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Introduction

Challenges to Family Ties in an Asian Global City

The point of departure for this study is the seeming contradiction between, on one hand, rapid societal change and the erosion of cultural continuity across generations (or an emerging generation gap) and, on the other hand, prevailing notions of traditional family values. Bee Choo’s narrative is representative of middle-class Singaporeans of her age group, as it illustrates the dramatic societal and personal transformations that have taken place over the past several decades. After nearly 150 years of British colonial rule, followed by a short-lived merger with Malaysia, the Republic of Singapore gained its independence in 1965. Massive effort was invested in modernizing the country, and together with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea, Singapore soon became known as one of the “Asian Tigers.” Urbanization gradually transformed the island into the high-tech metropolis we see there today. Villages have given way to new towns that are fully equipped with housing estates, MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) stations, neighborhood schools, shopping malls, post offices, childcare centers, sports centers, and cinemas. Singapore’s economic growth faced some obstacles in the beginning of this century, but it nevertheless remains the most trade-intensive economy in the world and the richest country in Southeast Asia. Singapore is continuing its self-reinvention by striving to become an international hub with a prominent role in finance and specialized services.

This study contributes to the anthropology of intergenerational relations in modern and rapidly changing societies. To date, anthropologists have been predominantly occupied with kinship and family in so-called traditional societies (e.g., Radcliffe-Brown 1924; Mead 1928; Simmons 1947; Goody 1969; Needham 1971; Foner 1984; Kertzer and Keith 1984). Contemporary anthropological research certainly includes the study of complex and urbanized societies, but intergenerational relations remains
an underdeveloped topic in anthropology that can be usefully expanded. Singapore represents an ideal site given the pace of social change there. I also hope to contribute to the body of anthropological research on Singapore society. Mention Singapore and most people—fellow anthropologists as well as people in general—think of an orderly city and a shopper’s paradise, skyscrapers and concrete jungle, severe fines for littering and a ban on chewing gum. Its image as a society lacking authentic culture and history is an important reason why Singapore has remained a marginal field site and subject of study within anthropology. Even the Singaporeans themselves have bought into this image. In the course of my fieldwork I got used to informants asking why on earth I was interested in Singapore: “Why Singapore? The traditions are too diluted here. If you are interested in Chinese culture you’d better go to China.”¹ Precisely for these reasons, I contend that Singapore is a fascinating and worthwhile research area.

Singapore’s resident population, exceeding 3.6 million in 2006, is predominantly of Chinese (75.2 percent), Malay (13.6 percent) and Indian (8.8 percent) origin, a result of the regional immigration that followed British colonization in 1819.² I will explore how intergenerational relations among Chinese Singaporeans have changed in tandem with the island-nation’s overall societal transformation. My decision to focus on the Chinese was not simply because they are in the numerical majority, but also because many kinds of generational gaps have emerged in the Chinese community. Apart from the leap in education, income, and consumption, a generational divide has arisen with regard to language, religion, and social memory. Simultaneously—and perhaps contradictorily—the Chinese are thought of worldwide as “naturally” family oriented and strongly committed to filial piety. Discrepancies between such an idealized representation and actual practices cannot be dismissed, but even so it is little exaggeration to say that the family has in fact been a pivotal feature of Chinese societies for centuries. In Singapore the family was reasserted as a cornerstone of the government’s Asian Values ideology in the 1980s. Under the political hegemony of the People’s Action Party (PAP), which has governed the country since 1959 (Singapore was granted a high degree of internal self-governance in 1959),³ the family has been the object of constant state intervention, and although the Singapore government no longer preaches Asian Values, a profamily ideology is continuously promoted.

