SPECIAL FOCUS: DOING FAMILIES IN HONG KONG

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INTRODUCTION

DOING FAMILIES IN HONG KONG:
VALUES, RELATIONS AND STRATEGIES

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This special issue builds on the papers from a workshop among ten local and international scholars entitled “Doing Families: Values, Relations and Strategies in Contemporary Hong Kong” held at the University of Hong Kong on November 11, 2006.

The workshop was conceived in the context of growing concerns among academics and policy makers with some of the transformations in Hong Kong families in recent years. They point to the trends of increasingly late marriage, declining fertility, rising divorce rate, ageing population, major re-orientation in gender roles and expectations, the tension between work and family, as well questions of educating the young and caring for elders. All of this occurs in a context of large-scale economic restructuring and geographical migration that characterizes the recent history of Hong Kong.

These changes have prompted bold prognosis and predictions. Some lament the passing of old ways. Some herald the dawn of a new age. Some argue we have seen the breakdown of ‘the family’. Others say we are witnessing the coming of individuation and a democratization of family life. The workshop was designed to shed light on these debates by bringing in scholars from various social-science disciplines to present their current conceptual work and up-to-date empirical evidence on related issues.

Six of the papers presented at the workshop are now brought together for this special issue. All are updated and elaborated in response to the debates raised in the workshop. Together they offer a comprehensive look at the divergent patterns, multiple paths and complex policies relating to doing families in Hong Kong.

Doing Families in the Context of Social Restructuring

The papers broadly share a common theoretical stance. They eschew universalistic theories of family change. They stress the importance of