

**The Role of Leisure in the Psychological Adaptation of New Marriage Migrant  
Women from Mainland China to Hong Kong**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the role of leisure participation in the psychological adaptation of new marriage migrant women. Through nine qualitative interviews and subsequent analysis, the study found that new marriage migrant women's leisure could be categorized as work-oriented leisure, leisure-oriented leisure, and pure leisure. Leisure participation could facilitate women's psychological adaptation through two main mechanisms: obligation fulfilment and self-oriented needs satisfaction. In the process of fulfilling obligation as mothers and wives, women are entitled to have leisure without self-blame, improving the identity confirmation; meanwhile, they also step out into a broader living space and wider social networks. Through the other mechanism of feeling and satisfying their own needs, women escape from daily work and stress, build up sense of continuity through maintaining leisure habits before migration, and construct positive future expectation via actively committing to deep leisure. Through these processes, women's psychological adaptation status is improved, and their individual agency is developed. This paper is expected to provide reference for policy makers and social organizations, so as to offer more appropriate and effective caring and empowerment measures to marriage migrant women in the future.

## 論文摘要

近年來國際文獻日益關注到較低階層移民女性受到的交叉性壓迫，以及她們在這種結構性束縛下個人主體性的發展。移民的主體性發展和在接收社會的心理適應狀態之間聯繫緊密，而休閒參與又常被視為主體性建立和發展的呈現方式。有鑒於此，本文用九位以結婚為目的從中國內地新移民到香港的女性個案，藉由定性訪談和內容分析，以休閒研究和移民研究雙重視角探討這些女性的休閒參與對她們的心理適應情況的影響。研究結果顯示，新結婚移民女性在階層、性別、移民身份等多重結構性束縛下，仍然有休閒參與的空間，這些參與可分為工作導向的休閒，放鬆導向但仍需顧及工作的休閒，純粹休閒三種類型。在休閒活動中，新結婚移民女性能通過「身份責任履行」和「自身需求滿足」兩類模式改善心理適應狀態：在履行自己作為母親、妻子等的責任的過程中，女性自然而然地走出狹小生活空間，建立人際關係，這也被視為她們在有意無意地進行一些無需自我責備的休閒活動，從而提高了對身份和自我的認同感；在感受和滿足自身需要的過程裡，女性能通過小憩暫離日常生活負擔和負面情緒，通過堅持移民前就養成的休閒習慣增加生活連續性，並通過主動的休閒投入建立起對未來生活的積極預期。得益於這些過程，女性的心理適應狀態得到改善，個人主體性也得到建立和發展。本文對新結婚移民女性的休閒參與和心理適應狀態的挖掘預期能為相關政府政策和社會組織決策提供參考，從而給結婚移民女性提供更合適有效的關懷和賦能。

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## Introduction

In 2020, there were approximately 281 million international migrants, which equated to 3.6% of the population worldwide (International Organization for Migrants, 2021). As part of the most densely populated region, Hong Kong has high population mobility. Population mobility in Hong Kong is long lasting and contributes to Hong Kong's diverse population origins. 8% population are non-Chinese ethnicities, while all kinds of migrants from mainland China to Hong Kong have taken up about 30% of the whole population (Census of Statistics Department, 2021). From end-2020 to end-2021, Hong Kong has witnessed a net outflow of 9400 persons, with an inflow of 17 900 one-way permit holders and a net outflow of 27 300 other Hong Kong residents Kong (Census of Statistics Department, 2022).

One-way permit is the shortened form of "Permit for Proceeding to Hong Kong and Macao", which is issued by China's Exit and Entry Administration since 1982. This policy was born under the context of heavy population mobility from mainland China to Hong Kong which was not regulated and caused a series problem for the relevant families and their sending and receiving society. While one-way permit does not equal to permanent residents... Since 1995, there has been 150 quotas every day to enable mainlanders to come to Hong Kong for family reunion. In 2021, approximately 49 Chinese citizens migrated from Mainland China to Hong Kong using the one-way permit (Home Affairs Department and Immigration Department, 2021). The number was even larger before the outbreak of COVID-19: in 2019, a total of about 39100 one-way permit holders (OWPHs) entered Hong Kong, with a daily average of 107 people (Home Affairs Department and Immigration

Department, 2019).

The majority of OWPHs received secondary education (66%). The median monthly household incomes for OWPHs were about HKD13400 in 2021. Although the proportions of their higher educational level and household incomes have been gradually increased over years, they are still significantly lower than the local average (Census of Statistics Department, 2022). Besides, about 60% OWPHs are women and 86% are married. And most of married women OWPHs are homemakers. As these women migrated through one-way permit by claiming their stable marital status with their Hong Kong native partners, “marriage migrant women” is often adopted to describe this group (e.g., Chiu, 2012 ).

