry out as many home cultural practices as parents would like.

During discussions, all the parents shared with me the multiple approaches they took to maintaining their own versions of Chineseness, suggesting the notion of multiple Chinese identities, not one single Chinese identity. They “selectively reconfigure” (Meerwald, 2001, p. 393) their Chineseness, and constantly modify characteristics of their Malaysian-Chinese identity according to their current Australian contexts like a “work in progress” (Wickberg, 2007, p. 53). According to Ang (1998, p. 225), “... Chineseness is not a category with a fixed content – be it racial, cultural, or geographical – but operates as an open and indeterminate signifier whose meanings are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different sections of the Chinese diaspora”. The aspects of Chineseness that assist the parents during this state of disjuncture may include their own experiences and those of others. The aspects of Chineseness that they maintain at home include speaking in Chinese dialects, observing Chinese festivals and celebrations, accessing Chinese media (e.g. songs, cartoon programmes

and books) and eating Malaysian food (which includes Chinese-inspired cuisine). These practices reflect the practices reported by other Malaysian-Chinese (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Yao, 2009), suggesting that Malaysian-Chinese immigrants in Australia, in their unique ways, have maintained their Malaysian-Chineseness over time.

The constant renegotiation and rearticulation of aspects of their Chineseness (Ang, 1998) to configure their own Chineseness is one of the strengths displayed by the parents in my study during this state of disjuncture. It is a selected aspect of their relational considerations that they refer to when they meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings. Similarly, the parents also experience an ever-occurring process of selecting aspects of their historical considerations. In the following, I discuss how the parents view this constant work in progress that they experience – their constantly evolving identities.

Perceptions of Malaysian-Chinese parents of their evolving identities

Previous discussion on the identity negotiation that occurs when parents adapt to their children beginning formal ECEC revealed their historical and relational considerations. These considerations influence their self-perceptions of their evolving identities. This influence is related to the extent of redefinition of characteristics of their identities, when parents modify their beliefs, goals and understandings when challenged and/or supported. I found three main notions when analysing how they perceive their evolving identities. They perceive their evolving identities as a form of change, as a sense of responsibility, and a process of empowerment.

Change. According to the CATF, aspects of historical and/or relational considerations strongly influence the extent to which identities are asserted or redefined, challenged or supported. While all parents are aware that change is inevitable, the extent of change and the

ways parents perceive their evolving identities are different for Acceptors, Negotiators and Challengers. Change is observable in Acceptors and Negotiators, who clearly outline the beliefs, goals and understandings that they are determined to maintain and also those that they are willing to modify. They view change as a natural occurrence. They realise that it is possible to change only the characteristics of their identities that they want change, while maintaining those with which they are happy. By defining their existing meanings and boundaries for the constant characteristics of their identities, they have a fixed point of reference when making changes to their surface identities (Hall, 1990). While both categories of parents change, Acceptors are more willing and more flexible than Negotiators during the adaptation process.

Acceptors face few issues in negotiating and overcoming any disjuncture they feel when introduced to the NPCS and EYLF. This may be due to them being more relationship-based in their parenting, as well as in their relationships with other people. While relationship building is mentioned in the NPCS, it is not as strongly positioned as it is in the EYLF. Negotiators think that it is their responsibility to teach their children regardless, so change is necessarily an element of this process. Challengers are the least willing to accept change to their identities because they want to hold on to their cultural identity and cultural baggage, and in their attempts to do so have sought ECEC from other settings more closely aligned to their beliefs, goals and understandings. According to INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005), understanding, respect and mutual affirmative valuation are crucial in developing positive group- and person-based identities. For parents to think that change is needed during their identity negotiation, they need to feel a sense of belonging, including being understood, respected and mutually affirmed. They accept the change, but their willingness to change would depend on how much they belong and the extent to which they feel that their beliefs, goals and understandings are taken into consideration.

This is also related to the construction of the parent by the regulatory frameworks in both Malaysia and Australia. By reference to the CATF, the extent of positive sense of self-worth and sense of belongingness to a group that the parents feel affect the way they adapt to fit in, in turn affecting the amount of change that occurs. However, regardless of category, all interviewed parents in Australia display change in their Chineseness to varying degrees. While they all still maintain that they are Malaysian-Chinese, they also include some Australian characteristics in their identity negotiation during this state of disjuncture, and appear to negotiate their Malaysian, Chinese and Australian identities to varying degrees. The change is more apparent in Acceptors and Negotiators, who renegotiate the meanings and boundaries attached to their Chineseness. At times during my discussions with them, they gave the impression of flexibility in their constant switching of identities to adapt to situations at hand. In some ways, such flexibility reflects Meerwald's (2001) notion that one "can be Australian, Chinese, Malaysian all at once, without having to be fixed to any particular space" (p. 389). In contrast, change is not as apparent in Challengers, who, although acknowledging that there are contextual modifications to their practices and that there are positive practices in the Australian culture, attempt to maintain more characteristics of their Malaysian-Chineseness.

For all interviewed parents in Malaysia, due to their familiarity with the sociocultural context that they are embedded in, it was not as necessary to change their Chineseness, compared to the participants in Australia. For these parents in Malaysia, especially those who relocated to West Malaysia from East Malaysia, change was more in relation to family life (e.g. from a single person to a person with a family) and geographical differences (e.g. from a small town to a big city).

Change that takes into account historical and/or relational considerations appears to result in positive redefinition and adaptation of identities. Unlike Acceptors and Negotiators,

Challengers are unwilling to move the boundaries of fixed identities and redefine meanings attached to these. This implies that, when historical and/or relational considerations are not taken into account, the redefinition and adaptation of identities are less positive than for Acceptors and Negotiators. Without interactive negotiation (Y. Y. Kim, 2005), Challengers find it more difficult to change because they strive to assert their existing identities, ending in little understanding and respect for their beliefs, goals and understandings. Regardless of how parents perceive their evolving identities, a constant aspect of their identities is their sense of responsibility towards themselves and their significant others.

Sense of responsibility. The parents in all categories reveal a strong sense of responsibility towards themselves and their significant others. While not always immediately observable, their identities as a person, partner, parent, child and Malaysian-Chinese all include this sense of responsibility, which they realise differently.

The parents' self-perceived identities as a person revolve around the concept of achieving the best versions of themselves. This perception of self reflects the Confucian-informed teaching of cultivation of self, in particular moral cultivation (Cline, 2015; Li, 2009). There is an inherent notion of commitment to establishing a learning purpose that would not only cultivate high levels of morality but also a purpose in life (Li, 2009). This purpose in life is highly likely to have been influenced by their upbringing, whereby their parents would have discussed the importance of education as a path towards a purpose in life (e.g. to be a pharmacist). This path is achieved through a sense of responsibility that involves "energy, dedication, emotion and action" (Li, 2009, p. 55) (e.g. committing to studying Chemistry hard and qualifying as a pharmacist from a prestigious school of pharmacy). It is a kind of self-perfection with a particular focus, which, although it may coincide with career aspiration, is not the same thing. Instead, it is "an inspirational purpose in the large framework in order to channel one's lifelong learning" (Li, 2009, p. 55).

From discussions with the parents in my study, it appears that the parents' self-perceived identities as a partner and parent relate to the concept of family well-being, which is one of their purposes in life. They ensure the well-being of their families by assuming different roles at different times. An overarching finding is that every parent feels that they are different after becoming a parent. They are different because they are no longer one person, and have many other responsibilities. All parents feel an increased sense of responsibility because, before, they did not have a child, but now they have a child, and in some families, up to three children. The sense of responsibility that parents feel influences the decisions they make for themselves and their families. Effectively, it also influences the types of settings their children will attend, in turn affecting the types of relationships that they will build with the educators and the setting. It will also influence the development of the children's agency, whether at home or at the settings, and is related to other characteristics of their identities. Children's agency is influenced by parents' willingness to trust and to impart to their children a sense of responsibility. The development of children's agency resonates with practices informed by the NPCS and EYLF, because respecting children's agency and helping children understand that there are personal consequences for their own behaviours, both encourage children to take some responsibility for aspects of their own learning.

Not being restricted to teaching their children to be good citizens who will also develop their own purposes in life, this increased sense of responsibility also plays a part in deciding the setting that best suits their ECEC philosophies. Some of the parents point out the non-existence of a universal handbook of parenting, and share details of their trial-and-error approach. They feel that, as parents, they grow with their children. They view every moment as a new learning opportunity not only for their children but also for themselves as parents, as they continually refine their approach according to their experiences and their children's on-going development. This view exemplifies the notion of filial piety, the belief that, in their old

age, their children will reciprocate with similar efforts of refining their approach and growing with them. Different parents in different categories do this in different ways, influenced by their historical and relational considerations. Although different in the ways they meet, negotiate and overcome the challenges that ultimately affect how they change, all parents do perceive their evolving identities from the perspective of an increased sense of responsibility.

