Race, Ethnicity and Childhood:
An Ethnography of ‘Chinese-English’ Children

by

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Abstract

‘Race’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘nation’ and ‘identity’ are commonly deployed in everyday discourses, and many believe that we now have entered a ‘post-race’ era where ‘race’ has been replaced by ‘ethnicity’. Focusing on a group of six to twelve-year-old ‘Chinese-English’ children – children of Chinese parentage growing up in Britain – this research examines children’s construction of meanings of racial and ethnic matters.

This qualitative study deploys innovative task-based research techniques along with interviews and observations to explore current understandings of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’. This research has a commitment to give primacy to the voices of children, and respect for children as competent social agents with valuable experiences, perceptions and emotions, and contributions to different aspects of society, but at the same time it is with the recognition of children’s generally marginalised status in society. In drawing upon sociology of childhood and race and ethnicity studies, this thesis interrogates concepts of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ within children’s subjective worlds, from children’s perspectives and in relation to their own experiences and concerns.

Grounded analysis of children’s narratives highlights the complex and dynamic nature of racial and ethnic matters in children’s lives. The findings challenge the simplistic conceptions of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ in terms of fixity against malleability and biology versus culture. This thesis shows how children use, rework and create racial and ethnic ideas to make sense of their relationships, experiences and their own and others’ identities. More importantly, it demonstrates the ways in which these discourses only partially inform children’s diverse and multiple senses of who they are, and have to be understood in relation to the body, their relationships with other children and adults both inside and outside the family sphere and within the local and global contexts. The importance of engaging children in the production of knowledge in understanding the social world reveals itself throughout the thesis.
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A racial old bag, an overworked mum, a single parent, a dying widow, we're all the same, we have different stories, some will break your heart, but we're all equal, you shouldn't care, if I'm black, white, Chinese, Asian, it's what's inside that counts, remember, you don't want to be rejected, so don't reject others

Emily 'Equal'¹

1.1 Introduction

This poem tells us something about race and ethnicity through the eyes of a British teenager. It illustrates the complexity of the world of children, and that children are human and social beings who have perspectives and emotions about their lives. The poem is an account of lived experience and personal insight on the theme 'we are all different but same' which underpins much multicultural and anti-racist teaching in modern Britain. It also draws our attention to the specific language that children use in talking about race and ethnicity, and the meaning of these issues in relation to other concerns that they may have.

Children's creative work of this kind, indicating that race is a topic of interest to them, echoes the increased emphasis on the Government's diversity agenda on children's development of positive identities and their relationships with others (Parekh 2000). At the same time, there has also been an acknowledgement of the significance of ethnicity as a crucial dimension of the social organisation of child-adult relationships within mainstream childhood sociology (Prout and James 1990; Prout 2001; Mayall 2002). However, what race and ethnicity may mean to children themselves has often been overlooked. Similarly, studies which addressed racial and ethnic issues among children and youths have often failed to give primacy to the

voices of the young people. Yet both in race and ethnicity studies and in childhood studies, there have been notable exemptions, for example the work of Hewitt (1986), Back (1996) and Ali (2003) on the one hand, and in the childhood studies of Connolly (1998) on the other. However, little work has set up a dialogue theoretically as well as empirically between these two sub-disciplines within sociology.

This thesis proposes to lead these discussions further by situating issues and experiences of race and ethnicity within childhood sociology. It brings together the two bodies of work in addressing the meanings of being Chinese and of being a child in contemporary British society. The present study focuses on a group of children between the ages of six and twelve living with their families in Britain. It presents and explores the children’s accounts and understandings of their everyday lives and experiences, and looks at the ways in which children make sense of and negotiate their own and other people’s identities.

In opening the thesis, I first introduce how childhood sociology brings important challenges to the way children are understood within social studies. I then draw attention to some of the demographic and other relevant information about the Chinese population in Britain, locating the children’s experiences within the wider social and historical context. This provides the background necessary for understanding the children’s accounts analysed in the subsequent chapters; it also illuminates both the common features shared by, and the diversity within the group of children and their families in the study. This is followed by a reflection on the emergence of the research project and a brief discussion of the terms and concepts used in the chapters that follow.

1.2 Children in Social Research

During the past few decades social studies of children have taken sharply new directions and the sociological understanding of childhood has evolved in a significant way. Since the exploration of children in history and the sequential
identification of the constructed nature of childhood by Aries (1960), the idea of childhood as a stage of life separate from adulthood has been examined, defined, redefined and critiqued by academics and researchers. However, in the UK, it was the collective work of James, Jenks and Prout in the 1990s which served as the turning point in raising the profile of childhood studies. The emergence of ‘new social studies of childhood’ (James, Jenks and Prout 1998) has led to the reconceptualisation of childhood, placing greater focus on the social construction of age and on young people’s agency, and establishing the discipline in a firmer place within mainstream social science enquiry.