While this group is identified by researchers, it also attracted public attention, however, in a negative way. Public perception often see this group as pure beneficiaries of local welfare system such as legitimate identity, direction to permanent residents and public housing, but contribute nothing to local society as they do not have paid work (), despite that their time is heavily allocated to unpaid childcare and household work and have limited leisure time. This negative feeling has been accrued because they have not blend into society well, when the social perception suppose they should have done so since they have less cultural and language barrier than other migrants of ethnic minorities. Nonetheless, although they have less cultural difference, marriage migrant women also encounter even greater problems as they have too less control over their living in the receiving society and thus have higher psychological vulnerabilities (Chiu, 2012). Study suggested that leisure participation benefits one’s psychological wellbeing and social adjustment in many aspects, yet leisure participation of these women is constrained and limited (Jackson & Henderson, 1995). The

issue of psychological adaption and leisure participation of this group is more worth investigating in Hong Kong context, where this group consists of great part of OWPHs, which is a great compensation of the outflow population in Hong Kong, and consequently the cohesion of Hong Kong society and the belongingness of migrants is of greater concern. Therefore, this study will investigate the psychological adaptation of new marriage migrant women from mainland China to Hong Kong through the perspective of leisure participation.

## **Literature Review**

### **New marriage migrant women and their psychological adaptation**

Marriage migrants are often defined as those who migrate through cross-border marriage, of which the majority are women (Chu et al., 2017; Constable, 2005; Huang and Mathers, 2008). While migrants in general experience great changes regarding their living environment and identity recognition, marriage migrant women are found of higher intersectional vulnerability, as they suffer from interrelated migration, gender, class, and cultural subordination (Chiu, 2012). They are thus found to be trapped legally, economically, socially, and culturally (Chiu, 2012).

Domestically, these women have stress originated from gender inequalities inherent in the cross-border marriage, and the stress becomes greater if they have kids, as their children are also under the adaptation pressure (Chiu, 2016). In the public sphere, marriage migrant women report various sources of psychological problems, such as that they are more likely to enter the secondary labour market with more precarious and unstable work (Man, 2004), and they often face discrimination and rejection from the host population (Yu et al., 2013). These domestic and social pressure together worsen their life situations and attitudes

in the receiving society.

In a general sense, adaptation refers to the processes of adjustment to the prevailing conditions in the new environment (Smith, 2003). Yet as mentioned above, our target group not only experience migration stress as normal migrants, but also suffering from much psychological pressure as women under intersectional inequality regarding their gender, class, and migration status. Therefore, we considered psychological adaptation as the more appropriate concept to understand these women's life not only externally but also intrinsically. Psychological adaptation refers to the long-term psychological outcomes of migrants' adaptation (Smith, 2003). Specifically, it involves a positive sense of individual identity, overall life satisfaction, and mental wellbeing in the receiving society (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). The development of psychological adaptation is also closely associated with the state of individual agency, which is defined as the capacity for a person to act and make choices independently in a given environment (Editor in Chief, 2016). In other words, agency emphasizes an individual's central and active role in life (Rydzik & Anitha, 2020).

To better understand psychological adaptation, existing literature has distinguished between sociocultural and psychological adaptation (e.g., Ward & Kennedy, 1993). The former is characterized by the development of social and cultural capabilities to handle daily situations in the mainstream cultural and social context (e.g., Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999); while the latter is particularly associated with psychological wellbeing (Smith, 2003).

On the other hand, psychological adaptation is different from psychological wellbeing, for that it is closely related to migrants' adaptation situation and coping strategies. For instance, integration strategies for migrants are found to have the greatest psychological

adaptation outcomes, as they offer individuals with two social support systems of both sending and receiving societies, and represent a lack of intergroup conflict (Berry, 1997). More detailed strategical choices related to positive psychological adaptation include active coping (Miller and Chandler, 2002), positive emotion (Beirens and Fontaine, 2011), and social support (Levecque et al., 2009). Influential factors for women's psychological adaptation can be categorized as common factors and individual ones, the former is usually about the common challenges and stress that migrant face during migration, such as family separation or partial citizenship (Claassen, 2005; Lonqvist et al., 2015); while the latter is related to individual background characteristics such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status (Kim & Yu, 2021). As Psychological adaptation involves both inward and outward adaptation, it displays the comfort and stability of migrants in the receiving society and is thus considered the ultimate outcome of acculturation (Berry, 2005).

### **New marriage migrant women and their leisure participation**

It is worthwhile noticing that “comfort and stability” are not gained naturally. Rather, it involves a series of active actions, including self-positioning, expression and realization, implying a dynamic identity formation process (Mata-Codesal et al., 2015). This has brought out the importance of leisure in understanding migrants' psychological adaptation, as leisure is regarded as a platform for these self-related and self-initiated process, and it is the realm where individuals take agency and are less forced by “external expectation” (Berry, 2005).

Leisure, as a basic form of human existence and human needs has been discussed in different spheres. Different schools have different dimensions of defining leisure, such as

time of leisure and non-leisure, leisure and recreation activities, or a psychological state of ease and calm. Besides the traditional perspectives, more and more scholars also argue that special dimension is important in realizing leisure (Henderson & Frelke, 2000). Even recent work started discussing the blurred and controversial aspects of leisure and leisure definition. Despite various attempts in defining leisure, overall, it refers to a direction towards “good life”, with the presence of “self” and “agency” (Henderson, 2008). While leisure constraints are also widely studied especially when it refers to women (e.g., Jackson & Henderson, 1995), such as the lack of free time, limited financial resources and educational level (Li and Stodolska, 2018). These leisure constraints in turn cause a series problems, and the major one identified is the lack of personal leisure, and hard emotional management when they are seeking prioritizing personal leisure, which leads to poor psychological wellbeing (Bó, 2020).