The parents' self-perceived identities as a child revolve around the value of filial piety, an important part of Confucian-informed culture. Filial piety is "an attitude of respect for one's parents with tangible acts such as obeying them, providing for them, and nurturing them" (S.-L. Lim & Lim, 2012, pp. 204-205). From discussions with the parents, it appears that there is an increased sense of responsibility towards their own parents and bringing honour to the family name, after they become parents themselves. The parents made frequent reference to instilling in their children the importance of respecting their elders and bringing honour to the family name as ways of repaying their own parents. Similar to reports by people of Chinese heritage in other parts of the world, including Australia (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1990), China (S.-L. Lim & Lim, 2012; Wu, 1996), Hong Kong (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1990; Yim et al., 2013), Singapore (Wu, 1996), Taiwan (Wu, 1996) and the USA (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1990), they deem it an important responsibility to maintain the concept of filial piety with their children because they would like their children to do the same for them in future. They feel that they portray the best versions of themselves when their children are able to reflect the same esteemed values and teachings from their childhood, and therefore play their roles in modelling, guiding and imparting experiences and knowledge to ensure that their children have a better upbringing (Chao, 2001; Downie et al., 2007; Leung, 1996; Luo et al., 2013; Pearson & Rao, 2003).

The parents' self-perceived identities as Malaysian-Chinese revolve around the concept of contributing to the country's human capital and common good. From discussions

with the parents, it appears that there is an increased sense of responsibility relating to culture and country, which is demonstrated in how they pass on cultural values and practices to the next generation. They feel that it is imperative to not break the cultural practices and values so highly regarded by their own parents, which were handed down by their ancestors and are connected to the Confucian core values of benevolence and righteousness, and the Chinese work ethic that has continually helped support Malaysia's economy since the British colonial times. They also feel that it is imperative to instil in their children a sense of belonging to Malaysia or Australia by encouraging them to understand and respect the cultural values and practices of other ethnicities, and also by maximising opportunities for their children to develop into responsible global citizens. Aligned with previous research that advocates for investments in early childhood to potentially increase human capital and decrease inequality later in life (Barnett & Ackerman, 2006; Bauchmüller et al., 2014), the parents' increased sense of responsibility regarding educating future generations implies a notion of contributing to the country's human capital and common good. However, the parents preserve these cultural values and practices through their own reconceptualisation and renegotiation of meanings and boundaries attached to those values and practices.

Parents perceive their own evolving identities by redefining their own Chineseness, which resembles the notion of selective reconfiguration (Meerwald, 2001). In this sense, parents reconfigure selected aspects of their existing beliefs, goals and understandings of what it means to be a Malaysian-Chinese parent when their children begin ECEC in Malaysia and Australia. One way selective reconfiguration of Chineseness is exhibited by the parents in my study is in their consideration of language choice and use. I found that language is a common consideration for all parents as they perceive their evolving identities, whereby different languages are important for different reasons. Context of situation is influential, because the disjuncture experienced by the parents in Malaysia is different to that experienced by the

parents in Australia. The disjuncture for parents in Malaysia places increasing importance on English and Chinese, while that for parents in Australia places increasing importance on Chinese only. For parents in Malaysia, it is crucial to be proficient in both Chinese and English, and with education highly valued, parents deem the provision of additional English and Chinese programs necessary. From British colonial times, proficiency in English and Chinese has been of utmost importance not only for educational purposes but also career advancement and life opportunities (Lee, 2012). Historically, the education of the Chinese in rural and semi-urban Malaysia was in the mother-tongue (language of ancestral origin), and was highly valued because of concerns about the possibility of children losing their language, culture, and identity (Kua, 2008; Lee, 2012). For those who lived in more urban areas, acquiring an English education was seen as a means to better employment opportunities in the colonial civil service and British firms (Lee, 2012). Parents in Australia appear to also share the same sentiments as the parents in Malaysia. They appear to place importance on the learning of these two languages; but due to their own proficiency in English and English being the language of instruction in educational settings, they discussed plans to enrol their children in Chinese programs external to the ECEC settings.

A sense of responsibility is crucial not only during this state of disjuncture but also throughout parenthood. It is especially crucial in the effective implementation of any ECEC philosophy, because parents with a sense of responsibility will ensure that they fully commit to their roles and responsibilities as a cooperative partner in the holistic development of their children.

Empowerment. Dahlberg and Moss (2005, p. 149) explain empowerment as “a concept of inclusion and normalisation, drawing upon the importance attached to autonomy and self-determination in liberalism”. They argue that empowerment can imply new power relationships, whereby empowerment can be gained through knowledge and understanding.

When applied to my study, the knowledge and understanding developed through communication and trust can thus be seen to empower the parents. As such, the change that is referred to in the CATF can also be viewed as the empowerment the parents gain depending on the adaptation that occurs during their identity negotiation process.

The feeling of empowerment felt by parents is category-dependent (Acceptors, Negotiators, Challengers). By reference to the CATF, the higher the acknowledgement, acceptance and respect for beliefs, goals and understandings, the more parents feel empowered as individuals. This allows partnerships between parent and educator, and also other individuals in the community, to become more meaningful. When meaningful partnerships are established within the community, there is more effective community involvement and social contribution. Effective community involvement and social contribution encourages intercultural communication, in turn developing exchanges of multiple beliefs and understandings. The community is able to gain a more holistic understanding of Chinese from Malaysia, enabling more reciprocated, cooperative and welcoming attitudes. Meaningful partnerships that involve communities that respect and understand one another are beneficial to a country's social and economic growth. Therefore, it is imperative to begin developing meaningful partnerships when young children and their families participate in ECEC.

As empowerment is experienced differently by Acceptors, Negotiators and Challengers, whether a parent is more relationship, independence or rule directed in their relationships with others would also influence the manner in which empowerment is realised. For example, Challengers who are more rule-directed were also seen to be lacking in communication and trust in their relationships. As noted in Chapter 5, with little communication and trust, it is more difficult to build relationships that are acknowledging, accepting and respectful. This would then affect the empowerment that Challengers realise, in

a ripple effect that extends into the communication and trust that they have in the wider community. According to Delpit (2006), educators are in an ideal position to play this role of initiating true dialogue. She suggests that educators are able to do so by “seeking out those whose perspectives may differ most, by learning to give their words complete attention... by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of colour, and to listen, no, to hear what they say” (p. 47). Although her suggestion refers to the educator-child relationship, it is also applicable to the educator-parent relationship, whereby educators would be viewed as more powerful by parents due to existing notions of the educator as a dispenser of knowledge rather than a co-constructor or partner (Ebbeck & Chan, 2011; Hewitt & Maloney, 2000; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; You, 2014).

In Summary

While parents require time to adjust to the ECEC contexts of both countries, the parents in Malaysia would adapt more easily to the Malaysian philosophies, but for the Malaysian-Chinese parents in Australia it is not as easy. Whether in Malaysia or Australia, this adaptation is especially harder for parents who do not feel acknowledged, accepted and respected. Without this acknowledgement, acceptance and respect, it is difficult for them to feel empowered. This results in a low sense of self-worth, and in turn influences their perceptions of their evolving identities. Empowerment allows a more positive perception of their identities, and the manner in which these evolve. Especially for immigrants in Australia, it is important to build this feeling of empowerment, because as espoused by the EYLF, respectful relationships are crucial in helping to develop families’ sense of belonging, not only to their respective settings, but also to their local community and Australia as a whole.

In general, my findings from participants in Malaysia and Australia support the importance of understanding parents’ negotiation of multiple identities during a likely state of

disjuncture. This understanding is built upon the investigation of the characteristics of their identities, which influence their goodness when negotiating and overcoming challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings when their children begin ECEC. In turn, the goodness experienced by the parents would influence their self-perceptions of their evolving identities. This suggests that the understanding of parents' negotiation of multiple identities during this state of disjuncture has applications beyond the areas to which it has been previously applied. In the following chapter, I offer possible implications of my findings, outline the limitations of my study, and suggest potential directions for future research.

Chapter 7: Implications, Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

For this study, I set out to investigate how Malaysian-Chinese parents negotiate multiple identities as their children begin ECEC in Malaysia and Australia. In addressing this problem, I aimed to answer these three questions:

1. What are the characteristics of Malaysian-Chinese parents' identities?
2. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings during a likely state of disjuncture?
3. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents perceive their evolving identities?

I found three categories of parents: Acceptors, Negotiators and Challengers. I found that there were three main characteristics of these parents' identities: perception of self, education, and perceived power structures. These characteristics of the parents' identities are contributing factors in how they meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings. Each category experiences a state of disjuncture at varying levels when their children begin ECEC. Consequently, a full understanding of these characteristics of identities requires detailed and varied investigation. I found that, often, the underlying reference points and strengths when parents made decisions relating to their children's ECEC were historical and relational in nature. I found that the parents' identity negotiation reflects how they selectively reconfigure (Meerwald, 2001) these historical and relational considerations to best overcome the challenges faced, and how they acknowledge that their identities evolve. These parents perceive their evolving identities mainly in three forms: change, sense of responsibility, and empowerment.

In this final chapter, I offer implications of the findings, outline the limitations of my study, and suggest potential direction for researchers contemplating future research in this area.