It is now more common for research literature on childhood to begin from the standpoint that childhood should be understood in terms of its diversity and plurality rather than perceived universality, and that childhood is not a fact of nature but is a social and cultural construction (James and Prout 1997; James, Jenks and Prout 1998). This does not mean that childhood is a merely imagined creation; it does exist but the concepts of child and childhood – images of children, attitudes towards them, expectations about them, understandings of who and what they are – are socially constructed. Within this framework, biology does not determine childhood but provides a context for it (O’Neill 2000:6). In this sense, the constitution of childhood is not only the product of culture, but also the product of politics at local, national and international levels. Childhood therefore varies not only between societies, but also between social groups and individuals, as well as over time.

With this new conception of childhood there are the twin dynamics at the heart of childhood sociology. On the one hand, the dynamic of children’s social competence: children are active actors engaging within the contexts of family, locality and society, demonstrating agency and interacting with and contributing to society. Children are not the innocent or passive recipients of adult attention as common portrayals often make them out to be (James and Prout 1997). On the other hand, the dynamic of social enablement and constraint affecting children and their competencies – childhood as an ‘integrated structural form’ within the social and cultural context of society (Qvortrup 1994:23) – are situated within social contexts which could be differently structured and enforced (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998:8). These twin
key principles have remained consistent since they were identified in detail within the Childhood as a Social Phenomenon Project (Qvortrup et al. 1994), and transcend the theoretical variations witnessed within the discipline (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Moreover, these principles have been crucial in linking childhood to the mainstream issues of social theory, in particular in relation to the great debates on the tensions and links between agency and structure, individual and society, identity and difference, local and global, and continuity and change (James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Mayall 2001).

Moreover, the theoretical developments within childhood sociology and scholarly arguments within sociology in part have extended the increasing visibility of children outside the sphere of social research to the wider society. More importantly, they have also helped to contribute to and promote the idea of children as having a voice which should be heard and respected. In this, children are considered to be people with views, competencies and opinions which are worthy of study in their own right rather than through the eyes of adult society and as incomplete projects as future members of society. The immediate and most recent result of this is the emergence of diverging theories of childhood; for example, theories of life course and age-based identities (Hockey and James 2003), standpoint theories extracted from feminist perspectives (Mayall 2002), and theories of children as embodied beings within different settings (Prout 2000). As I will discuss in chapter 3, recently James (2002) has raised questions relating to how the locales – which largely refer to the vague notions of locality, ethnicity and nationality – have often been overlooked in childhood sociology studies. This leaves unanswered questions about the nature of ethnicity and both its role and significance within childhood.

The majority of research which has emerged from the sub-discipline of childhood sociology focuses on comparative historical and cross-cultural analysis; it reveals a range of different childhoods rather than a single, simple phenomenon which can be called childhood. In addition, because of the perspective of children as social actors, studies involving the contestation of universalising models of childhood and child development resort to small-scale and detailed studies of children’s everyday lives in order to demonstrate the socially constructed character of childhood. Such studies
show the diversity of children’s childhood and call into question universal models of childhood. Yet in order to make this argument, the elements of the national and cultural context are effectively downplayed, if not at times written out altogether (James 2002). The greater challenge is then to demonstrate the importance of the categorical position of children vis-à-vis the adult world within a given context, and to insist that children can be informants in their own right, taking an active part in shaping the course of their own lives. It is not, of course, that ethnicity was not written about by childhood sociologists, but rather that they have only treated ethnicity as one of the dimensions of social structure, working with others such as class and gender, which affect children’s childhood lives (Mayall 2002). The precise character of ethnicity has therefore not been fully explored from children’s own perspectives. The sociology of childhood with reference to ethnicity has many missing parts of this kind. I believe that the possibility and potential for situating racial and ethnic issues and experiences within childhood sociology is rewarding, as will become evident as the thesis unfolds.

1.3 The Chinese Development in Britain

The recorded history of the first Chinese person in Britain dates back over 300 years. The great majority of the Chinese arrivals a century later were sailors who lived in ports but rarely stayed longer than a few years. The more intense influxes occurred from the 1960s onwards when the colonial Hong Kong Chinese arrived. The Chinese have since then made a significant impact on British society, and Chinese people and their influences are visible everywhere; from Chinatowns in five major cities which hold the yearly Chinese New Year celebrations to the catering establishments scattered nationally. In spite of this, there has been a continuous recognition that the Chinese — children, adults and the population as a whole — are marginalised and underrepresented both within society (Watson 1977; Taylor 1987; Shang 1993; Yeh 2000) and in social research (Garvey and Jackson 1975; Department of Education and Science 1985; Parker 1995; Tam 1998; Francis and Archer 2005). A critical review of the history is a useful way to understand both this
marginality and invisibility, and how and why the Chinese settlements have evolved into their present forms.