Therefore, it could be understood that leisure study is important in exploring migrants’ psychological adaptation process. Leisure allows migrants to create and adjust emotional bonds with people and things in both their sending and receiving society and is a key sphere for migrants to sense the existence and consistency of themselves, looking for continuities and changes in their life (Mata-Codesal et al., 2015).

### **Migrants’ leisure and psychological adaptation**

Much empirical research has contributed to the understanding of migrants’ leisure and adaptation. The meaningfulness within their leisure experience includes leisure companionship, leisure mood enhancement, leisure rejuvenation, and leisure adjustment

(Kim and Iwasaki, 2016). Therefore, leisure serves as a key to alleviating their suffering, buffering their adaptation stress, and increasing their quality of life (Li and Stodolska, 2018).

A study by Stodolska and other scholars (2017) in the U.S. found that immigrants were able to not only establish interactions with strangers but also build memories and traditions within their own families through their leisure and recreation in natural environments in the host society. In this way, migrants link their life in their origin and in the new environment, embracing changes but also developing feelings of attachment (Stodolska et al., 2017).

Other researchers stressed the special dimensions matter in this process. As suggested by Horolets (2015), migrants' minority status manifests itself not only through the scarcity of certain social resources and capital but also through possessing the embodied, temporal, and spatial feature of "being in an unfamiliar place", of which the uncertainty also poses challenges for identity. By depicting how Polish labour migrants in the U.K. undermined uncertainties of the place and of themselves, created senses of belonging and gained self-confidence by exploring their living environment through leisure and recreation such as walking in theme parks or just randomly wandering around, Horolets (2015) claimed that "the place becomes theirs, they become the place".

While Ugolotti (2015) looked at immigrant children in Italy, who were very likely confronted with unemployment and discrimination, yet by their public presence and interactions with public spaces such as playing sports, these teenagers asserted their rights to be in and of the place towards "locals".

As mentioned before, leisure per se is constrained by a series of factors. Chinese

domestic female migrant caregivers preferred free leisure activities and “quick play”, and their leisure has blurred boundaries with work, which exactly occurred under their daily practices and position as female migrant caregivers (Li and Stodolska, 2018). Accordingly, degrees of engagement in leisure, and the forms of leisure that migrants are used to, are inherently embedded in their very position at the place and identity at the moment, and hence are fundamental for exploring the impacts of leisure participation upon psychological adaptation.

For migrants, the establishment of self-identity behind psychological adaptation happens in every moment of migrants’ life, in both their work and leisure, yet it is the backstage of leisure that is unique as a site of struggle for autonomy, of negotiating one’s lived realities, of counteracting their relatively disadvantaged situation and compensating for the energy invested in the performances of their social roles (Goffman, 1959; Li and Stodolska, 2018). However, the total amount of leisure research in this field is limited (e.g., see Lin, 2013; Chan, 2014; Haberfeld and Lundh, 2014). While existing literature on migrant leisure was mostly conducted in Northern America, a little research in Asian has been conducted with different targeting group. Chen explored the life and psychological adaptation of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong through investigating their self-initiated beauty pageants, which displays great agency and is regarded as an active strategy of building up resilience (Chen, 2015).

Therefore, the following research questions will guide the present study: What is the role of leisure in the psychological adaptation of new marriage migrant women from Mainland China to Hong Kong? In particular: (1) What is their leisure participation? (2)

How does leisure participation impact their psychological adaptation?

### **Methodology**

To investigate in the detailed mechanisms of leisure's role in new marriage migrant women's psychological adaptation, we used a qualitative method to gather their life experiences and attitudes both before and after their migration to Hong Kong from Mainland.

In order to select the appropriate interviewees, two traits were identified to filter the most relevant participants. All interviewees are:

1. Marriage migrant women entering Hong Kong with One-way Permit;
2. Have resided in Hong Kong for less than ten years.

The first criterion enabled researchers to find Mainland women who migrated for the purpose of reuniting with their local husbands, and as mentioned above, these women were usually of relatively low education level, unprofessional job capabilities, and low socio-economic status. The second requirement used time range to narrow the target group to new migrants, with the aim of finding respondents who had a more accurate memory and profound understanding of their experiences and attitudes both before and after migration. The reason why we set a time limit of ten years for "new migrants" in this case was that a considerable number of the targeted women came to Hong Kong with short-term entry permit for family visits before getting one-way permit. During the time they travelled between Mainland and Hong Kong from time to time and thus adapting to the local society was not considered their priority. Hence, we set the time frame at less than ten years from the time they first entered Hong Kong with any permit related to their cross-border marriage.