The benefits gained from identifying the characteristics of these parents' identities, searching for their goodness when in a state of disjuncture and understanding their perceptions of their evolving identities, are threefold:

1. *The formation of respectful and collaborative relationships among parents, families and educators.* This is through understanding Malaysian-Chinese parents' cultural baggage and the active involvement of parents in the decision-making affecting their children, as outlined by the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a).
2. *The facilitation of Malaysian-Chinese families' full and active participation in Australian society.* As espoused by the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a) and NQS for ECEC and School Age Care (DEEWR, 2009b), high quality ECEC environments are characterised by strong partnerships. The understandings gained from my study assist in the creation of ECEC contexts in which parents make significant, meaningful contributions to the particular ECEC environments with which they engage.
3. *The provision of ecologically sound, responsive, high-quality ECEC.* By investigating parent identities, the wider communities of Malaysia and Australia, especially those of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, are also able to benefit from my study. Ecologically sound, responsive and high-quality ECEC can only be provided when there is a full understanding of parents' identities because these characteristics of identities inform many ECEC-related decisions.

While the above benefits are specific to Malaysian-Chinese parents, they also have possible implications for the wider community and, in particular, ECEC stakeholders. I detail these implications in the next section of this chapter.

Implications

The implications of my study can be categorised as theoretical, structural and regulatory, or operational. In the following, I explain implications in each category in turn.

Theoretical implications. While my study was undertaken from a broader sociocultural perspective, a theoretical framework that allowed for fine-grained analysis of the specific characteristics of identity was required. The CATF and TP-RCO (Tuttle et al., 2012) served as my study's theoretical framework. To craft the theoretical framework that underpins the specifics of my research, there was a need to use the CATF in conjunction with the TP-RCO (Tuttle et al., 2012) for a more complete understanding of the negotiation of identities that occur during a time of possible dynamic change in parents' beliefs, goals and understandings. This framework illustrates the need for ECEC to more fully embrace theories beyond ECEC in ECEC research, particularly regarding relationships and partnership with parents. Thus, widening the theoretical reserve from which ECEC research can draw is an implication of my study. I have shown that, when theoretical frames beyond the immediate ECEC field are applied, detailed understandings of existing knowledge can be viewed in multiple ways.

My survey of prior research in ECEC and allied fields reveals a paucity of application of the ICTC-CA (Y. Y. Kim, 2005) and INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005), either independently or in the combined manner (as in the CATF) that I used in my study. These two theories are traditionally applied more often in the fields of cross-cultural adaptation and intercultural communication. For example, INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005) was used in conjunction with Imahori and Cupach's (2005) Identity Management Theory to underpin research that studied how primary school-aged children from Hungary, Mexico and the USA represented their identities online (Hou et al., 2015). In a more recent study, Chen (2016) used the ICTC-CA (Y. Y. Kim, 2005) in combination with von Bertalanffy's (1968) General Systems Theory to

develop the research model that informed a quantitative study exploring the role that adoptive parents play in the cross-cultural adaptation and identity formation processes of their internationally adopted children. It is apparent that intentionally selecting and combining theories (as in the CATF in my study) provides a useful lens through which to view the complex process of identity negotiation during a state of disjuncture.

The relational elements and fluid nature of the TP-RCO has also proven to be a useful way of framing parenting (e.g. L. Kim, Knudson-Martin, & Tuttle, 2014; Tuttle et al., 2012), especially in light of the emphasis given to relationships. It is also useful when parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are involved, because of its consideration for the reciprocity between parent, child and context. The use of the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012) as a resource to explore cultural variations in parenting and engage in discussion around parenting practices and identity negotiation has been shown to be useful in the case of parents who appear to struggle with the various pulls of multiple identities in contrasting contexts. Its application in ECEC research responds to reported sociocultural limitations of previous research that applied parenting dimensions that are used in more Western contexts, and which thus called for alternative concepts for parenting (Chao, 1994, 2001; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Frewen et al., 2015; Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009; S.-L. Lim & Lim, 2003; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1990). The application of the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012) in my study was in response to this call for alternative concepts of parenting, and as my study has shown, it is indeed important to ask parents what messages about parent-child relationships they learnt during childhood and how they view their roles in making decisions for their children.

It appears that the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012) has not been applied in ECEC research specifically but has been used in research that included children of the early childhood age range of birth to 8 years. Informed by the notion of relational orientations from the Relational Orientations Framework (Silverstein et al., 2006), the TP-CRO incorporates the relational

self, in which the construction of self is aimed more towards maintaining relationships with significant others than collectivist and individualist constructions of self (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008; Chao, 1994, 2001; Gao et al., 1996). Originally developed from clinical practice in relationship therapy, this typology is traditionally applied in the field of family therapy. For example, L. Kim et al. (2014) drew on this typology to guide their research that examined how second-generation Korean-American mothers born in North America and their partners approach parent-child relationships. Following a similar vein of enquiry into parenting that straddles contrasting cultures, the application of the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012) in my study has also provided a useful lens through which to view the parents during a state of disjuncture.

The theoretical implications of my study highlight the necessity to adopt theories that are traditionally beyond the immediate ECEC field in research due to the complex nuances of culture, to which current regulatory frameworks point but nevertheless underplay. While these frameworks place varying emphases on relationship-building, respecting diversity and partnership formation, relationships, respect for diversity and partnerships are strongest when as much as possible is known about the people who form these relationships. This is because all parents, regardless of age, ethnicity or culture, are unique, when children first attend ECEC for the first time. My study is an example of how parents can be differentiated, in this case by looking specifically at Malaysian-Chinese parents who experience the same type of disjuncture but in different ways in two contexts. Understanding parents' identity negotiation is a fundamental aspect of understanding this disjuncture. Consequently, consideration of identity and relational frameworks is essential.

Structural and Regulatory Implications. The structural and regulatory implications of my study relate to those features that broadly underpin the day-to-day ECEC that is enacted by parents, children, educators and other professionals. Such features include, but may not be

limited to: policies in ECEC and allied fields; regulatory environments pertaining to early childhood and other forms of educational provision, including measurements of quality; and approaches to teacher education. It is essential that diversity is recognised in relevant policies and regulations. This recognition cannot be tokenistic. It must acknowledge the complex nature of the cultural baggage of parents regardless of their origin, because even when parents do not relocate to a new country, they may be influenced by the ways of thinking and acting that are dominant in their existing country. As my study has shown, there are meanings and boundaries attached to identities that are flexible, just as there are meanings and boundaries attached to identities that are fixed.

A structural and regulatory implication is to reconsider notions of diversity. Regardless of cultural baggage, identity negotiation is still experienced during a state of disjuncture. Diversity may easily be oversimplified in the development of relevant policies and regulations. Diversity has been acknowledged in varying ways, such as acknowledging different skin and hair colour, heritage language, religion and belief systems (e.g. Bacchi, 2000). These are but some of the outwardly obvious aspects of diversity. However, there is also the need to include identity. According to my study, understanding identity is crucial in embracing diversity and building strong relationships among all stakeholders in ECEC. By including identity, diversity becomes something that is constantly enacted according to person and context at a particular point in time (Rhedding-Jones, 2001). Just as in considering parents to have many identities, perhaps part of a reconsideration of the notion of diversity is to make the term plural *diversities*.

Another structural and regulatory implication is to offer a more nuanced approach to developing relationships with parents. This might result in modifications to existing learning frameworks such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a) or NPCS (MoE, 2010). For example, such modifications to the NPCS (MoE, 2010) could involve consideration of parents' differing

identities and their beliefs, goals and understandings, rather than just stating the need for parents to be involved in their children's ECEC. Currently, the NPCS (MoE, 2010) strongly encourages parents' involvement in children's ECEC and provides base-level examples, such as fruit-cutting, but does not include guidelines outlining opportunities for educators to build deep-level relationships with families. Similarly, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a) charges educators to build strong relationships with parents but does not provide detailed guidelines on *how* educators should approach the relationship-building with parents. Regardless of parents' origin, it is undeniable that they have much to offer in terms of their children's ECEC because of their wealth of knowledge about their family contexts. Strong relationships with parents are crucial because understanding and incorporating this wealth of knowledge assists parents in contributing significantly and meaningfully to the particular ECEC environments with which they engage. An important implication of my study is the provision of details surrounding parent engagement with ECEC settings and relationships with staff, which is based on deep understanding of characteristics of parents' identities and negotiation of identities due to the unique cultural baggage of parents.

With the recognition of multiple identities comes the need to recognise multiple views of learning, hence multiple views of teaching. Just as how my study has shown that historical and relational considerations contribute to parents' decision-making when negotiating their identities, teachers' pedagogical leanings and decisions too can be influenced by their historical and relational experiences. As "any re-conceptualisation of pedagogy must go hand-in-hand with a re-conceptualisation of knowledge" (Edwards & Usher, 2008, p. 168), multiple views of teaching can be cultivated through thoughtfully designed programmes that further encourage critical and reflective practice.