Across the social science literature, the term “generation” is used in several, and sometimes ambiguous, ways. At a societal level, generation generally means “age group” or “age cohort,” that is, a group of individuals
who roughly share the same period of birth. From an anthropological perspective, however, one’s generation is not deducible from one’s biological life course. Karl Mannheim’s (1952) classic formulation of historical-social generation units is of particular relevance here: generation is a matter of “social location,” rather than a biological fact (ibid., 291). Like class belonging, a generation consists of individuals who develop a group identity due to shared experiences (ibid.). In a family context, on the other hand, generation refers to the relative position in a kinship structure, which does not necessarily coincide with actual age. This study is concerned with generations both at a societal level (in terms of cultural continuity/discontinuity across generations) and within the family (in terms of intergenerational expectations and obligations). Instead of conceptualizing the societal and familial as separate domains, I shall treat them as intersecting, by examining how intergenerational expectations and obligations are challenged, reworked and/or reaffirmed in relation to the extensive societal change of past decades.

**GENERATIONS UNITED, GENERATIONS DIVIDED**

Long ago, Margaret Mead addressed the problem of the generation gap in *Culture and Commitment* (1970), one of her less-noted and likewise less-elaborated works. In this essay, Mead argues that the world has entered a new phase in history, in which the conditions of cultural commitment are radically different from the past. As a result of the breathtaking social changes in the twentieth century, we have witnessed the emergence of a deep, unprecedented generation gap:

Today, suddenly, because all the peoples of the world are part of one electronically based, intercommunicating network, young people everywhere share a kind of experience that none of the elders ever have had or will have. Conversely, the older generation will never see repeated in the lives of young people their own unprecedented experience of sequentially emerging change. (Mead 1970, 50)

In this modern world, elders cease being adequate sources of knowledge and identity; the basis of cultural commitment is no longer found in the past, it is to be found in the future (ibid.). Margaret Mead, of course, is hardly the only scholar who understands intergenerational disintegration as a contem-
porary phenomenon. The idea that modern society fundamentally changes the relations between elder and younger generations is widespread within academic and popular discourse. Modernization—commonly defined in terms of economic and technological development, upward social mobility, urbanization, and Westernization—is assumed to have a fragmenting effect on intergenerational relations. The position of the elder generation vis-à-vis the younger generation is undermined by longer life expectancy, increasing levels of education, the break up of the extended family, and the decline of the religious significance of elders (e.g., ancestor worship) (Cowgill and Holmes 1972).

While intergenerational disintegration is extremely conspicuous in contemporary Singapore, existing research overlooks its complexity and the ways intergenerational relations continue to be maintained and reaffirmed. This study therefore argues for the importance of an analytical framework that recognizes both processes, the levels at which they occur, and the ways in which they are articulated in everyday life. As we shall see, a fragmentation of cultural continuity across generations does not necessarily imply the dissolution of the obligations within the family. Bee Choo’s case, presented in the prologue, demonstrates how various forms of intergenerational support continue to bridge the generation gap. Modern societies are usually associated with a reversal of intergenerational resource flows (money, goods, services) to the advantage of the younger generation (Caldwell 1976). As the family becomes economically and emotionally nucleated, parents presumably spend increasing resources on their own children without expecting or receiving anything in return. This hypothesis applies only partially to Singapore. While the resources flowing from parents to children have substantially expanded among my informants, this has not meant the disruption of the support from adult children to elderly parents. The increasing pressure on young Singaporean parents to sustain this double flow has given rise to the term “sandwich generation.”

But the term “sandwich generation” is not unique to Singapore; several studies in Asia as well as Europe and the United States use it to describe the situation of adult children who simultaneously raise their own children and care for elderly parents (e.g., Riley and Bowen 2005; Grundy and Henretta 2006; Künemund 2006; Kwok 2006; Zhang and Goza 2006). While the sandwich generation refers to a position in the family network, and not a specific age cohort, the phenomenon as such is connected to certain social processes. Studies conducted in other parts of Asia such as Hong Kong and mainland China emphasize the impact of lower fertility rates and longer life
expectancy (e.g., Kwok 2006; Zhang and Goza 2006). In addition, rapid economic development means that the standard of living has increased dramatically from one generation to another. As a result, the older generation will be poorer—and in greater need of financial and material assistance—compared to the younger generation. The question, however, is more complex than this. As we shall see, intergenerational support often runs in both directions, and the difference between giver and receiver becomes blurred when, for instance, elderly parents provide practical assistance in the form of babysitting or cooking.