Given that one of the researchers have the connection with the Hong Kong Church

Network for the Poor (HKCNP), a local non-governmental organization (NGO) that is closely connected with our target research group, the recruitment was mainly through purposive sampling with HKCNP's assistance. Seven out of nine interviewees are recruited in this way. For the other two interviewees, one was recruited based on researcher's personal network, and the other was recruited through a popular social media in Mainland China called Xiaohongshu. Xiaohongshu was observed to be a venue for new marriage migrant women to share and receive useful messages, usually about the common challenges they face in Hong Kong such as migrant-related document processing, mile powders shopping for kids, and package delivery to and from Mainland. We approached eligible women with the function of "direct message" in Xiaohongshu and received reply from one woman, who became our interviewee.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with nine targeted women aged between 28 and 52, and six out of nine were in their 30s. The characteristics of our interviewees are shown in table 1 below, and they are in consistent with the major population characteristics of women one-way permit holders. All interviews covered the topics of (1) personal background; (2) life, leisure, and feelings before migration; (3) life, leisure, and feelings after migration; (4) recent life, leisure, and feelings; (5) attitude towards Hong Kong and one's own adaptation.

Each interview lasted for 1-1.5 hours. Eight out of nine interviews were conducted online due to the drastically evolved situation of COVID-19 at the time, and one was conducted face-to-face in interviewee's community.

All interview conversations were taped and transcribed. Findings were discovered

with subsequent coding and thematic analysis.

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<b>Home town</b>	<b>Habitual residence before moving to H.K.</b>	<b>Resident period in H.K.</b>	<b>Length of Employment in H.K.</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Children (number, gender, age)</b>	<b>Housing</b>
<b>A</b>	34	Secondary school degree	Guangdong	Huizhou, Guangdong	6 years	2 years (part-time)	Married	1 son (3), 2 daughters (12&10)	Public housing
<b>B</b>	34	Secondary school degree	Guangdong	Shenzhen, Guangdong	3 years	1.5 years (part-time)	Married	1 son (7), 1 daughter (9)	Transitional housing
<b>C</b>	48	Secondary school degree	Guangdong	Taishan, Guangdong	< 1 year	0 year	Widowed	1 son (23)	Public housing
<b>D</b>	28	Post-secondary school degree	Guangdong	Maoming, Guangdong	5 years	0 year	Widowed	1 son (5), 1 daughter (2)	Interim housing
<b>E</b>	35	Primary school degree	Guangdong	Guangzhou, Guangdong	9 years	0 year	Remarried	1 son (5 month), 1	Interim housing

								daughter (3)	
<b>F</b>	52	Primary school degree	Guan gdong	Shenzhen, Guangdon g	8 years	0 year	Widow ed	1 daughter (11)	Private housing
<b>G</b>	33	Secondary school degree	Jiangx i	Shenzhen, Guangdon g	4 years	0 year	Divorce d	1 son (4), 1 daughter (5)	Transiti onal housing
<b>H</b>	38	Secondary school degree	Fujian	Nan'an, Fujian	6 years	1.5 years (part- time)	Remarri ed	1 son (10)	Public housing
<b>I</b>	30	Undergrad uate degree	Guan gdong	Guangdon g	1 years	0 year	Married	1 son (3)	Rental housing

Table 1

## Findings

There are two main sections in our findings. The first part explicates the structural context of new marriage migrant women's leisure participation and how the context shapes women's predominant leisure choices. The second section discusses the impacts of these women's leisure participation on their psychological adaptation, with two subsections.

## **New Marriage Migrant Women and Their Leisure Participation**

### ***Structural Constraints and Opportunities for Leisure Participation***

Almost all interviewed women were married to local husbands in Hong Kong with the hope of upward economic and status mobility and blending in this presumably better society. However, it was found that their socioeconomic status, gender role, and migration status all constrained their new life here, and also constrained their leisure participation. This is consistent with the application of intersectionality theory to marriage migrant women from Mainland by Chiu (2012). These constraints are structural, limiting women's capabilities to act and live in the ways of their own wills and thus restricting their individual agency (Editor in Chief, 2016).

These women are of low socioeconomic status, both in their families of origin and their new families formed through marriage. Their husbands often have unstable jobs or insufficient income for family use. Furthermore, four of the nine interviewees live in transitional or interim housing waiting for public flats, and one is in a lawsuit with her deceased husband's family for the house he left behind. The cramped and unstable living environment also confines women's leisure participation.

*“Since my husband died, our daughter and I have been living in the house he left behind. But my husband and his ex-wife's children don't want me to live here, and we have been in a lawsuit for five years. It is very exhausting and unsettling. Finishing this lawsuit is my most important wish.”*

*Interviewee F, 52 years old, widowed*

Traditional gender roles often constrain these women within each family, such as being the main or even the only caregiver for their children, shouldering almost all the housework, and subordinating to their parents-in-law. Additionally, because many women are unemployed, they have no direct income, so they have little money, time, or energy for leisure.

*“My mother-in-law was very demanding of me, and she scolded me for everything, causing me to see a psychiatrist. I will definitely go crazy if I live with her ever again ... My parents were very much against me marrying Hong Kong, so I have always avoided talking about the difficulties and frustrations I encountered here and only reported the good news.”*

*Interviewee B, 34 years old, married*

*“My husband is very lazy, and he hardly takes care of the children or does any housework. When he’s home, even when he’s lying next to our children, he doesn’t pay any attention to them unless they cried extremely loud, then he hugs them a bit and quickly goes back to playing his phone.”*

*Interviewee E, 35 years old, remarried*

As new migrants, unfamiliarity with the city is often stated by women. Many of our interviewees reported that they could not speak fluent Cantonese when they first came to Hong Kong. In addition, unfamiliar with the community they live in also constrains the

range and location of their outdoor leisure activities. Moreover, they have a very limited number of friends here in Hong Kong, which limits their leisure participation with others. The reality that their original families stay far away in Mainland China adds to these women's loneliness and helplessness as they can hardly rely on their original families for support or accompany.