Teacher education must be tailored to encourage pre-service teachers to realise their potential roles in maintaining the *status quo* (Canella, 2005), especially during a crucial point

of transition in ECEC for parents. There is a need to continuously work towards questioning existing beliefs and biases by asking whose status quo or whose beliefs, goals and understandings are being upheld (Canella, 2005), due to seemingly increasing diversities of parents' beliefs, goals and understandings. An implication of my study is for teacher education programmes to address issues relating to identity negotiation in a way that demonstrates the immediate application of reflexivity in day-to-day operations. Reflexivity helps develop intercultural competence, and has to be entrenched from very early stages of teacher education, because "past intercultural experiences [beget] future intercultural collaboration" (Summers & Volet, 2008, p. 367). An example is the inclusion of group work that is culturally-mixed from the earliest stages of teacher education programmes. This can assist pre-service teachers to develop skills in communicating with parents, for them to gain understanding of parents' unique identity negotiation experiences through negotiating differences and sharing beliefs, goals and understandings. The intention is to assist pre-service teachers to develop cultural competence by challenging their existing historical and relational considerations. The state of disjuncture when challenged may help them empathise with others who experience a similar state of disjuncture.

In addition honing communication skills, teacher education programmes must also provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to build their confidence in entering into dialogue with parents. According to Fozdar and Volet (2010), it is more important to develop intercultural confidence compared to intercultural competence. Therefore, as well as being part of a culturally-mixed group, pre-service teachers must have opportunities throughout their teacher education programme for collaborative group work. Teacher education programmes must provide a safe environment that encourages pre-service teachers to become aware and reflect on their own beliefs, goals and understandings, which may or may not differ from those of their group members (Antal & Friedman, 2008). They are then able to

experiment with alternative ways of completing group tasks and negotiating identities by being in dialogue with other group members (Antal & Friedman, 2008). One method is to assist pre-service teachers realise that they need not have answers for every question when in dialogue with other group members, and potentially, with parents. They do, however, need to respond. Having an answer is different to responding. The latter, according to Bakhtin (1981, p. 282) is “dialogically merged and mutually conditioned” to understanding. If learning to respond is learning to understand, it implies the necessity for pre-service teachers to learn respectful ways of responding to parents from a myriad of backgrounds when building strong partnerships.

However, collaborative group work must involve prolonged engagement with members of the same culturally-mixed group (Meerwald, 2013). This is so that the skills that the pre-service teachers develop are sustainable, not merely tokenistic (Meerwald, 2013). This develops competence and confidence to respond to others in a respectful manner, in turn promoting a sense of belonging and trust that potentially underpins similar future encounters with parents.

Operational Implications. The operational implications of my study are those related to day-to-day ECEC that is enacted by parents, children, teachers and other professionals. For staff in ECEC settings and those working in allied fields, the broad implication is to base actions on the acknowledgement that parents come from a myriad of backgrounds, which means that there is a myriad of various forms of cultural baggage and identities to consider in day-to-day interactions. Families may come from different cultural backgrounds to those of each other and to those of staff. This implies the need for staff to develop tailored forms of contact and communication with parents. Staff may also establish conditions for optimal communication with, understanding of, and collaboration with parents. The findings of my study imply the need to transcend base-level language environments (e.g. notices, signs and

forms in community languages) for parents to perceive themselves as empowered contributors to their children's ECEC and to promote a sense of belonging. There is a need to consider and respect multiple views of teaching and parenting.

My study alerts ECEC staff to think about the ways in which the social context exerts influence, and in engaging parents in meaningful discussions about their beliefs, goals and understandings. Staff must first express the need and their desire to acknowledge parents' cultural baggage and the disjuncture they experience, to develop strategies to assist in empowering parents. Proactive engagement with well-planned intentional steps to invite open communication with parents paves the way for in-depth understanding and partnership. Also referred to as dialogue by Adair and Tobin (2008), such engagement can only occur when staff readily "explore, learn about and accept diverse forms of knowledge" (Canella, 2005, p. 32). Such engagement also assists staff in articulating specific ECEC priorities that are relevant to the parents. In addition, proactive engagement provides opportunities for both staff and parents "to assess the value of different ways of doing things instead of insisting that there is only one way" (Bacchi, 2000, p. 68).

Another implication is the promotion of parent support rather than parent education (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). Adair and Tobin (2008), found that discussions between staff and parents are often "hierarchical rather than reciprocal with staff justifying curriculum, giving child-rearing tips and correcting parental misperceptions" (p. 148). Although the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a) acknowledges parents as children's first teachers, respectful partnerships necessitate educators supporting rather than educating parents. Such support can lead to assisting parents to realise that they can contribute to their children's lives now, not only later. My study has shown that understanding identity is an important element in providing parent support that builds respectful partnerships.

An aspect of identity to carefully consider when building respected partnerships is that of perceived power structures. For parents to fully participate in and contribute to their children's ECEC at the setting, staff need to understand that they may be viewed differently by parents from different cultures in crucial ways. Some cultures may regard ECEC staff very highly while others may have little respect. Where staff position themselves within the web of relationships and how this position may be negotiated relies on ongoing engagement with and building relationships with parents. With continual honest communication, it is possible to build connections and develop trust (Adair & Tobin, 2008). In turn, parents may realise that staff can operate as supportive partners, whose sole purpose is not to impose new or better thinking relating to children and ECEC (Adair & Tobin, 2008). Staff can seek to leverage parents' potential by characterising their role as supportive and collaborative rather than directive.

My study has shown that parents may view parenting as a trial-and-error, learn-as-you-go process. An inclusive and respectful way to support parents can be to understand their natural instincts and what I identified as examples of hidden curriculum. If staff focus more on children's range of physical, emotional, mental, linguistic and social capacities but do not take into account the same range of capacities in parents, elements of the hidden curriculum may be perpetuated and may not be understood. Staff must acknowledge historical and relational influences on parents' ECEC decision-making, and explain to parents that children's characteristics can also influence these decisions. The dynamic parent-child relationship both influences and is influenced by being a parent (L. Kim et al., 2014; Tuttle et al., 2012). Being a parent is something that is actively and constantly experienced throughout adulthood, not just determined from childhood experiences. This implies the need for staff to develop communication strategies to widen the understandings of parent, to realise that

parents are different in different situations, by understanding and not ignoring their differences.

I also found that one way parents perceived their evolving identities was through an underlying sense of responsibility that contributes to the common good, another example of hidden curriculum. As the connection between parent-child relationships and the society can be influenced by the possible moral cultivation (Cline, 2015) that occurs alongside this sense of responsibility, this implies the need for explanatory tools to generate understanding of the effects of parenting on society as a whole. As such, parents affect social change in important ways. It is crucial for staff to encourage parents to realise the vital importance of the early years of children's lives, and that their ECEC-related decisions have the ability to shape their children's future in tangible ways (Cline, 2015).

Limitations

While the findings of my study contribute to ECEC literature, especially regarding Malaysian-Chinese families during the transition to formal ECEC, it is an in-depth study into a specific aspect of the field. As is the case for any research, there are limitations by virtue of scope, methodology and practicality. In the following, I acknowledge the limitations of this study.

Participants.

The participants of my study were from only one ethnic group (Chinese) and from one country of origin (Malaysia). As I set out, with clear participant criteria, data collected from the participants of my study are not representative of all people who are Malaysians or Chinese. In addition, my findings are not necessarily applicable to non-Chinese speaking Chinese people or succeeding generations of Chinese immigrants. However, my findings may be transferable to other groups of immigrant parents and also to groups from different

ethnicities and countries, but care would need to be taken to also consider their cultural and historical contexts. Issues pertaining to transferability are addressed later in this chapter.

Furthermore, my study did not involve the uniform participation of mothers and fathers, either separately or together. Some interviews were conducted with only a father or a mother, some were conducted with both. While gender is shaped by cultural discourses and inextricably related to the way that couples parent (C. S. Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011; L. Kim et al., 2014; Rinaldi & Howe, 2012), the influence of gender on the identity negotiation of the parents was not part of my research aims.

Researcher Background. I am of the same background as participants, in that I am from the same country, am of the same ethnicity, and in some ways experienced the same education system as my participants. I would consider myself an insider researcher, or more specifically, a “total insider researcher” (Chavez, 2008, p. 475), because I share multiple identities or profound experiences with my participants. However, there were instances when I considered myself an outsider researcher because there were specific identities and unique experiences that I did not identify with closely, or at all. My researcher position, either as insider or outsider, likely influenced the information disclosed and how it was delivered. How I represent and share the information is inevitably shaped by my identities and experiences. While insider knowledge has been found to be advantageous (discussed in more detail later in this chapter), it can also lead to subjectivity due to familiarity and increased risk of filtering data based on personal knowledge and experience (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Greene, 2014; Yin, 2011). However, it has been argued that outsider researchers may have the tendency to do the same, but from a point of the unknown rather than of the familiar (Greene, 2014).

Knowledge, experiences and perceptions can be referred to as presumptions (Yin, 2011) or preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2011). Tufford and Newman (2011) use this term to refer to existing “assumptions, values, interests, emotions and theories” (p. 81) that

can potentially affect the interpretation of data, either positively or negatively, as a source of insight or a source of indifference. As such, these presumptions may unconsciously affect the whole process of my study, as presumptions arising at any stage of research may influence other stages. Consequently, my researcher background can be turned into a limitation.