The phenomenon of the sandwich generation should also be understood in relation to the political system. One important reason for the continuity of intergenerational support in Singapore and many other Asian societies is the minimal role of the state in providing public welfare (Croll 2000, 2006). Their neglect of the impact of political regimes is a serious weakness of theories focused on modernization, which suggest that the responsibility to support the elderly automatically shifts from the family to the state in modern societies (see Cowgill and Holmes 1972). This change is by no means self-evident. Where a welfare state finances intergenerational support between age groups (since public welfare is largely tax-funded and channeled via the state apparatus), the Singaporean state locates the burden of intergenerational support at the level of the family. The antiwelfare stance is rationalized on the grounds that the family is the traditional pillar of Asian societies. How the state tries to reaffirm familial obligations and how its strategies must be seen in relation to the wider political economy, as Singapore struggles to establish itself as a key hub in the global economy, is a major issue for this study. But while the state reinforces the continuity of familial obligations, the cultural logic of intergenerational support extends beyond the political and economic dimensions. The ways in which Chinese intergenerational expectations and obligations are maintained and/or renegotiated in the context of societal change and modern capitalism, I argue, must be understood against a specific cultural notion of the parent-child relation.

**THE INTERGENERATIONAL CONTRACT**

The theoretical concept “intergenerational contract” stands for the expectations and obligations that bind the generations together. This is not a contract in a legal sense, but a metaphor for norms of intergenerational
obligations and expectations in a specific socio-cultural context (see Bengtson 1993; Ikels 1993, 2004; Croll 2000, 2006; Izuhara 2002, 2004). The notion of a social contract can be traced all the way back to ancient Greece, but it became especially salient in the political philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau proclaim the social contract to be what defines and legitimizes the rights and duties between the state and the people (Boucher and Kelly 1994). A social contract, in this case between generations, presupposes that the different parties are morally obliged to fulfill the formal and informal expectations laid upon them.

As a theoretical concept, the intergenerational contract has a number of advantages for the purposes of this study. Apart from serving as a metaphor for existing obligations and expectations between generations, I suggest that the concept of a contract has particular relevance for understanding the nature of Chinese intergenerational relations in contemporary Singapore. Although my informants do not use the term “contract” with regard to these obligations and expectations, their implicit understanding of the Chinese parent-child relation does in effect suggest a contract, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. My informants invariably described the parent-child relation as inseparable from sentiments of indebtedness and repayment. Each child is indebted to his or her parents for being brought into this world and for being raised and cared for until adulthood. When reaching adulthood, the child is expected to reciprocate this debt by taking care of elderly parents.

The intergenerational contract, of course, is an analytical tool and should not be confused with my informants’ way of speaking about intergenerational obligations and expectations. In the Singaporean context, the relation between parent and child is intimately linked to the notion of filial piety, both as a term of reference in everyday life and as an ideological-political tool deployed by the state. Filial piety, which is a translation of the Chinese word xiao (or hsiao), is closely associated with the work of Confucius and his disciples. Strictly speaking, filial piety refers to a set of ritual observances between parent and child, but the way the term is used in contemporary Singapore is much broader. Even though the interpretation and practice of filial piety varies according to religion, generation, and socio-economic status, there exists consensus regarding children’s moral responsibility to provide support to their elderly parents (a consensus that does not always translate into actual practice). Hui Min, a female in her midtwenties, put it the following way: “What do I mean by filial piety?
Basically to take care of your parents when they grow old and are not able to take care of themselves. That you will basically respect and honor them.” Hui Min is unmarried and lives with her parents. Like most adult children, she gives her parents monthly portions of her salary (this “pocket money,” in local parlance, can be a significant amount—as much as 20–25 percent of an adult child’s income): “I know my mum appreciates it. She thinks it’s good and in a sense I also think she sees it as, how should I say, that it is an expression of my filial piety to her.”