Although women suffer from all these constraints, it is found that they also have some opportunities facilitating leisure participation, mainly related to the financial assistance they received and the escape from traditional family roles as wife and as daughter-in-law.

Almost every interviewee's family has been supported by the government or NGOs. The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance has effectively reduced the financial burden of some women we interviewed. Many interviewees have also been assisted by the government regarding their housing issues, giving them relatively stable and less narrow living spaces.

Another condition is the release of the burden from their respective marriage family. This often includes women moving away from their parents-in-law and mitigating stress from their intense relationships or divorcing their aggressive husbands.

*"Moving away from my mother-in-law greatly reduce my mental stress."*

*Interviewee B, 34 years old, married*

### ***Three Modes of Leisure Participation***

Given their living conditions, leisure participation of these women can be divided into three modes. The three modes are: work-oriented leisure, leisure-oriented leisure, and pure leisure. The former two modes refer to leisure participation which involves simultaneous work, while whether this period is work or leisure-dominant depends on migrants' subjective assessment. The last one refers to complete leisure which engage no external pressure or index.

Therefore, **work-oriented leisure** often happens when these women are doing work as homemakers, such as taking care of or picking up children, cooking meals or grocery shopping. It is a form of leisure when they enjoy cooking or get out, admiring views, meeting people, and developing interpersonal relationships.

While the previous one is for the purpose of homemaker work, **leisure-oriented leisure** often appears when the main purpose is to relax and have recreation for themselves, such as gathering and hanging out with their friends or travelling with their families with partial attention on taking care of their children.

**Pure leisure** refers to the time totally arranged by the women themselves and is for the purpose of self-rest, self-charging, and recreation. For this group, pure leisure activities often include doing gym at home, taking lessons, playing phones, and chatting in online groups and watching TV.

Work-oriented leisure is the most frequent one among all three dominant leisure forms. All of our respondents had jobs in the mainland before they had kids and moved to Hong Kong. While since they came to Hong Kong, they have not had stable paid jobs as their

expected role is to take on childcare and household chores. Homemaker has become the most important part of their lives. Their time and energy are expected, internally and externally, to be allocated to prioritize family and children. From getting up early in the morning to making breakfast, taking children to school, preparing lunch, dinner, tutoring and putting the children to bed, their work is voracious, and they do not have clear breaks and holidays like paid jobs. Consequently, work-oriented leisure appears as a great part of their daily life and will be discussed as a separate part.

As contrast, leisure-oriented leisure and pure leisure are relatively less frequent or more scattered. Activities from these two categories that require a specific period of time for completion often happen once or twice a month, for instance, hanging out with friends without kids. Other activities, such as chatting with friends online, playing games or reading web novels, often happen at late night after their kids go sleeping. As the practical realization of these two forms share great common points, their influence on psychological adaptation will be discussed together in the later section.

### **Impacts of Leisure Participation on Psychological Adaptation**

The following part will discuss the targeted women's leisure participation's impact mechanisms on their psychological adaptation. The first type, obligation-fulfilment mechanisms will focus on the part of leisure's impact that is related to women's obligation as homemakers in families. This type of mechanisms is basically associated with work-oriented leisure categorized in the above section, and it includes the mechanisms of. The second type, self-oriented mechanisms will stress the leisure's impact that is related to women's needs for self-interests such as relaxation, social relationships, and self-

development. This type of mechanisms is primarily associated with self-oriented and pure leisure, and it involves the mechanisms of temporal escaping from daily life, continuity construction between past and present, and active devotion to future expectation.

### ***Obligation-fulfilment Mechanisms on Psychological Adaptation***

For our targeted women, work-oriented leisure is unique, as it is embedded in their work of taking care of their families and children. This form of leisure is often designed for leisure of kids or betterment of family, instead of relaxation of women themselves.

Therefore, the impacts of leisure on psychological adaptation through obligation-fulfilment are summarized into two mechanisms: (1) natural outward reaching to the receiving society; (2) self-legitimation and identity confirmation.

**Natural outward reaching.** As the major obligations of our targeted women are taking care of children and doing housework, their obligation-fulfilling work includes taking their children outside, playing with their kids, and buying goods from markets and groceries. Many of our interviewees mentioned that they believed outdoor activities are necessary for children's physical and psychological health, especially when most of them live in narrow housing with limited indoor space for activities. When accompanying their children to go out, these women have the responsibility to arrange diverse and intense outdoor activities for their kids. Therefore, when they take their children out to gardens or seaside, they are performing their responsibility and are achieving a good mother role.