I was mindful of this limitation, and therefore drew on the idea of bracketing. Bracketing is sometimes used to reduce the potential effects of presumptions related to the research (Tufford & Newman, 2011). There was a need for bracketing because, although I am part of the culture under investigation, I may not understand the subcultures. Although I may share similar experiences, having an experience is neither necessary nor sufficient for knowing it (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). However, I drew from the idea of bracketing not to prevent bias but to complement my analysis with a more complete picture of my perspective. According to LeVasseur (2003), a complete prevention of bias is not possible nor desirable when aiming to understanding lived experiences, because inquiry-motivated research contains elements of curiosity that may be subjective. While Ashworth (1999) recommends not to ignore but to set aside presumptions “to reveal engaged, lived experience” (p. 708), Fischer (2009) suggests not to set aside but to be constantly mindful of how the presumptions affect what was observed and the interpretation of the observation. For my study, I chose to follow Fischer’s (2009) and LeVasseur’s (2003) suggestions because it is not possible to maintain objectivity entirely throughout the research process, due to the sharing of personal information and real experiences that involve emotional attachment. Therefore, as much as possible, I reminded myself of my presumptions.

Practicality. My study involved an ethnographic approach. I immersed myself in the lives of my research participants to observe and/or experience first-hand the normalities of their daily lives as much as possible. These normalities not only included regular routines (e.g. brushing teeth, having breakfast) but also unexpected constraints and pressures (e.g.

waking up late, the distress of a younger sibling). The same is true for research with people, whereby at times research is smooth and not so during other times (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Emerson et al., 2011). There were events that occurred beyond my control, which caused some limited opportunities during data collection. For example, I met a participant in Sydney twice instead of three times, as she gave birth during the study. Another participant in Kuala Lumpur also was able to meet only twice due to unplanned work-related commitments. Such incidents resulted in not all participants being interviewed three times, as was initially planned. Four families were interviewed only twice, with questions originally scheduled for Interview 2 and Interview 3 merged into one interview. Unlike the other families who had three opportunities for engagement, these four families only had two. My shortened engagement with them may have influenced their level of familiarity, and thus, frankness with me (Yin, 2011).

While I was able to conduct observations at all ECEC settings, not every family gave permission to conduct home observations. This meant that I was unable to obtain supporting data for those families, thus preventing me from forming a more complete understanding of them. As my analysis focused on what the parents told me, with observations as supporting material, I was limited to using the data from my interviews with parents to answer my research questions. This may have influenced the credibility of my study.

Generalisability and Transferability. Findings from research are considered generalisable when they are applicable to situations beyond the immediate research context (Flick, 2007). As research using a qualitative case study approach targets specific issues or questions in a specific context (Flick, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2006), findings are normally not generalisable to the wider population or wider research environment (Flick, 2007; Gibbs, 2007; Yin, 2014). This is due to them being statistically limited or small in number of participants or cases (Morrow, 2005; Stark & Torrance, 2005). Generalisation to other

contexts is considered difficult due to the definitive nature of case studies (Flick, 2007).

Although not generalisable to the wider population or wider research environment, or statistically generalisable, findings are generalisable to theoretical propositions (O'Leary, 2005; Yin, 2014). However, case studies have been argued to provide findings that can also represent general experiences through strategic selection of cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

As I strategically selected cases that exemplify definitive experiences of a particular group of Malaysian-Chinese people, to fulfil the aims of my study, findings represent specific examples of non-mainstream Malaysian culture of Chineseness, which is increasingly more common in Australian ECEC settings and related environments. Although specific, my findings are transferable to other specific populations due to my study being in-depth with a small sample instead of surface-level research with a large sample. In addition, I disclosed information regarding myself as the researcher, my research context, process, participants and my relationship with them, to assist others in deciding on the transferability of my findings. Such information assists others in deciding whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which he or she is familiar, and the extent to which findings can justifiably be applied to another setting (Morrow, 2005; Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2011). Findings from research are considered transferable when they are relatable to “broader philosophical positions that cut across specialisations... to allow the study to be different things to different people” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 238).

While my study has limitations, they do not detract from the significance of the findings. Rather, these limitations offer opportunities for my work to be extended in particular ways in future research, which directions I detail in the following section.

Potential Directions for Future Research

In this section, I suggest potential directions for future research that consider similar topics or approaches. Here, I provide suggestions in reply to the five limitations previously noted.

Participants. A potential direction for future research is to include participants who are Chinese from other countries. Another possibility is to include Malaysians of different ethnicities. More general research that acknowledges ethnicities beyond Malaysian-Chinese is also a potential for future research. For example, do the parents of Vietnamese children living in a large city with a large Vietnamese population experience the same state of disjuncture and identity negotiation? Or do they not because the population is so large that they do not experience any disjuncture due to the Vietnamese culture being deeply embedded to the point of being almost mainstream compared to the Malaysian-Chinese in Sydney? There is a need to acknowledge that other ethnic groups may also undergo similar experiences, and that there is the likelihood of experiencing disjuncture and identity negotiation when people are mobile.

Further research could address how relational parenting orientations are influenced by gender dynamics between parents, and parents and child. A suggestion is to include analysis of how parents work together in the parenting dyad or the gender dynamics of father and mother, and how this may change over time (e.g. remaining an Acceptor, Negotiator or Challenger, or shifting categories) if a longitudinal design was applied. In situations where only one parent is willing to participate, a potential direction is for future research to report findings separately instead of as overall parenting. Future research can take a more inclusive approach to conceptualising co-parenting as a process beyond the two-parent dyad, especially when other people are involved (e.g. grandparents or neighbours). In addition, considering that people are increasingly mobile, future research can also consider transnational parenting (e.g. T. Lam, Yeoh, & Law, 2002) or grandparenting (e.g. Da, 2003).

Researcher Background. I used my own background as a Malaysian-Chinese with insider knowledge to my advantage in facilitating the “production of knowledge without necessarily gaining or losing because of shared ethnicity” (Abbas, 2006, p. 319). My insider knowledge also enabled me to sustain deeper-level engagement with the participants and the data, and, in turn deeper-level reflection on the topics at hand and analysis of data from multiple perspectives (Tufford & Newman, 2011). As I made occasional comparisons to my own experiences, there were times when I questioned the information shared, which was a demonstration of “skepticism” (Yin, 2011). My skepticism was not only directed towards the frankness of the participants’ responses but also towards my own presumptions (Yin, 2011). While my background knowledge and language assistance can be considered strong points in research, they can also be considered limiting factors because of my possible presumptions (Yin, 2011) or preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2011), which was why I applied the idea of bracketing (as previously explained).

A potential direction for future research is to include more than one researcher with insider knowledge to make the analysis of data more robust and multifaceted, from an insider point of view. Another potential direction for future research is to include a researcher from a background that is different to the participants to broaden those presumptions of an insider from an outsider perspective (Chavez, 2008). Regardless of whether future research involves researchers from only the same background, or also from other backgrounds, research with more than one researcher could be more rigorous due to multiple interpretations of data from different people and cross-checking opportunities, such as usage of different sources and methods (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Yin, 2011). Research processes that are rigorous lead to research that is trustworthy (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

Trustworthiness. Research quality of quantitative studies is often established via the use of measures of reliability and validity (e.g. Bryman, 2016). However, such measures are

not readily applied to qualitative research. Instead, notions of trustworthiness are central to establishing the veracity of qualitative research such as in my study. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Morrow, 2005; Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004). For the purpose of responding to the practicality limitations of my study, this section focuses only on the trustworthiness strategy of credibility.

Credibility can be ensured through a range of strategies, including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, cross-checking of data and participant checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Schwandt et al., 2007). Prolonged engagement requires the researcher to spend an extended amount time on collecting data and obtaining an understanding of the people and phenomenon under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). This facilitates the process of building trust and rapport with informants, to foster rich, detailed responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). In addition to building understanding, prolonged engagement also provides researchers with as much time as possible to question presumptions: their own and those of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Schwandt et al., 2007).

Prolonged engagement broadens research scope, whereas persistent observation of particular phenomena under study increases research depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Schwandt et al., 2007). With details surrounding the physical environment, including visual and audio cues, as well as characteristics of participants, including their gestures, interactions with others and actions (Yin, 2011), persistent observation assists researchers in differentiating relevant from less relevant data, due to their familiarity with the phenomena under study (Eisner, 1979; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Schwandt et al., 2007).

Peer debriefing (discussions of the research) with professional peers who are removed from the immediate context of the study assists in developing emerging patterns in data, questioning the suitability of data collection tools and process, and pointing out possible presumptions (Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004). Cross-checking of data involves the use of different sources and methods. Possibly, cross-checking may also involve different researchers. Participant checks are ways of informally confirming the information that participants shared. Approaches include the researcher clarifying with participants information that was previously shared or observed, or immediately asking participants the accuracy of interpretation (Shenton, 2004).