Although the intergenerational contract as defined here is metaphorical, the importance of contracts of various kinds throughout Chinese society has been widely accepted by scholars (Hansen 1995, 1995a; Cohen 2005). Historical and archeological data show that contracts were used for the transfer of a huge variety of goods and services, from land and labor to women, crops, and animals. In addition to their role in negotiating daily life, contracts were crucial also in negotiating with the gods. Valerie Hansen (1995, 1995a) has described the widespread use of “tomb contracts” in imperial China. Tomb contracts were buried together with the deceased to prevent conflicts with the spirits and help the deceased in the netherworld. The underlying belief here was the “confidence that those courts [of the netherworld] would accept the same type of documents as used in the world of the living” (Hansen 1995a, 66). In fact, tomb contracts were usually drawn up in duplicate—one copy for the deceased and one for the gods from whom the deceased buys the grave area. Hansen (1995a) further distinguishes two types of tomb contracts. Some contracts were meant to settle unresolved controversies from the world of the living, others were aimed at use after death. These latter contracts commonly stated the deceased’s right to the grave plot and warned malicious spirits against trespassing. The tomb contract was also believed to help the deceased in the courts of the netherworld should a dispute arise.

Contractual thinking seems to have permeated all spheres of Chinese social life, including the family. Filial obligations, such as care of elderly parents, were not only established in various codes of conduct and under imperial law; often they were also stated in “family division contracts” (Cohen 1976, 2005; Miller 2004). Unlike a conventional will, the family division contract usually took effect during the lifetime of the parents, and, apart from settling the division of the family property among the sons, it also defined the sons’ duties to their parents. The rights and duties of each party, such as the amount and kind of support each son should provide, were made explicit and often written down in detail (Cohen 2005, 126).
But I must avoid making sweeping comparisons with China, because family division contracts are not found in Singapore. In the Singaporean context certain indigenous Chinese customs changed because they were incompatible with the colonial British judicial system; these changes have been largely sustained under the judicial system of the modern Republic of Singapore (Freedman 1979). Nevertheless, the contractual relationship between parent and child is reproduced in other ways, both figuratively and literally. The idea of a contractual relationship between parent and child is a fundamental component in the Singapore government’s family ideology. In fact, children’s responsibility to support aged parents is legally mandated under the Maintenance of Parents Act, which came into force in 1995. At the level of the state and its regulations, of course, the notion of a contract between generations is not restricted to the Chinese community.

As the intergenerational contract is reproduced on many different levels, it is being challenged and renegotiated in the context of ongoing societal change. One of the most obvious trends is the erosion of extended family units and the substitution of financial and material support for the traditional ideal of coresidence. Another is the reconfiguration of intergenerational obligations by gender, since daughters now, too, represent an important source of support for their natal families (see also Graham et al. 2002; Teo et al. 2003). In Singapore, as in other societies across Asia, the increasing focus on young children and the declining status of the elderly has given rise to new strategies, whereby elderly parents provide unpaid assistance to their adult children in exchange for the support they receive (Ikels 1993; Croll 2000). Recent research in Singapore has emphasized the mutual advantages to the intergenerational contract by showing how elderly parents are in fact an important source of support for their adult children (Mehta 1999; Teo et al. 2003). The concept of an intergenerational contract may thus be useful for highlighting the “binding nature” of mutual support between parents and children in the absence of sufficient public welfare (Ikels 1993, 307). However, although the intergenerational contract may be a gain for both parties (parent and child), it would be misleading, at least with regard to Chinese Singaporeans, to conceive of it as an agreement made between equals. Instead, the ethnography in this study points to the existence of asymmetrical power relations in the negotiation of intergenerational rights and obligations. Nor can the intergenerational contract be said to result from a voluntary agreement. The notion of a contract brings into sharp focus the fact that intergenerational relations are
neither a natural fact nor immune to negotiation, but this is a contract the parties are socialized into, rather than one that is explicitly agreed upon.