*“I think it's good to relax, like going to the beach or something, it still feels comfortable, go out and go anywhere. If the kids are at home, they have too much energy, and it's easy to fight and argue. So, overall, it's both fun and tiring if you*

*go out, but it's on the happy side."*

*Interviewee A, 34 years old, married*

However, it is worthwhile noticing that these women do not only see these activities as "work", but very often the elements of leisure are involved. For example, when they take their kids out to play, they can appreciate the natural and street views of Hong Kong themselves, and thus generate feelings of ease and relaxation. Another example is that when they are picking up their kids from school, they are able to talk with parents of their kids' friends and schoolmates and thus develop friendships. This is supported by the situation that the mothers of these women's kids' classmates are the majority of their friends in Hong Kong, as mentioned by the interviewees.

*"I have four to five friends here in Hong Kong, who are all mothers of my children's classmates. We got familiar with each other that we waited for our kids to finish school together every day. Later we would hang out together and visit one another's home."*

*Interviewee B, 34 years old, married*

These relaxing experiences, refreshing feelings, and social relationship that have developed naturally along with these women's daily duty-fulfilling work were described positively in interviews. They are considered important for these women to gain aesthetic and pleasure experience, get connected with local environment, and expand their social network in the receiving society. These all contribute further to their increasing sense of

stability and overall mental wellbeing. Therefore, although many of our interviewees admitted that taking kids outdoor required energy as they needed to pay attention to and protect their kids in time, they still enjoy the leisure elements during the process.

*“Taking them (kids) outside... of course you need to pay a lot attention and feel tired...but I feel happy... happiness accounts the major part.”*

*Interviewee I, 30 years old, married*

**Self-legitimation and Identity Confirmation.** Contrasting to common perception, pure personal leisure is not always ideal for these women because they shoulder much obligation with the interrelated identity as homemaker, mother, wife, and daughter-in-law. Hybholt et al. (2022) found that for middle age working women in Denmark, not being able to fulfil their parenting and caring role in family involves coping with a bad feeling for prioritising oneself. In line with previous feminist research, our study finds that this uncomfortable feeling when not fulfilling identity roles is severe for our targeted women. As their current primary obligation is being in charge of housework and taking care of children. This obligation is heavily internalized and even regarded as the single most important life goal by these women. This internalization of obligation is also related to the perceived external social pressure. Many of the women mentioned that they had less bargaining power in family because they did not have paid work. Therefore, doing pure leisure without any fulfilment of their obligation have been believed by these women to be burdensome for other family members such as their husbands and parents-in-law, because they would need to “help” the women with “her work”. This sense of guilt partially explains

why most of our respondents did not spend more time pursuing their preferred individual leisure choices.

*“... I prefer to go out with my kids... they are just my kids and they are too young to stay alone...my husband is good but busy. He will [help] me if he has no work on weekends. Normally he will be very tired and it is better not to disturb him. I feel good to take kids out... ”*

*Interviewee B, 34 years old, married*

Following this concern, work-oriented leisure exists with great self-legitimation, as even when they are admiring the views when taking their kids out, chatting with friends during grocery shopping, they are still protected under the shell of “managing obligations”, rather than being “irresponsible and selfish”. This self-legitimation contributes to their more stable and better psychological state when they are having leisure. When they plan to take their kids to some new places they have never been to, they search for more information and make plans, and visit there when they are ready. During this process, some of them felt they added something new to their repeated life with a deeper connection with the local community.

More importantly, through self-legitimation of leisure during work, they are able to negotiate their roles and obligations of doing housework and taking care of children, and themselves as individuals who have hobbies, taste and preferences, in the local society. These women often reported feeling more familiar with local norms and rules, and they have more initiatives to make a difference on their lives and their work. They felt satisfaction for

the time of work-oriented leisure per se and also for accomplishment of their obligations.

*“You could learn a lot when you do grocery shopping with your friends... yes they came to Hong Kong earlier than me... there are many subtle rules and norms which is different from my hometown... you need to prepare changes and know what the staffs are talking about so you can respond quickly...it is a definitely learning process but I enjoy it especially when I am be with my friends”*

*Interviewee B, 34 years old, married*

### ***Self-oriented Mechanisms on Psychological Adaptation***

In addition to blending leisure in these women’s obligation fulfillment process, they also have much leisure participation that primarily derives from self-interest and individual needs, such as the needs for social relationships, relaxation, self-care, and self-development. Using the leisure category developed in the first finding above, it is found that these self-derived needs are mainly associated with leisure-oriented leisure and pure leisure.

Three self-oriented mechanisms connecting leisure and psychological adaptation are thus generated: (1) temporary escape from daily burden and stress; (2) continuity construction between the past and the present; (3) active devotion and commitment to positive future expectations.

**Temporary escape from daily work and stress.** One kind of predominant leisure for these women can be characterized as quick and scattered leisure. This kind of leisure usually happens in the fragmented time in women’s daily life and requires little cost or effort to exert. Typical forms of this leisure include playing on their phones and watching TV.

*“I like watching TV when I am free, especially the infotainment program called ‘scoop’. But I can’t watch live because the time is not fit, I usually watch the replay online, the time of which can be more flexible.”*

*Interviewee B, 34 years old, married*

Consciously or not, this kind of leisure provides short break for women between their heavy daily family work and allows them to escape from the burden and the stress that comes along. Thus, for many of our interviewees, the scattered leisure of playing on their phones and watching TV is not simply a relaxation but can yield “fleeting experiences of escape” (Clark & Lupton, 2021) from everyday trifles and mental distress and even breakdown.