1.3.1 Early China-Britain Relations

Trading between China and Britain started in the 18th century. The first documented large-scale Chinese presence in Britain was of those employed in British merchant ships of the East India Company. This company had been granted a monopoly in the trade of opium in 1773. It enabled the British administration of India to secure valuable Chinese merchandise including tea, silk and porcelain without losing precious silver reserves; cotton and opium were the substituted currency. In spite of the Chinese imperial government's prohibition on opium, forbidden merchant activities of this kind culminated in the flooding of China with opium. China's response to control the trade by confiscating stocks of opium led to Britain unleashing the first phase of the Opium Wars in 1840 (Hanes and Sanello 2002).

During the First Opium War, China was forced into signing the 1842 Treaty of Nanking which ceded Hong Kong Island to Britain. The Chinese government's compelled conclusion to subsequent conventions after the Second Opium War in 1860, and in 1898 resulted in the present borders of Hong Kong. The lease of Hong Kong to Britain expired in 1997 when the territory reverted to China. This set the cornerstone of the later Hong Kong Chinese migration to Britain, bringing particular socio-cultural characteristics influenced by the British.

1.3.2 Pre-war Chinese Settlement in Britain

Records of Chinese people in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries were of seafaring communities in the port areas including London, Liverpool, Cardiff and Bristol (Baker 1994). From the early 20th century, this transient population of predominantly single males from the southern coastal provinces of China had developed into more established settlements not restricted to the seaport areas. In these early years, the number of Chinese had risen from under 100 to about 2000 between 1851 and 1931 (Ng 1968). A small number of Chinese-English families had emerged along with the operation of grocery shops, eating houses and lodging
houses, and the later Chinese-run hand laundries in many small towns. The anti-Chinese agitation of sections of the popular press and of the British working-class partly explained the confinement of the Chinese to a limited range of jobs.

During this early period, the social understandings of the Chinese people could be seen to have emerged in conjunction with the construction of a British nationhood based on whiteness. The orientalist representations which constructed the Chinese along with other foreigners as the racialised others were evident in newspapers. The Chinese were described as a 'docile race of human beings' (*The Times* 25 Aug 1877 in May 1978:112) who were 'ancient and inscrutable' (*The London Magazine* 1911 in Parker 1998:72). In spite of the fact that the Chinese were seen as hardworking and could be managed and assimilated into the population, they were regarded by some as 'not fitted to be a part of civilised white society' (*The Sunday Chronicle* 2 Dec 1906 in Waller 1970). The portrayals in the media, novels and films eventually contributed to the Chinese becoming a 'yellow peril'.\(^2\) Chinese males were said to be 'weak, unmanly, helpless slaves' to their opium smoking habit, needing to be 'saved' by white people (Clegg 1994:22). Yet this image conflicted with the dominant image of the Chinese as 'evil', with the power to lure young white women with their 'exotic charm' and become 'the master of the world' (*The London Magazine* 1911 in Parker 1998:72).

The Chinese contribution to the British war effort during the First and Second World Wars is a little known chapter of the British Chinese story (Pan 1998). A possible explanation is that the predominant belief in a white British nationhood and processes of racialisation may have led to the input of the Chinese, and their status in general, being devalued. Many Chinese were deported in the periods after the World Wars, partly due to pressure in the housing and employment markets as soldiers returned to Britain, with the possibility of racial riots (Parker 1998).

\(^2\) More detailed discussions of the Chinese in Britain portrayed in the media in this period can be found in Parker (1995), Clegg (1994) and Pan (1990).
1.3.3 Chinese Migration in Post-war Britain

Only very few of the pre-war Chinese remained in Britain. They, along with the newcomers, entered into a new phase in the history of Chinese in Britain. The post-war Chinese settlements had an increasing population with labourers, educational transients and professionals from Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia – which were British colonies – and China (Home Affairs Committee 1985). Yet the Chinese from Hong Kong were the fastest growing immigrant group, forming the major source of permanent settlement in Britain.

By 1950, the British shipping industry had started to decline, just as the Chinese hand laundry industry also went into terminal decline with the introduction of high-street launderettes and the appearance of domestic washing machines (Jones 1987). While the Chinese were looking for new employment opportunities, there were significant changes in British society. An increasing number of women participated in the labour force, an increase in single households, the dispersal of the population into suburbs and council estates, and the return of soldiers from the Far East, all provided the basis for the Chinese catering industry to proliferate (Parker 1995). The demand for Chinese cuisine in Britain coincided with a collapse of traditional agriculture in the rural part of Hong Kong, leading to an influx of Hong Kong Chinese, Commonwealth citizens, who had the right to settle in Britain in the late 1950s and 1960s.

It was during this period that the Chinese population in Britain began to assume its present dispersed pattern of settlement and relative concentration in the catering sector. As the Chinese catering industry began to expand, there was an increased need for new markets for the individual catering establishment. As a result of this, the Chinese had to disperse. At the same time, in the light of the increasingly restrictive immigration laws (see Mason 2000), the later migrants from Hong Kong had to rely upon contacts with people already established in Britain. Unmarried men or men who had left families behind in Hong Kong moved to Britain, working in their relatives’ or fellow villagers’ restaurants (Watson 1975).
During the 1960s and 1970s, permanent settlements and family-based migrations of the Chinese started to occur. The change in immigration legislation, coupled with the economic security of those already working in catering, encouraged family reunions and the formation of family units (Shang 1984). These developments were closely linked to the rapid growth of Chinese family takeaways and fish-and-chips shops in many British towns in the 1970s. An establishment of this kind not only offered financial security to the family, but resolved the problem of accommodation. In addition, family members provided an important source of labour, enabling the running of these small businesses.