**FILIAL CHILDREN IN A MARKET ECONOMY**

Studies of Chinese social life often emphasize the significance of gift-giving in the establishing and maintenance of social relationships, including family and kinship ties (Yang 1995; Yan 1996, 2002). Mutual obligations are thereby conceived as the basis for all forms of human relationships, whether these are distant or intimate. As we shall see, this also applies to Singapore. The palpable presence of notions of reciprocity in Chinese intergenerational relations gives renewed relevance to Marcel Mauss’ theory of gift exchange. In his famous essay *The Gift* (originally published as *Essai sur le Don* in 1925), Mauss demonstrates the involuntary nature of gift exchange. While gifts may appear voluntary, because they “take place in the form of presents,” they are, in reality, “given and reciprocated obligatorily” (Mauss 2000, 3). Although gift-giving and personal connections are prevalent features of Chinese society, these practices are hardly limited to Chinese culture, nor are they static within that culture. By the same token, it is necessary to see how the scope, form, and significance of gift relations is engaged with the wider political economy.11

Singapore is in many ways a capitalist society in the extreme, and its operation is totally in tune with the global economy. A small city-state with few natural resources, the country has become significantly dependent on its ability to facilitate enterprise and attract multinational corporations. As Singapore now faces increasing competition from neighboring countries, where costs of production are lower, the government is busy turning the country into a key source for specialized services and finance. Singapore’s efforts to become a financial hub is in line with Saskia Sassen’s (1994) description of “global cities.” But Singapore differs in that it is a city-state. Where Sassen (ibid.) suggests that global cities increasingly assume the role of governments in the world economy, Singapore is at once a city and a state, which enables its government to supervise and indeed actively stimulate the building of a global city. In recent years, the Singapore government has implemented a variety of measures to create a cosmopolitan environment, from tax reductions for companies and wage reforms to allowing bar-top dancing, bungee jumping, 24-hour liquor licenses and
casinos. Singaporeans, meanwhile, are urged to adopt a mindset tuned to the global economy; they must accept sudden changes and learn how to adjust to those changes. In this respect, the character of the Singaporean state is reminiscent of Philip Bobbitt’s (2003) notion of the “market-state.” In The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History, Bobbitt traces the history and transformation of the modern state. He argues that we are currently witnessing a transition from the order of the nation-state to that of the market-state. The market-state “depends on the international capital markets and, to a lesser degree, on the modern multinational business network to create stability in the world economy, in preference to management by national or transnational political bodies” (ibid., 229). Unlike the old nation-states, which take their “legitimacy from the promise to better the material welfare of their citizens,” the emerging market-state sets out to “maximize the opportunity of its people” (ibid., xxvi).