*“In the evening I often play on my phone and relax. I feel like this is the only personal time I have.”*

*Interviewee G, 33 years old, divorced*

It is also worth noting that the escape from daily work and stress through fragmented leisure should not necessarily involve physically setting a boundary between women themselves and their family members, rather its emphasis is more on they stay away from the homemaker works.

*“In some evenings during the summer holiday for my son, I watched videos and novels on my phone, my son played on the computer, and my husband played games on his phone. I really enjoy this leisure because I can relax in my own way, and meanwhile my family can accompany one another well.”*

*Interviewee H, 38 years old, remarried*

**Continuity construction between the past and the present.** Another mechanism is related to women's conscious or unconscious formation of bonds between their past experience and present life through leisure. Typical leisure forms of this kind involve making friends of similar backgrounds, keeping contact with original family, as well as doing leisure that is in consistent with leisure habit before migration.

*“My best friend is from the same hometown. We used to rent the houses on the same floor. She approached me after hearing my husband and me talking in our native dialect... But the most important reason for us becoming best friends is that her husband is as bad as mine. When I talked about the annoying behaviours of my husband, she always said it's the same for her so she could well understand my situation.”*

*Interviewee E, 35 years old, remarried*

*“I used to practice yoga at home by myself when I lived in Shenzhen to keep my body slim and beautiful. Now I do a little yoga at home when I have time, after which I always feel comfortable and happy. I enjoy the feeling of doing exercise.”*

*Interviewee B, 34 years old, married*

*“When I experience some difficulties and new things in Hong Kong, I will share with my parents about it. And sometimes I play Mah-jong with my original family*

*on the phone.”*

*Interviewee I, 30 years old, married*

All of the interviewees had jobs before migrating to Hong Kong or giving birth, and some of them did sports like yoga and dancing after work as ways of leisure. These women highly value this time period for leisure both before migration and now, which they describe as “a time totally belong to myself and of high value to my life”. Horolets (2015) suggests in his study that Polish migrants in the UK would create a sense of belonging and gain self-confidence through preserving the habits they held before migration. We found similar positive associations between our targeted women’s maintenance of previous leisure choices and their psychological adaptation status. The act of preserving the leisure habit is not simply a way to relax, but more importantly an active choice to maintain continuity of their life, so as to preserve the sense of stability and confidence in heart and reduce stress during their adaptation process.

**Active devotion and commitment to positive future expectations.** While the first mechanism in this section is about dealing with daily trifles and pressure and the second one is more connected to the past, this third mechanism is about women’s positive expectation towards future life and their active inputs of time, energy, and money to pursue future betterment. Typical leisure form of this kind, classified as deep leisure, involves taking language courses and vocational skills training.

*“I once joined a free English class in Hong Kong, and I would try my best to finish the housework early and save more time studying my course ... I also*

*want to get a beautician's license in Hong Kong in the future because I have been doing it for a long time before moving to Hong Kong. I hope through this license I can find a job and the salary in Hong Kong is high."*

*Interviewee G, 33 years old, divorced*

Active coping strategies opposing migration challenges is considered an important revelation of psychological adaptation and individual agency.

Relationships between obligation-fulfillment mechanism and self-oriented mechanism is shown in the figure 1 below. As two mechanisms elaborating leisure's impact on psychological adaptation, they are distinguished yet some overlaps between the two. For example, an interviewee mentioned that she learned Cantonese proactively both for letting her kids to grow up in a Cantonese-speaking environment and thus the kids can better adopt to local society, and for equipping herself for better job opportunity in the future. When asked to further reflect on the weight of these two reasons for her language learning, this interviewee said that the two causes are equally important.

Yet more importantly, the core of both concepts, leisure and psychological adaptation, are closely connected to the meaning of individual agency, reflecting the women's active choices to adopt in the new society, under unneglectable structural challenges and difficulties.