Accompanying this was the growth of Chinese associations and supplementary schools and classes. The latter were particularly concerned with providing Chinese language and cultural education for both the British-born Chinese children and those who were born overseas in such places as Hong Kong, Malaysia or other European countries (Wong 1992). As the majority of the Chinese were from Hong Kong, these classes provided teaching in Cantonese – a dialect spoken in the Canton province of China and in Hong Kong. The practice of attending Chinese language classes at the weekend among all of the children in this study can be seen as originating from these early educational institutions.

Despite the family-based nature of the migration in the 1960s and 1970s, it tended to be staggered, and spouses or children often migrated to Britain at different times (Song 1999). The grandparents and the parents in three of the five families of the present study with a three-generation structure, largely conform to this. The grandfathers all arrived in Britain in the late 1960s and were joined by the grandmothers in the early 1970s. While one father and a mother, who were then young children, arrived in Britain in the mid-1970s, another mother, then in her 20s, decided to unite with her parents and siblings in the 1980s. In these families, the two generations had been separated for an average of ten years. These parents then got married in the 1980s. Among them, a mother married a partner from Hong Kong who arrived in Britain in the 1970s for family reunion, another mother also married a partner from Hong Kong who had came to Britain in the 1980s for work, and a father married a partner in China and together they settled in Britain in the 1980s.
It was in fact during the 1980s that most of the Chinese arrived in Britain as part of the global migration movement which was especially significant in Hong Kong. This was in spite of the 1981 Nationality Act which denied Hong Kong Chinese the right of entry and settlement in Britain (Mason 2000). After the signing of the Joint Declaration on the question of Hong Kong in 1984 between China and Britain – which ensured that the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 would be successful – many of the Chinese people felt a sense of uncertainty over the future of Hong Kong (Chan and Chan 1997). Unlike some others in Hong Kong, the parents in one family of this research could not take advantage of the changing immigration policies of countries like Canada and Australia, which targeted the highly educated or those who possessed specialised skills. As the father was a member of one of the lineage-based clans in rural Hong Kong, the couple used the connection with fellow villagers who had already established their catering businesses to settle in Britain. This operated in the same way as many of the early chain migrations from Hong Kong to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s (see Watson 1975, 1977; Shang 1984).

During the same period, Chinese from China had also developed into a significant component of the Chinese population in Britain. Yet this group, along with the Chinese from Singapore, Malaysia and later Vietnam in late 1970s, has always been outnumbered by their Hong Kong counterparts since the early 1960s (Parker 1998). As China opened up to the western world in the 1980s, various categories of students and scholars arrived and later settled in Britain (Cheng 1996). The 1989 Tiananmen incident in China was also believed to have led to an increase in applications for political asylum by Chinese from China (Parker 1998) and in the number of this group who were granted the right of settlement in Britain (Chan and Chan 1997). One family in this study can be seen as belonging to the former group of student migration. While the father arrived in Britain through university scholarship in late 1980s, the mother, also through scholarship, arrived later with their child in early 1990s. This family speaks the official Chinese language Mandarin, just as the great majority of the Chinese from China living in Britain.

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3 Armed crackdown by the Chinese government on a pro-democracy student demonstration in Tiananmen Square in Chinese capital Beijing on 4 June 1989.
1.3.4 Contemporary Profile of Chinese Population in Britain

In the last decade or so, the Chinese population in Britain has continued to grow. According to the 2001 Census, there are 247,403 Chinese residents in Great Britain, representing 0.4 per cent of the overall population and 5.3 per cent of the non-white population (Office for National Statistics 2005). The Chinese contribute to the fifth largest ethnic group in Britain, after white, Asian (British), black (British) and mixed people. A third of all of the Chinese live in London; however, the population is widely dispersed nationally and within any region there is in generally not more than four Chinese people per one thousand residents. This corresponds to the broad representation of Chinese pupils in maintained schools, both primary and secondary, in local education authority areas (Department for Education and Skills 1999). The working population of the Chinese has a relative concentration in a single industry; about two fifths of both women and men work in restaurants, snack bars, cafes and other eating places, which is slightly less than that of the Bangladeshi population in relation to the catering industry (Cheng 1996; Office for National Statistics 2005).

These particular features of the Chinese can be explained by their earlier settlement patterns. For this reason, the social understanding of the Chinese in Britain shifted from a focus on concerns about economic competition to perceived cultural difference. The Chinese catering businesses have not competed with any sector of the white community, with perhaps the exception of fish-and-chips shops, but rather with Asian and Mediterranean groups (Jones 1987:245). The Chinese have not often presented themselves in any numbers, either in areas where a single industry had been relied on by the local workforce, or on the streets as part of the political activism common in the later half of the twentieth century. While the Chinese have become somehow inconspicuous in British society, the previous fear and hostility exhibited by some of the public about the ‘yellow peril’ has faded away.