Singapore may be a full-fledged capitalist society, but gift relations are certainly not extinct. This is especially obvious with regard to intergenerational transactions. Whereas Mauss saw gift relations as typical of traditional societies, subsequent studies have questioned the dichotomization between gift and commodity societies, pointing to the existence of gift relations in modern societies (Parry 1986; Thomas 1991; Carrier 1995, 1996). James Carrier (1996) mentions the family as one of the most obvious examples of how transactions are socially embedded even in capitalist societies. As the family is enmeshed in the larger capitalist economy (e.g., through employment and consumption), transactions within the family are not free from social obligations as are market transactions. Family transactions are not only vital for survival, but also for the “regeneration of relations within the household” (ibid., 89). In this view, the private sphere of intergenerational obligations and expectations must be analyzed in relation, not opposition, to the market economy. Ara Wilson (2004) deploys the notion of “intimate economies” to highlight the interaction and intersection of the market economy and realms of everyday life in contemporary Bangkok. The term “intimate” refers to “features of people’s daily lives that have come to seem noneconomic,” in other words, all those “deeply felt orientations and entrenched practices that make up what people consider to be their personal or private lives and their individual selves” (ibid., 10–11). In the same sense, I argue for the importance of highlighting the intersection of the modern capitalist economy and the intimate sphere of the Chinese intergenerational contract.
The modern capitalist economy, despite representing a fragmenting force in terms of social mobility and individual thrift, also exerts an integrating force on the intergenerational contract. Money, the essence of capitalism, supposedly depersonalizes transactions, but the monetary transactions that take place within Chinese families are far from impersonal, since they reaffirm intergenerational roles and relationships. The ways in which the capitalist economy intersects with intergenerational obligations should also be seen in relation to the meaning of money in Chinese culture. Money (as opposed to wealth) is an important idiom of Chinese social relations, and is frequently exchanged as gifts among family members and friends (see Freedman 1959; Gates 1987). Not only do monetary transactions reaffirm the economic-practical significance of intergenerational relations, these transactions also reaffirm emotional bonds.

The cultural importance of monetary contributions surfaced in a conversation with Auntie Teo, as we discussed the practice of giving parents a portion of one’s salary. (In Singapore you never address senior people by name. Family and kin are addressed according to their kinship term. Unrelated senior people are usually addressed as “auntie” and “uncle.”) Auntie Teo is in her fifties. She is a primary school teacher and her husband has a contractor business. They live with three adult children in a nice semi-detached house, own two cars, and employ a Filipino maid to do the housework. Although they fare well economically, Auntie Teo expects her working children to contribute monthly to common household costs and as a “token of appreciation.” The “token of appreciation” notion was frequently referred to by my informants whenever we discussed contributions to the family economy. As we spoke, Auntie Teo was curious to know how much money I give to my parents. When I replied that I do not give them money, despite having an income of my own, she could not believe her ears: “Why not?! Don’t you love your parents?” “Of course I love my parents,” I immediately protested, “but in Sweden we don’t give our parents pocket money, and when they are old they usually move to a nursing home.” Auntie Teo was appalled. In Sweden, where state-provided support is generous, there are no expectations that children will make regular financial contributions to the support of their parents, whether as a source of old-age support or as a manifestation of affection and reciprocity. But Auntie Teo sees monetary contributions as a moral responsibility. Our contrasting views on this matter may appear prosaic, but they reveal very different ideas of the parent-child relationship, and different ways of expressing affection and gratitude.
As such, it also illuminates how emotions are culturally articulated rather than "substances to be discovered in our blood" (Rosaldo 1984, 143).

**PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

In contrast to anthropology, sociology has for decades taken the family and generational issues in modern, albeit mainly Western, societies to be major topics for research (e.g., Burgess 1948; Mannheim 1952; Parsons and Bales 1955; Eisenstadt 1956; Berger and Berger 1983; Kertzer 1983; Bengtson 1993; Corsten 1999). Sociological as well as historical accounts often provide comparative and theoretical insights and both will therefore figure in this study. I have already mentioned the importance of Karl Mannheim’s (1952) notion of generation units, which emphasizes the ways in which generations are socially constructed as a result of shared experiences. An early attempt to analyze the organization and function of age groups in different societies is sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt’s comprehensive study *From Generation to Generation: Age Groups and Social Structure* (1956). Eisenstadt’s study, which covers a range of traditional and modern societies, examines how those societies transmit their heritage across generations. A major argument of the work is that universalistic societies, of which industrialized societies represent the purest form, are characterized by an increased significance of age-homogenous groups at the expense of age-heterogeneous groups, that is, intergenerational structures.