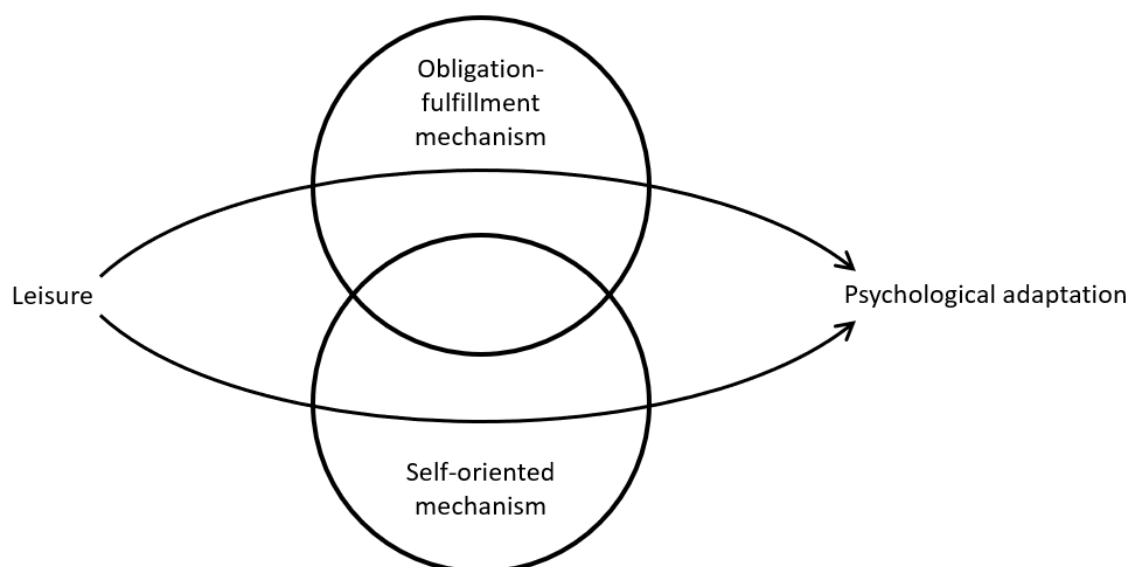


Figure 1

## Discussion

### *Discussion and Conclusion*

This study provides insight into the impacts of leisure on new marriage migrant women's psychological adaptation, and two types of mechanisms, namely obligation-fulfillment and self-oriented mechanisms, have been developed. Individual agency is discovered to be the embodied core concept for the study, and it is through these two mechanisms that the women's agency is exercised in oppressive contexts. On the one hand, these women are suffering from intersectional inequalities regarding their class, gender, and migration status, which worsen their migration adaptation status and mental wellbeing and limit their leisure choices. On the other hand, they have actively engaged in coping methods in carving out their "spaces of control", maintaining mental wellness, building up continuities in life, and actually working for positive future expectation. All these show the women's consciousness and responses to face the structural challenges in different degrees.

Through a focus on leisure and psychological adaptation and the exercise of agency

behind, this article adds to the literature of both migration and leisure studies. In addition, paying special attention to the target group of new marriage migrant women in Hong Kong context, which is a migrant city and has had larger scale of migration movements in recent years, this study provides practical implications for policymakers and NGO practitioners on addressing the issues of social cohesion and migrant adaptation facilitation.

The real-life public health emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic, has enhanced new marriage migrant women's vulnerabilities. De Boer et al. (2021) argue that COVID-19 is exerting more negative impacts on people with lower socioeconomic status, whose vulnerability has increased in both more confirmed cases and greater impediments in daily life.

*“The COVID-19 pandemic reduces my husband’s income and make my life much more inconvenient. My husband can only do a part-time job due to the COVID and simply earns \$10,000 HKD a month, a quarter of which becomes the house rent, and for the rest, we need to use it for food and raise two children.”*

*Interviewee B, 34 years old, married*

Because of the epidemic, these women's young children were kept home from school. This would have increased the frequency of their outdoor activities with their children, but with the epidemic's severity, women had to keep themselves and their children at home. Moreover, these women have less opportunity to meet their friends in Hong Kong offline. Furthermore, they cannot return to their families of origin for reunion and seeking the more immediate feelings of bonding, which was reflected in many women's words that they had

not been home for many years.

*“Before the breakout of the COVID-19, I normally went back to my hometown once per year, but now I can’t. If you want to go home, you have to go through quarantine, which is expensive and makes me feel like being in prison. I really miss my family of origin, especially during festivals like the Spring Festival.”*

*Interviewee B, 34 years old, married*

Reduced access to leisure and the increased burden of child-rearing have increased the squeeze and challenge on the women’s leisure participation. However, it is the context of pandemic that emphasizes the essential value of leisure, psychological adaptation, and individual agency.

This study is expected to facilitate a better understanding of these women’s experiences and wellbeing under the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus provides practical implications for the government and NGOs for future policies and measures regarding protective measures for the vulnerable group under massive public health emergencies.

### ***Limitation and Future Direction***

There are some potential limitations of this study. One is about the methodology. Regarding interviewee recruitment, due to the inconvenience of interviewee approaching caused by the COVID-19, the network the NGO - Hong Kong Church Network for the Poor (HKCNP) became the main source of our interviewees, and seven out of nine interviewees were recruited in this way. A potential risk of homophily remained: women connected with HKCNP naturally meant that they were either church members or community residents that

receive relief from local churches. Facing this situation, we have tried to consider the impact of churches in our analysis: questions about respondents' participation, attitudes, received relief, and social networks related to church were asked during interviews and evaluated in subsequent analysis. In terms of interview conduction, eight out of nine interviews were conducted online. Virtual interviews have the advantages of providing more flexibility regarding time and location, and allowing the interviewees to feel more relaxed and share more naturally during conversations. Yet it also had potential defects. First, it was difficult to capture subtle changes in the interviewee's movements and expressions during interviews. Second, researchers could not physically enter or observe interviewees' living environment. Third, it was difficult to build a strong trust and bond between interviewers and interviewees as in face-to-face interviews, which further constrained our use of snowball sampling in interviewee recruitment. Overall, for future studies, it would be better to include more field observation and face-to-face interviews, with interviewees of more diverse backgrounds recruited through not only purposive sampling but also snowball sampling.

Another limitation is the impact of the COVID-19. We have discussed that the COVID-19 is having overwhelming impacts on both women's leisure participation and psychological adaptation, yet its specific role and impact on the mechanisms we found remained unclear. Comparative studies during and after the COVID-19 could be done in the future to better understand COVID's influence.

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