In spite of this, Chinese people and Chinese catering establishments have been subjected to a certain amount of vandalism or violence at a local level (Shang 1984; Clegg 1994; Min Quan 2005). Moreover, the increasing number of Chinese catering businesses and the emergence of Chinatowns in the five major British cities between
the 1980s and 1990s have all become crucial sites in which orientalism constructs the image of the Chinese. These have been where exchanges between the Chinese and the public take place and images of the Chinese are projected and reinforced. The early forms of cultural distancing and absolutism portrayed the Chinese as ‘inscrutable’ with backward and ‘disgusting eating habits’ (Parker 1995:67, 68). This has largely been replaced by modes of appreciation of the ‘exotic’ and ‘mysterious’ Chinese food and waitresses (Parker 1995:68; Highbury and Islington Express 29 March 2002). In addition, the alleged Chinese connection with the triad gangsterism and ancient martial arts seems to have added an extra degree of exoticism and mystery to the image of the Chinese people, the Chinatowns and the Chinese community as a whole.

Although the popular perception tends to portray the Chinese as having its unique characteristics, it is either positive or negative in absolute terms. At the same time, the Chinese input into British society and the nation generally has certainly been valued. Chinatowns in the cities are now tourist attractions and Chinese food is a part of many British people’s everyday lives. As perceivably a rather independent and self-maintained group of individuals, with hardworking, intelligent and disciplined children and adults – reflected in education, employment and other social indicators – the Chinese have earned their acceptance. Moreover, they represent an important part of the harmonious British multicultural landscape, both from a national and international political point of view. The visible economic success in the catering industry among the Chinese has been seen by many as evidence that racism does not hold people back in Britain (Parker 1995). At the same time, some of the Chinese continuously take advantage of trading in the name of culture and tradition, from Chinese New Year performances to the food businesses, which are in fact constructed Chinese cultural forms generated within the special British context. Because of this series of factors, it would be difficult for the Chinese people, children and adults, to be recognised as anything other than being merely Chinese. The way that these children perceive their identities sits at the heart of this research. The children in this study are among the 46,720 dependent Chinese children in a family with parent(s) in England and Wales in 2001 (Office for National Statistics 2004).
1.4 Towards an Ontological Starting-Point

Before proceeding to discuss issues of terminology, I want to explain how this study came about, as this helps to clarify my ontological starting-point. Many writers in the field of racial and ethnic studies remarked on how their engagement in academic work had helped them, or in some cases failed to help them, in recognising their own identities (Hall 1987; Parker 1995; Ali 2003). I too have a personal investment in this research. I came to Britain with my family from Hong Kong in 1993, and this is when the journey towards doing this study began.

The British colonial government of Hong Kong meant that as a Chinese person, my life had always been filled with a degree of British influence. I started learning English from a relatively young age and, apart from my Chinese name, I was given by my parents an English calling name. From my parents’ generation this has been a common practice among many Hong Kong Chinese. Yet the great majority of people in Hong Kong were Chinese and it was a predominantly Cantonese Chinese speaking society. With the exception of my headmistress and English teacher, both from England, I had never met anyone who was not Chinese, not in person at least. I knew about the English people in Hong Kong, perhaps mostly from TV, the Governors and those who occupied the highest positions in the government and private firms. So, my British nationality had always been undermined by my identity of being Chinese. I am, in Chinese terms, the ‘descendant of dragon’, and ‘descendant of Yellow Emperor’, also a ‘yellow race’ person and ‘Asian’.

However, it was from the first day I arrived at school in England that these identities started to become an issue of importance. When questions about my Chinese background were raised, I began explicitly to assert my Chinese identity. As I carried on my career as a pupil in college, I developed a range of vocabulary to identify and describe people. Some years after I had left school, I realised one day that the girl in my science class at school who had her hair covered had been

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Muslim, while some girls must have been South Asian, and the girl who had been the kindest to me was probably mixed race. Before this reflection and ‘discovery’, I had never thought of them in these terms. In the same way, I had not been using my Chinese identity to consider if my fellow pupils liked or disliked me. This is not something that I had been taught in school or I had deliberately learned about. Instead, it is something that I have become familiar with as I have lived in British society. The same goes for my long abandoned use of ‘yellow race’ and ‘Asian’ to describe myself. This is because I had learned that in the British context, I do not fit into the definition of ‘Asian’, and while ‘black’ and ‘white’ are common in everyday language, ‘yellow’ is almost unheard of.