Although the data collection period with each family in my study spanned 6 months, I was not fully present in their lives every day for this period. Even with limited opportunities to meet, I was still able to develop a level of friendship with my participants. To be present in their lives every day for 6 months would undoubtedly have provided more complete understanding, more persistent observations and thicker descriptions of their lives. There would be more opportunities to seek multiple data sources (e.g. diaries, photographs) and to cross-check, and carry out participant checks (e.g. ask same question over several occasions). Therefore, a potential direction for future research is for a researcher to be entirely immersed in the culture or community that is being studied for a prolonged period of time, such as a few months to a few years. Examples of this include to be an educator in an ECEC setting or to shadow a family as frequently as possible over a prolonged period of time.

Generalisability and Transferability. My application of a case study approach enabled me to *close in* (Flyvbjerg, 2006) on the real-life situations of my participants and explore their identity negotiation during a likely state of disjuncture as it was unfolding or not long after it unfolded. It was important to clarify the deeper influences behind their identity

negotiation during this state of disjuncture and its consequences, instead of to outline the symptoms and frequency of the disjuncture.

As my research methodology was chosen for these definitive reasons and suitability, it gives insight into a particular topic, which, although is not generalisable, is transferable. Stark and Torrance (2005) posit that case studies have the potential for assisting “readers [to] recognise aspects of their own experience in the case... they intuitively generalise from the case” (p. 34). A potential direction for researchers who find my findings transferable is to adopt a broader approach to research without sacrificing the need to consider context. It is possible to include other methods of data collection, such as participant diaries, focus groups or surveys. Another potential direction is for future research to consider the participation of children, others who are involved in ECEC-related decisions, or ECEC staff. These groups of people play influential roles that may potentially affect the identity negotiation of parents during a state of disjuncture. However, findings that are found to be not transferable imply the possibility of the need to use a different research design due to the specific purposes of case studies.

Causality. According to O’Leary (2005), research conducted from an ethnographic approach aims to investigate real-life, lived experiences of people, and not the causes of those experiences. My study referred to this notion, in that I investigated the identity negotiation of parents during a likely state of disjuncture. A potential direction for future research can be to construct a research design that looks into possible causal relationships. A detailed analysis of the causal relationship between the self-perceptions of parents and their identity negotiations would undoubtedly shed additional light on the specifics of perfecting a respectful, collaborative, responsive and ecologically sound ECEC environment. However, such analysis would warrant more extensive, measurable data, and was beyond the scope of this study.

Summation

For this study, I set out to investigate Malaysian-Chinese parents' negotiation of identities as their children begin ECEC in Malaysia and Australia. I aimed to answer three research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of Malaysian-Chinese parents' identities?
2. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings during a likely state of disjuncture?
3. How do Malaysian-Chinese parents perceive their evolving identities?

To conduct my study, I followed a broad sociocultural perspective and employed three theories that are normally not used in ECEC and allied fields: ICTC-CA (Y. Y. Kim, 2005), INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005) and the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012). I later combined ICTC-CA and INT to become the CATF.

Through snowball sampling, I recruited 21 Malaysian-Chinese parents of children aged 5 months to 5-years-old in Kuala Lumpur and Sydney, and collected data in the form of non-participant observations of daily family routines and semi-structured interviews with parents. I analysed field notes and interview transcripts from an ethnographic perspective, using HyperRESEARCH (Version 3.0.3) to assist in managing my data.

Three categories of parents emerged from my analysis, which I named Acceptors, Negotiators and Challengers. Acceptors are parents who accept and support the prevailing ECEC philosophy of the systems that encompass the settings they chose for their children. Negotiators are parents who accept the prevailing ECEC philosophy of the systems but complement that with elements of their own philosophies of ECEC at home. Challengers are parents who do not readily accept the prevailing ECEC philosophy of the systems.

By reference to the CATF, when facing the disjuncture of their children commencing ECEC for the first time, Acceptors are more flexible in negotiating multiple identities,

therefore more accepting of change in their identities. Negotiators are open to negotiating some parts of their identities and not so for other fixed parts of their identities, therefore are mixed in accepting and resisting change in their identities. Challengers are more assertive in their quest to retain their fixed identities, and therefore are more resistant to change.

By reference to the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012), parents approach parenting differently. Acceptors are more relationship directed in their parenting, Negotiators more independence directed, and Challengers more rule directed. Acceptors display more elements of shared power and relational responsibility. Thus, their children learn to respect the needs and thoughts of others, whereby they develop an awareness of self and others (Tuttle et al., 2012). Unlike Acceptors, who engage their children in shared decision-making, Negotiators engage their children in some decision-making that they deem age-appropriate. Thus, their children learn how to negotiate their desires with their parents (Tuttle et al., 2012). Largely informed by societal and cultural influences, Challengers, unlike Acceptors and Negotiators, do not engage their children in decision-making. Thus, their children learn to behave according to their position in the family hierarchy (Tuttle et al., 2012).

The themes that emerged from my analysis reveal similarities and differences among these three categories of parents, and also between geographical locations. At times, these similarities and differences were subtle, yet at other times, palpable. I organised the emerging themes to respond to the three aims of my study.

Firstly, my investigation of the characteristics of Malaysian-Chinese parents' identities reveal that their identities are mostly signified by three main characteristics: perception of self, education, and perceived power structures. Parents' cultural identities stood out most as a perception of self. A type of hidden curriculum was found embedded in the cultural maintenance that occurred alongside what parents deem formal learning. There were

implicitly understood perceived power structures surrounding parents' relationships with ECEC settings.

Secondly, historical and relational considerations are two overarching strengths that inform how these parents meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings. Historical considerations are parents' upbringing or their own childhood experiences, which they either want to replicate or are keen not to do so. Regardless of geographical location or category of parent, I found cultural maintenance to be a strong reference point, from their upbringing, when they meet, negotiate and overcome challenges to their beliefs, goals and understandings. The parents in Sydney also exhibit characteristics of a Chinese learner, which they appear to also practice with their children. Relational considerations refer to the communication that occurs between parents, with their children, other members of the family or the community, or ECEC staff. All parents in both locations expressed that their trust in the ECEC staff is influenced by communication or lack thereof. Communication and trust occur concurrently, as the stress that parents feel when they do not feel trusted is likely to hamper their identity negotiation during this state of disjuncture.

Thirdly, the interplay of their identity characteristics and overarching strengths in various combinations contributes to how parents perceive their evolving identities. These perceptions were signified by three main themes: change, sense of responsibility and experiencing empowerment. While all parents realised the inevitability of change, the extent of change and the ways parents perceive their evolving identities are different for Acceptors, Negotiators and Challengers. By reference to the CATF, aspects of historical and/or relational considerations strongly influence the extent to which identities are asserted or redefined, challenged or supported. Change that takes into account historical and/or relational considerations appears to result in positive redefinition and adaptation of identities. Regardless of how parents perceive their evolving identities, a constant aspect of their

identities is their sense of responsibility towards themselves and their significant others. Their identities as a person, partner, parent, child or Malaysian-Chinese all include this sense of responsibility, which is not always apparent but is realised in different ways. Empowerment is experienced differently by parents when they discuss their perceptions of their evolving identities. The feeling of empowerment is category-dependent (Acceptors, Negotiators, Challengers) and is shaped by the communication and trust that parents have with ECEC staff. That is, whether a parent is more relationship, independence or rule directed in their relationships with others influences the manner in which empowerment is realised. The empowerment that parents gain, depending on the adaptation that occurs during their identity negotiation process, reflects the change referred to in the CATF.

My study has three main implications. Firstly, there are theoretical implications due to my application of the CATF and the TP-CRO (Tuttle et al., 2012), theories traditionally not applied in the ECEC and allied fields. My study implies that detailed understandings of existing knowledge can be viewed in multiple ways when theoretical frames beyond the immediate ECEC field are applied. Secondly, there are structural and regulatory implications, relating to those features that broadly underpin the day-to-day ECEC that is enacted by parents, children, educators and other professionals, that highlight the need to reconsider understandings regarding diversity. My study implies the need for sustainable and respectful strategies of parental involvement and partnership, and offers opportunities for tailoring within teacher education programmes. Thirdly, there are operational implications, relating to the day-to-day ECEC that is enacted by parents, children, educators and other professionals, that highlight the importance of communication and trust. My study implies that a true parent partnership necessitates deep-level communication for ECEC staff to fully understanding the identity negotiation that parents experience during this state of disjuncture.

As is the case for any research, my study has limitations. These limitations specifically pertain to participants, my researcher background, practicality, and generalisability, and transferability. In response to these, I suggest potential directions for future research. Despite these limitations, my study has made several contributions. Specifically, it contributes to existing literature on the Malaysian-Chinese community in Malaysia and Australia, identity negotiation with parents as main participants, and understanding a large group of people who are significant contributors to the Malaysian and Australian economies. My study also provides an avenue to validate the experiences of Malaysian-Chinese parents in Kuala Lumpur and Sydney.