At the beginning of this chapter I pointed out the shortage of ethnographic studies of family and generational relations in contemporary Singapore. A number of informative studies were conducted in the 1950s and 1960s, in particular Maurice Freedman’s *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore* (1957), Alan Elliott’s (1955) study of Chinese spirit-medium cults, Barrington Kaye’s sociological look at Chinese households in an urban area of Singapore (1960), Ho It-chong’s paper on Cantonese domestic workers (1958), and Judith Djamour’s ethnographic account of Malay family life (1965). Janet Salaff (1988) conducted a qualitative study of the impact of state policies and industrial restructuring on Chinese families in the 1970s and 1980s. Tania Li’s 1989 study of Malay kinship is an important contribution to the ethnography of modern Singapore. While ethnographic studies may be few, a substantial body of sociological research exists on family-related issues in Singapore. The sociological literature is mostly quantitative (e.g., Kuo and Wong 1979; Chung et al. 1981; Chen et al.
1982; Kuo 1987; Chan 1997; Quah 1998), but more recently, qualitative studies have been done of the renegotiation of intergenerational relations (Mehta 1997, 1999; Graham et al. 2002; Teo et al. 2003). Studies of consumption and modernity in Singapore are also of significance in trying to understand the generation gap (e.g., Chua 2000).

For the purposes of this study, it is also useful to look at research into intergenerational relations in other parts of contemporary Asia. Important contributions in this regard are Charlotte Ikels’ (2004) edited volume on the practice and discourse of filial piety in contemporary East Asia, Janet Salaff’s (1995) study of gender and filial piety in Hong Kong during rapid industrialization, and a number of studies on ageing and intergenerational relations in Japan and Korea (Sung 1990, 1995; Traphagan 2000; Thang 2001; Traphagan and Knight 2003). Elisabeth Croll’s (2000, 2006) work on the changing Asian family makes an important contribution to the analysis of intergenerational resource flows and the renegotiation of intergenerational obligations. On the basis of ethnographic records from East, Southeast and South Asia, Croll (2006) argues that the intergenerational contract, rather than a social contract, plays a crucial role in contemporary Asian modernization and development strategies. In this context, both older and younger generations continue to invest in, as well as benefit from, intergenerational expectations and obligations.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides historical background for Singapore, from the precolonial period to the modern Republic of Singapore. Chapter 1 also contains a section on the history of Singapore’s Chinese community and features of Chinese family organization. In chapter 2 I discuss my fieldwork and methodological issues, including the collection and interpretation of ethnographic data. Chapter 3 examines the consequences of rapid modernization on cultural continuity across generations. Despite the ideological predominance of Asian family values, continuity across generations faces significant challenges due to the rapid pace of social change in Singapore. Chapter 3 not only discusses how those challenges are articulated in everyday life, it also lays out the strategies people employ in negotiating intergenerational differences. In chapter 4 I turn to the ways intergenerational relations are maintained and reaffirmed. To begin, I discuss how the Singapore government uses notions
of traditional family values to implement strategies aimed at adjusting Singapore to the global economy. As we shall see, the government’s anti-welfare policy has a consolidating effect on intergenerational relations in the sense that parents and children must depend on each other for economic and practical support. Moreover, the government’s profamily ideology reinforces preconceived ideas of Asian family values and consequently pressures people to live up to the ideal of a cohesive family life. While the role of the state and the political economy are crucial for explaining the continuity of the intergenerational contract, the ways in which intergenerational obligations and expectations operate are culturally constructed. The second part of chapter 4 therefore focuses on how the Chinese intergenerational contract is interpreted and practiced in everyday life. This leads us into chapter 5, where I examine how the intergenerational contract is renegotiated and transformed. Rapid social mobility across generations has weakened the position of elderly parents vis-à-vis their children in terms of economic capacity and social status. This development is accompanied by an increase of resource flows from parents to young children, which puts pressure on young parents to balance the amount of time and money spent on their elderly and younger dependants. While these challenges have not yet led to the dissolution of filial obligations, chapter 5 illustrates the ways the intergenerational contract is being reworked and made relevant to contemporary society. In the conclusion, I synthesize the different aspects of intergenerational disintegration and consolidation that have been examined in this study and suggest further areas for research.