My first encounter of what I regarded as racism was when I came across the Stephen Lawrence case as it re-emerged in the media in 1999. It struck me how much it hurt me, but even more so how race had the power to affect some people’s lives. I was in university studying sociology then. I found myself drawn to the question that, if scientifically there are no such things as races in terms of biology and genes, why did some people still talk and act as if there are? At the same time, I felt frustrated about my long-believed idea of a yellow race so strongly associated with my Chinese identity. Emerging from these vague ideas and concerns was this study, with a realisation of the Chinese and young children as underrepresented in the academic debate of new ethnicities in Britain, and more generally in social studies. Also, as my experiences of these issues began in a non-adult world and has continued to progress, this partly explains the interest of a research focus on children. I wanted to find out more about the lives of Chinese children in Britain.

1.4.1 Concepts and Terms

As a Chinese person, it may seem ‘natural’ for me to study the experiences of a group of Chinese children. Yet on the contrary, Chinese as a constructed category with a range of unsettled connotations – which a person can assert, as well as being assigned to, as an identity in different situations – is precisely what I have been trying to highlight in this introductory chapter. The same applies to the concepts of race and ethnicity. One of the fundamental assumptions is that there are no races in
the biological sense of distinctive divisions of the human species. This research has a specific focus of exploring the meanings of race and ethnicity in children’s experiences and lives. This involves an investigation of how children construct their own and others’ identities. But herein lies the challenge. There has to be a means of knowing when I am looking at something that is racialised and ethnicised in these constructions.

To adapt an existing definition of race and ethnicity would be impracticable because there have been so many debates and different approaches in popular, political, academic and other social contexts, all with their specific interests and agendas. The resulting production of terminologies is therefore customised and of particular usage. The fact is, a neat, exhaustive and agreed definition of race and ethnicity transcending time and space is never possible to accomplish and is not the purpose of this study. One of the crucial working basics is that race and ethnicity are both a political and social construct. Oversimplistically, whereas racial ideas are often said to evoke discourses of genetic and biological differences, ethnicity is often regarded as generating a discourse where difference is grounded in cultural and religious features. Yet most often the discourses of biological and cultural difference are simultaneously in play. Having in mind the extensive theoretical arguments in relation to the concepts of race and ethnicity, my approach is to take these ideas as the working basics and a starting point of the enquiry, which would be continuously tested against the children’s accounts. Specifically, this study is more interested in exploring the nature of the children’s discourses and the practices and processes involved. The question then is how do children make particular elements work in their constructions of what may be seen as race and ethnicity in common adult discourse?

This research therefore aims to develop an understanding of concepts of race and ethnicity through the eyes of children, in the hope that it will inspire some reflections among readers. To draw upon different aspects of social studies of childhood and race and ethnicity – with the particular research techniques designed for this study – it attempts to avoid letting the concerns of one discipline blind the emergence of empirical evidence of the other’s. Do children use what may be seen
as racial and ethnic concepts to define themselves and others, to explain their experiences or to construct their relationships with other people? If so, how do they do that? And in what ways are these racial and ethnic issues significant for children’s social worlds? Answers to these questions are intended to produce a more balanced theoretical argument with the support of sound empirical evidence to contribute to existing sociological theories.

1.5 Outline of the Chapters

The next chapter presents a critical review of the literature addressing different aspects of the lives of Chinese children in Britain. It draws attention to the particular limitations of the existing work, which the present study attempts to overcome. These include the lack of extended accounts from the children about their perspectives and experiences, the underlying Eurocentric development approach to children, and the orientalist and essentialist perspectives of culture and identity which often portray the Chinese as repressive traditional in opposition to the liberal modern western society.

Chapter 3 examines theoretical understandings of children, childhood, race and ethnicity within the two disciplines of childhood sociology and race and ethnic studies. In relation to the more general concept of identity, this chapter discusses the implications of integrating some practices of two areas of study and developing a relationship between them. It draws particular attention to the often unaddressed adultness embedded in much of the theorisation of race and ethnicity, and similarly racial and ethnic issues in theories of children and childhood. I argue that a theoretical framework of race and ethnicity which takes into account children as competent social agents but also their specific and generally marginalised positions in society has much to offer.
Chapter 4 details the methodology in researching racial and ethnic matters with children. It draws attention to the considerations which influenced the research design, leading to the emergence of a qualitative ethnographic approach. Methods of participant observation and interviews based on the innovative techniques — photographs, activity sheets of board game completion and ranking task, imaginative talk and finger puppets — are discussed in detail. It also provides an account of the management and analysis of the data. Issues of accessing participants and research ethics and politics are addressed with a focus on reflections of the research relationship.

Chapter 5 draws on the children’s accounts and describes the ways in which the children identify individuals and groups. The children’s narratives demonstrate children’s language use in describing identities, and how these are constructed largely through visual markers of difference. The chapter explores the meanings of racial and ethnic concepts and matters in children’s peer worlds. It highlights the importance of the body as a site through which identities are experienced and constructed. It also suggests that there are often the dual forces of fixity and fluidity embedded in the children’s practices of assigning identities to others which do not correspond to a strict relationship of the physical or racial as opposed to the cultural or ethnic. More important, it argues for the idea that racial and ethnic issues are only partial and situated within the children’s peer worlds.