More-so, my study highlights the importance of relationships in the provision of quality ECEC experiences for children, in particular Malaysian-Chinese children in Kuala Lumpur and Sydney. It is vital to take into account parents' contexts when understanding how parents overcome the disjuncture that they may experience as their children commence ECEC for the first time. Characteristics of their identities and their historical and relational considerations are interrelated, and are influencing factors in the strengthening of relationships between parents and ECEC settings. To ensure strong, meaningful and respectful partnerships among children, families and communities, it is crucial to assist parents to feel empowered during this state of disjuncture. As partnerships that are strong, meaningful and respectful are crucial in optimising ecologically sound ECEC opportunities for all children, it is imperative that parents' identities, and negotiation of these identities, are acknowledged and fully understood, for "we do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs" (Delpit, 2006, p. 46).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Malaysia.

First interview.

Parents' background.

- ☐ Just for me to know you a little more, I would like to ask you some simple background questions.
- ☐ Are you originally from Kuala Lumpur (KL)? If not, where is your hometown?
- ☐ What prompted you to leave?
- ☐ How old were you when you left your hometown?
- ☐ How old are you now?
- ☐ How many children do you have and how old are they?
- ☐ What is your highest level of education?
- ☐ What is your current occupation?
- ☐ How has life been since settling down in KL?

Beliefs, goals and understandings.

- ☐ As explained earlier, my interest lies in your identities – your beliefs, goals and understandings. Tell me about yourself or how would you portray yourself to others?
- ☐ Malaysians use the term “citizen of the world”. What is your understanding of that term? Do you think this idea influences your parenting approach or beliefs in any way?

- I was wondering if you can tell me a bit about your experiences in KL, perhaps more generally to begin with, and then as a parent. Have your experiences so far in KL been what you expected? Why, or why not?
- What is your view on your children's education?

Choice of ECEC for children.

- Your little one just started "school" (change to kindergarten, preschool or childcare according) this year. How did you feel at that initial stage of having your child "start school"?
- I understand that as parents, you may have a checklist of must-haves or certain criteria when deciding on things relating to your children. What made you decide on the centre that your child is attending now?
- How do you feel about the choices in ECEC that you make for your children?

Second interview.

Follow-up from first interview.

- It has been two/three months since your child started attending childcare/preschool. I was wondering if you think there may have been any changes in your family.
- Do you think there may have been any changes between you and your child?
- What do you think about the education and care that your child receives at childcare/preschool?
- This might be a difficult question, but how does it feel being a parent? What are your feelings about this?

☐ Do you feel that your role as a parent is different now compared to when we last met? How so?

☐ Add other questions that surfaced from data collected in the first interview.

☐ Phrase from the first interview to clarify: “citizen of the world”.

Incorporate observation info:

☐ When I was at the childcare centre/preschool, I noticed that.....

☐ You mentioned that, at school...

Third interview.

Follow-up from second interview.

☐ What are some of the important things that have happened in your family since our last meeting?

☐ Describe your feelings towards being a parent.

☐ How would you describe your relationship with the childcare centre/preschool setting that your child is attending?

☐ Do you feel constrained or enabled as a parent through this relationship?

☐ There will also be other questions that would surface from data collected in the second interview.

To sum up.

☐ If you could start anew, would there be things that you would do differently? Why?

☐ Is there anything else that you would like to tell me before we wrap up this last interview?

Australia.

First interview.

Parents' background.

- ☐ Just for me to know you a little more, I would like to ask you some simple background questions.
- ☐ How old were you when you left Malaysia?
- ☐ How old are you now?
- ☐ How many children do you have and how old are they?
- ☐ What prompted you to leave Malaysia?
- ☐ What is your highest level of education?
- ☐ What is your current occupation? Was this your occupation when in Malaysia?
- ☐ How has life been since arriving in Australia?

Beliefs, goals and understandings.

- ☐ As explained earlier, my interest lies in your identities – your beliefs, goals and understandings. Tell me about yourself or how would you portray yourself to others?
- ☐ Malaysians use the term “citizen of the world”. What is your understanding of that term? Do you think this idea influences your parenting approach or beliefs in any way?
- ☐ I was wondering if you can tell me a bit about your experiences in Australia, perhaps more generally to begin with, and then as a parent. Have your experiences so far in Australia been what you expected? Why or why not?
- ☐ What is your view on your children's education?

Choice of ECEC for children.

- Your little one just started “school” this year. How did you feel at that initial stage of having your child “start school”?
- I understand that as parents, you may have a checklist of must-haves or certain criteria when deciding on things relating to your children. What made you decide on the centre that your child is attending now?
- How do you feel about the choices in ECEC that you make for your children?

Second interview.

Follow-up from first interview.

- It has been two/three months since your child started attending childcare/preschool. I was wondering if you think there may have been any changes in your family.
- Do you think there may have been any changes between you and your child?
- What do you think about the education and care that your child receives at childcare/preschool?
- This might be a difficult question, but how does it feel being a parent? What are your feelings about this?
- Do you feel that your role as a parent is different now compared to when we last met? How so?
- Add other questions that surfaced from data collected in the first interview.
- Phrase from first interview to clarify: “citizen of the world”.

Incorporate observation info:

- When I was at the childcare centre/preschool, I noticed that.....
- You mentioned that, at school...

Third interview.

Follow-up from second interview.

- ☐ What are some of the important things that have happened in your family since our last meeting?
- ☐ Describe your feelings towards being a parent.
- ☐ How would you describe your relationship with the childcare centre/preschool setting that your child is attending?
- ☐ Do you feel constrained or enabled as a parent through this relationship?
- ☐ There will also be other questions that would surface from data collected in the second interview.

To sum up.

- ☐ If you could start anew, would there be things that you would do differently? Why?
- ☐ Is there anything else that you would like to tell me before we wrap up this last interview?

Appendix B: Human Research Ethics Committee Final Approval



HS Ethics application ref: 5201100948 - Final Approval

Fhs Ethics <fhs.ethics@mq.edu.au>

17 January 2012 at 14:18

To: Dr Peter Whiteman <peter.whiteman@mq.edu.au>

Cc: Miss Shi Jing Voon <shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au>

Dear Dr Whiteman,

Re: "An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Multiple Identities as Their Children Begin Early Childhood Education in Australia and Malaysia"

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee and you may now commence your research.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Peter Whiteman
Associate Professor Ellie Vasta
Ms Shi Jing Voon

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports. Your first progress report is due on 17 January 2013.

If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Sub-Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).
4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Sub-Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms
5. Please notify the Sub-Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.
6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of Final Approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have Final Approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of final ethics approval.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Peter Roger
Chair
Faculty of Human Sciences Ethics Review Sub-Committee
Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix C: Parent and Children Information Statements and Consent Forms

Malaysia.



Faculty of Human Sciences
 Institute of Early Childhood
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An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Identities as Their Children Begin Early Childhood Education in Australia and Malaysia

Parent and Children Information Statement (Malaysia)

You are invited to participate in a study of parents' negotiation of identities as their children begin early childhood education. The study seeks to:

1. Understand Malaysian-Chinese parents' perceptions of their evolving identities in Malaysia and Australia
2. Explain the impact of these perceptions on the decisions underpinning choice of and access to early childhood education and care services.

The study is being conducted by Voon Shi Jing (telephone 03 8943 2768, 012 687 7683; email shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au) to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Early Childhood Education) under the supervision of Dr. Peter Whiteman (telephone +612 9850 9883; email peter.whiteman@mq.edu.au) at the Institute of Early Childhood (IEC) at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. Shi Jing will be responsible for data collection and analysis.

If you and your child decide to participate, observations will be undertaken in your home over one day to gather information related to routines in the morning (up until drop-off at centre) and in the evening (from pick-up from centre). During the observation, field notes will be made and Shi Jing will not engage in any activities with the children.

You will be asked to participate in interviews lasting up to 90 minutes on three separate occasions spread across six months. Mutually agreeable times and places for the interviews and observations will be arranged. The interviews and observations are aimed at understanding parents' perceptions of your evolving identities and how challenges are overcome as you negotiate beliefs, goals and understandings. There will be some questions pertaining to your experiences as a parent of a child attending a formal prior-to-school setting for the first time. A digital audio recording device will be used to record the interview to allow for transcribing and analysing of data afterwards. Prior to analysis, you will have an opportunity to review the transcripts and make changes where necessary.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone [+612] 9850 7854, fax [+612] 9850 8799; email: ethics@mq.edu.au). Alternatively, a local independent person to contact in relation to ethical concerns about this study is Prof. Anna Christina Abdullah (telephone [04] 653 5067; email: achrsti@usm.my). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. Access to all data collected throughout the course of this study will be available only to the researcher and research supervisors. The findings of this study may be published in journal articles and/or conference presentations. This might include examples of what was said in the interviews. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Feedback regarding the results of the research can be obtained by contacting the researcher at the above contact methods.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to participate and should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the consent form overleaf and hand it in to the researcher. Feel free to contact the researcher through either means stated above should there be any queries.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone [+612] 9850 7854, fax [+612] 9850 8799; email: ethics@mq.edu.au). Alternatively, a local independent person to contact in relation to ethical concerns about this study is Prof. Anna Christina Abdullah (telephone [04] 653 5067; email: achristi@usm.my). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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**An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Identities as Their Children
Begin Early Childhood Education in Australia and Malaysia**

Parent and Child Consent Form (Malaysia)

I have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

I agree to participate in three interviews over a 6 month period at a time and place convenient to me.

