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BOOK REVIEW: *Towards a Chinese Conception of Social Support: A Study on the Social Support Networks of Chinese Working Mothers in Beijing* by Angelina W. K. Yuen-Tsang

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Xia, Yan Ruth and Zhou, Zhi, "BOOK REVIEW: *Towards a Chinese Conception of Social Support: A Study on the Social Support Networks of Chinese Working Mothers in Beijing* by Angelina W. K. Yuen-Tsang" (1999). *Faculty Publications, Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies*. 51.
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BOOK REVIEW

Towards a Chinese Conception of Social Support: A Study on the Social Support Networks of Chinese Working Mothers in Beijing. Angelina W. K. Yuen-Tsang. Aldershot, England: Ashgate. 1997. 280 pp. ISBN 1-84014-167-0. \$37.50 cloth.

Towards a Chinese Conception of Social Support shows a profound understanding of a relation-oriented society (Liang, 1974) and captures the nature of traditional Chinese social support systems in urban China. It conceptualizes the underlying social support available for working mothers as "Chinese communal support networks." These networks are characterized by the pooling of network resources, holistic provision of support, rigid boundaries between insiders and outsiders, and a strong sense of reciprocity throughout life. The research method is well justified, and the credibility of the findings is enhanced by the measures and data analysis. Methods used include focus groups, participant observations, revisits with the interviewees, theoretical sampling, triangulation, peer debriefings, and member checks.

Because reliability verification is not the primary concern of an interpretive researcher, any attempt to extend the sample to the whole population runs the risk of unwarranted generalization. The research presented in this book no doubt successfully documents the characteristics and conceptions of the social support system through the eyes of 27 working mothers in a Beijing neighborhood, but the demographic features of these women (74% lived in quadrangles, 63% lived with parents-in-law, 55% were from age 30 to 40, and 30% had an education above secondary school) may not provide "a representative picture of an urban community" in the People's Republic of China, as the researcher states (p. 23).

People may turn to their support networks for emotional support, and the multiple social roles and expectations of Chinese women can cause great distress and depression (Pearson, 1995). Yuen-Tsang's study seems to focus more on instrumental assistance among family circles and not on who is involved in the emotional support networks of these women, nor on how the support networks function in crisis.

Towards a Chinese Conception of Social Support faithfully describes the challenges facing the Chinese communal support networks. Changes have to be made in the support networks with sweeping social and economic changes. Although some patterns of the system may have become history since the time of the study, the basic communal structure of the network may not have changed significantly.

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