Chapter 6 analyses the ways in which the children talk about their experiences of their own and others’ bodies. It is argued that physical appearance is crucial to children’s sense of who they are, and is often entailing and invested with a matrix of emotions. The children show that physicality and embodiment interactions are crucial to the construction and negotiation of identities. This chapter reveals that children’s perceptions and experiences of the body are sometimes related to racial and ethnic notions of Chineseness, Englishness, blackness, Indianness or others. However, these ideas have to be understood within the context of children’s own concerns in terms of the discourses of family relations, peer relationships, the ‘normal’ body, the healthy body, and gender, sexuality and attractiveness.
Chapter 7 deconstructs the children’s Chinese-English identities. It draws together the narrative discussions and looks at the nature, constituents and meanings of these identities. The chapter also identifies and describes some of the processes and practices through which the children’s identity formulations are created. It is found that the notion of ‘born and bred’ and language is crucial to the children’s English identification while the constructions of Chineseness are more diverse. Although these Chineseness and Englishness are often defined in relation to or even oppositional to one another, the children are managing their Chinese-English identities in a strategic and largely positive manner. Whilst the children have different ways and degrees of being connected to England and the country(s) where their families have migrated from, the two senses of geographic affiliation are often found to be interlinked. The examination challenges the adulthood in much of the common imagery of ethnic identities as well as the negligence of children’s contributions to the relevant social meanings.

Chapter 8 examines the children’s accounts of their experiences and perceptions of different aspects of their families. Through the presentation of the families as individual cases, it draws attention to the similarities and differences between the children’s families. The chapter has a main focus of exploring the significance of family in children’s senses of identities, and the ways in which the children understand their familial positions and their relationships with other members of the family. The diversity found among the experiences of siblings of particular families as well as children of all the families brings into question the generalised idea of a Chinese family in Britain with the alleged impact of its so-called traditional Chinese family form on children’s lives.

Chapter 9 draws together the evidence of the children’s accounts to address the question ‘what do racial and ethnic matters mean in the children’s lives?’ This chapter also reflects upon the contributions and limitations of this thesis on both theoretical and methodological levels. These issues are addressed in relation to the key themes of embodiment of identity, playing with racism, and intergenerational relationships and emotional diaspora.
Existing Research on Chinese Children in Britain

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I attempted to locate the Chinese, children and adults, within the British context adopting a socio-historical approach. Yet in particular, little is known about the children, except for their outstanding achievement within the British education system, with their immigrant parents succeeding in food businesses; all somehow being successful and respectable members of a model community within the society. This chapter looks specifically into the field of social research as a resource for what is known about the lives of Chinese children in Britain.

In the last decade or so, research on the experiences of young Chinese people in Britain has expanded slightly in terms of output and diversity, contributing significantly to the somewhat limited and dated area of study. Many of these works have centred on education. Different aspects of school life have been examined, including children's educational preferences and aspirations, and their attitudes to learning. These children's experiences of relationships with children and adults, both behind and beyond the school gate, are sometimes hinted at, but often not fully investigated. The ultimate concern of these projects is the children's educational experiences, focusing on their performance and identity as a pupil. Many of the enquiries have taken for granted, or rather ignored altogether, the children's excellent academic records, and have instead focused on the problems and difficulties experienced by the children. There has only been one exception which actually attempted to explore the possible reasons for, and costs of, the British-Chinese children's educational success in relation to their construction of ethnic and gender identities (Archer and Francis 2005; Francis and Archer 2005).
What the great majority of these studies lack is a comprehensive account of Chinese children’s views about their perspectives, experiences and concerns. There is a clear need for a description of the everyday lives of Chinese children in Britain, who are not merely being categorised as pupils, but more generally as people and yet specifically as children, with a consideration of their active participation in the home, school and other social spheres.

2.2 Themes from Previous Literature

Despite the limitations of some of the existing literature, it informs crucially an understanding of the lives of Chinese children in British society. In discussing the themes from these works, particular attention is given to how the children and their childhood are presented and understood. This would help to identify the dominant perceptions of children, age, ethnicity and culture within this particular field of study.

2.2.1 Teacher Perception of Chinese Pupils

Since Garvey and Jackson’s (1975) pioneering research project of the educational experiences of Chinese children in Britain, there has been a scattering of studies of a similar nature. Taylor (1987) usefully provides a comprehensive review of all available literature relating to Chinese pupils in Britain prior to 1984. Many of these original works had been undertaken for submission to the Swann Commission with its sequential parliamentary publication, the Swann Report (Department of Education and Science 1985). In addition, there are several insightful – but some more resource-constrained than others – community and academic student research projects.