I agree to my child and family being observed over one day in my home in the morning (prior to childcare/preschool) and in the evening (after childcare/preschool). I also agree to my child being observed during that day while at the early childhood centre.

I have spoken with my child about the study and explained that she/he is allowed to withdraw her/his consent to participate at any time.

Participant's Name (block letters): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact details: _____ (Phone) _____ (Email)

Investigator's Name: VOON SHI JING

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Telephone : 03 8943 2768 (10:00am to 6:00pm weekdays)

Mobile : 012 687 7683 (anytime during the week)

Email : shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au

(PARTICIPANT'S COPY)

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone [+612] 9850 7854, fax [+612] 9850 8799; email: ethics@mq.edu.au). Alternatively, a local independent person to contact in relation to ethical concerns about this study is Prof. Anna Christina Abdullah (telephone [04] 653 5067; email: achristi@usm.my). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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**An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Identities as Their Children
Begin Early Childhood Education in Australia and Malaysia**

Parent and Child Consent Form (Malaysia)

I have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

I agree to participate in three interviews over a 6 month period at a time and place convenient to me.

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I have spoken with my child about the study and explained that she/he is allowed to withdraw her/his consent to participate at any time.

Participant's Name (block letters): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact details: _____ (Phone) _____ (Email)

Investigator's Name: VOON SHI JING

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Telephone : 03 8943 2768 (10:00am to 6:00pm weekdays)

Mobile : 012 687 7683 (anytime during the week)

Email : shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au

(INVESTIGATOR'S COPY)

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Australia.

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**An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Identities as Their Children
Begin Early Childhood Education in Australia and Malaysia**

Parent and Children Information Statement (Australia)

You are invited to participate in a study of parents' negotiation of identities as their children begin early childhood education. The study seeks to:

1. Understand Malaysian-Chinese parents' perceptions of their evolving identities in Malaysia and Australia
2. Explain the impact of these perceptions on the decisions underpinning choice of and access to early childhood education and care services.

The study is being conducted by Shi Jing Voon (telephone 02 9850 9837, 0416 112 868; email shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au) to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Early Childhood Education) under the supervision of Dr. Peter Whiteman (telephone 02 9850 9883; email peter.whiteman@mq.edu.au) at the Institute of Early Childhood (IEC) at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. Shi Jing will be responsible for data collection and analysis.

If you and your child decide to participate, observations will be undertaken in your home over one day to gather information related to routines in the morning (up until drop-off at centre) and in the evening (from pick-up from centre). During the observation, field notes will be made and Shi Jing will not engage in any activities with the children.

You will be asked to participate in interviews lasting up to 90 minutes on three separate occasions spread across six months. Mutually agreeable times and places for the interviews and observations will be arranged. The interviews and observations are aimed at understanding parents' perceptions of your evolving identities and how challenges are overcome as you negotiate beliefs, goals and understandings. There will be some questions pertaining to your experiences as a parent of a child attending a formal prior-to-school setting for the first time. A digital audio recording device will be used to record the interview to allow for transcribing and analysing of data afterwards. Prior to analysis, you will have an opportunity to review the transcripts and make changes where necessary.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. Access to all data collected throughout the course of this study will be available only to the researcher and research supervisors. The findings of this study may be published in journal articles and/or conference presentations. This might include examples of what was said in the interviews. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Feedback regarding the results of the research can be obtained by contacting the researcher at the above contact methods.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone [02] 9850 7854, fax [02] 9850 8799; email: ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to participate and should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the consent form overleaf and hand it in to the researcher. Feel free to contact the researcher through either means stated above should there be any queries.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone [02] 9850 7854, fax [02] 9850 8799; email: ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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**An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Identities as Their Children
Begin Early Childhood Education in Australia and Malaysia**

Parent and Child Consent Form (Australia)

I have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

I agree to participate in three interviews over a 6 month period at a time and place convenient to me.

I agree to my child and family being observed over one day in my home in the morning (prior to childcare/preschool) and in the evening (after childcare/preschool). I also agree to my child being observed during that day while at the early childhood centre.

I have spoken with my child about the study and explained that she/he is allowed to withdraw her/his consent to participate at any time.

Participant's Name (block letters): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact details: _____ (Phone) _____ (Email)

Investigator's Name: SHI JING VOON

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Telephone : 02 9850 9837 (10:00am to 5:00pm weekdays)

Mobile : 0416 112 868 (anytime during the week)

Email : shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au

(PARTICIPANT'S COPY)

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone [02] 9850 7854, fax [02] 9850 8799; email: ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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**An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Identities as Their Children
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Parent and Child Consent Form (Australia)

I have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

I agree to participate in three interviews over a 6 month period at a time and place convenient to me.

I agree to my child and family being observed over one day in my home in the morning (prior to childcare/preschool) and in the evening (after childcare/preschool). I also agree to my child being observed during that day while at the early childhood centre.

I have spoken with my child about the study and explained that she/he is allowed to withdraw her/his consent to participate at any time.

Participant's Name (block letters): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact details: _____ (Phone) _____ (Email)

Investigator's Name: SHI JING VOON

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Telephone : 02 9850 9837 (10:00am to 5:00pm weekdays)

Mobile : 0416 112 868 (anytime during the week)

Email : shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au

(INVESTIGATOR'S COPY)

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone [02] 9850 7854, fax [02] 9850 8799; email: ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix D: Information Statements and Consent Forms for Centres

Malaysia.



An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Identities as Their Children Begin Early Childhood Education in Australia and Malaysia

Information Statement for Centres (Malaysia)

A family in your centre has been invited to participate in a study of parents' negotiation of identities as their children begin early childhood education. The study seeks to:

1. Understand Malaysian-Chinese parents' perceptions of their evolving identities in Malaysia and Australia
2. Explain the impact of these perceptions on the decisions underpinning choice of and access to early childhood education and care services.

The study is being conducted by Voon Shi Jing (telephone 02 8943 2768, 012 687 7683; email shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au) to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Early Childhood Education) under the supervision of Dr. Peter Whiteman (telephone +612 9850 9883; email peter.whiteman@mq.edu.au) at the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. Shi Jing will be responsible for data collection and analysis.

If you decide to allow Shi Jing to conduct her study in your centre, observations of up to four hours will be undertaken in your centre to gather information related to only the daily routines that the child is involved in. Field notes of the observations will be made after leaving your centre and Shi Jing will not engage in any activities with the children and staff. These observations will take place only on one day.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. Access to all data collected throughout the course of this study will be available only to the researcher and research supervisors. The findings of this study may be published in journal articles and/or conference presentations. This might include examples of what was observed. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Feedback regarding the results of the research can be obtained by contacting the researcher at the above contact methods.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to participate and should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence. If you are willing to allow this study to be undertaken in your centre, please complete the consent form overleaf and hand it in to the researcher. Feel free to contact the researcher through either means stated above should there be any queries.

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**An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Identities as Their Children
Begin Early Childhood Education in Australia and Malaysia**

Consent Form for Centres (Malaysia)

I have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to allow my centre to be part of this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

I agree to allow the undertaking of observations that relate to the routines involving a child attending a formal prior-to-school setting for the first time.

I have spoken with the staff at my centre and the child about the study and explained that they are allowed to withdraw their consent to participate at any time.

Participant's Name (block letters): _____

Name of Centre (block letters): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact details: _____ (Phone) _____ (Email)

Investigator's Name: VOON SHI JING

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Telephone : 03 8943 2768 (10:00am to 6:00pm weekdays)

Mobile : 012 687 7683 (anytime during the week)

Email : shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au

(PARTICIPANT'S COPY)

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An Analysis of Malaysian-Chinese Parents' Negotiation of Identities as Their Children Begin Early Childhood Education in Australia and Malaysia

Information Statement for Centres (Australia)

A family in your centre has been invited to participate in a study of parents' negotiation of identities as their children begin early childhood education. The study seeks to:

1. Understand Malaysian-Chinese parents' perceptions of their evolving identities in Malaysia and Australia
2. Explain the impact of these perceptions on the decisions underpinning choice of and access to early childhood education and care services.

The study is being conducted by Shi Jing Voon (telephone 02 9850 9837, 0416 112 868; email shijing.voon@students.mq.edu.au) to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Early Childhood Education) under the supervision of Dr. Peter Whiteman (telephone 02 9850 9883; email peter.whiteman@mq.edu.au) at the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University, Sydney. Shi Jing will be responsible for data collection and analysis.

If you decide to allow Shi Jing to conduct her study in your centre, observations of up to four hours will be undertaken in your centre to gather information related to only the daily routines that the child is involved in. Field notes of the observations will be made after leaving your centre and Shi Jing will not engage in any activities with the children and staff. These observations will take place only on one day.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. Access to all data collected throughout the course of this study will be available only to the researcher and research supervisors. The findings of this study may be published in journal articles and/or conference presentations. This might include examples of what was observed. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Feedback regarding the results of the research can be obtained by contacting the researcher at the above contact methods.

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Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

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