One of the areas having attracted lots of attention is in relation to the Chinese children’s behaviour; how they behave in classrooms and schools as pupils. A considerable number of these understandings have been reflected in teachers’ accounts, based on their observations and interactions with the pupils. Teachers’, sometimes headteachers’ comments about Chinese children have generally been
positive. According to these accounts, Chinese pupils are hardworking, intelligent, well-behaved and doing well in their school work overall (Fong 1981; Simpson 1987; Verma et al. 1999; An Ran 2001; Archer and Francis 2005). A number of teachers believed that some Chinese pupils had difficulties with English language. However, this has to be read with the fact that information regarding the children’s backgrounds, e.g. how long they have been living in Britain, is not available in the studies in question. Yet while a teacher regarded the language problem to be one of the issues during ‘the settling in period’ for the ‘newcomers’ (Fitchett 1976:20), another suggested that the Chinese pupil ‘has the intelligence to overcome this problem’ (Fong 1981:71). Moreover, in various studies, many teachers expressed their perception that Chinese pupils are ‘quiet and passive’ (Garvey and Jackson 1975; Simpson 1987; Archer and Francis 2005), have ‘lack of facial expression’, are ‘inscrutable’ (Fitchett 1976:21) and under-react (Taylor 1987). Although it is said to have left a few teachers feeling frustrated (e.g. Verma et al. 1999), these qualities seem to have been welcomed by most teachers and other staff as positively contributing to classroom and school management.

Whether these comments were made by teachers about a particular Chinese pupil they had personal experience of, or as a more generalised view about Chinese pupils, concern has been raised amongst some educational researchers about the stereotype of Chinese children as ‘a junior version of oriental inscrutability’ (Langton 1979:8), who are ideal pupils, well integrated into the school environment, have no problems and give no cause for concern. In relation to this, the Swann Report (Department of Education and Science 1985) pointed to, without further investigation, one of the most difficult areas for policy. This was how the positive stereotype of the quiet and unassuming Chinese pupils could actually work to their disadvantage (Parker 1995). This is a theme that has been further developed by a number of researchers who set out to explore the problems that Chinese children faced and their needs within the school context.
2.2.2 Researcher Observation and Understanding of Chinese Pupils

Although most of the educational researchers might have been well-intentioned to go beyond the stereotypes of Chinese pupils and address the underlying issues, their enthusiasm about Chinese culture and the pupils’ welfare and development could have worrying implications. The same criticism of the teachers’ stereotyping of Chinese children deriving from their ignorance has often been reproduced and reinforced in the researchers’ own writings. Drawing on these researchers’ observations of Chinese pupils in British schools, sometimes along with attitude and motivation questionnaires and interviews, it has been suggested that Chinese pupils are marked by their particular personalities and distinctive learning preferences.

The image of Chinese pupils as being quiet and passive is reflected in Simpson’s (1987) classroom research of twenty Chinese children in secondary schools in Leeds. According to Simpson, his observations ‘strongly confirmed’ those made by other researchers which suggest that Chinese pupils are not keen to answer teachers’ questions in class (p.23). Chinese pupils do not volunteer to answer questions, they also do not ask questions, even when they do not understand. In Simpson’s words, the pupils develop different ‘strategies to cope with this problem’, including ‘avoid drawing attention to themselves, avoid eye contact when questions are asked, pretend to be otherwise engaged, or simply decline to answer’ (p.24).

Moreover, in responding to the research questionnaires, several pupils indicated that they preferred to work in groups. As explained by Simpson, this enables the children to avoid direct questions being asked of them, or answering the teacher’s questions (1987:24). It also allows the children to seek assistance from other pupils rather than the teacher. Simpson argues that ‘face’, as a central concept in the ‘Chinese way’, explains this behaviour characteristic of Chinese pupils. He believes that ‘face is lost by a person who shows ignorance by asking a question, and by revealing someone else’s ignorance if they do not know the answer’ (p.24). However, these children’s own words also clearly show how much they value and appreciate mutuality and team effort among their fellow pupils, and being in a group. In addition, one child stated that ‘if you ask the teacher, they sometimes shout at you when you really
don't understand' (p.24). This points to how a culturalist and orientalist approach of
the Chinese children can risk undermining the children's own experiences and
feelings; in particular the significance of peer relations among children.

Indeed, findings from a questionnaire study which compared the learning
preferences of British-Chinese and British-European pupils in Manchester, aged
between 13 and 16, indicate that the great majority of children from both groups do
not 'enjoy being asked questions' by their teachers (Woodrow and Sham 2001:390).
Yet, the authors are more drawn to the idea that more British-European pupils than
British-Chinese pupils agree that they enjoy being asked questions. They maintain
that 'classroom observation suggests that British-European pupils seemed to enjoy
being asked questions by their teachers much more than the British-Chinese' (p.390).
Moreover, Woodrow and Sham discovered that more British-Chinese than British-
European pupils agree that they are 'scared to ask questions' when they do not
understand and they 'feel scared' when teachers ask them questions (p.390).
However, when questions with the exact wording were asked in an associated
survey study with a much bigger sample from Manchester, London and Liverpool,
there is literally no difference in the responses between the British-Chinese and
British-European pupils (Verma et al. 1999:120). The majority of these children
disagreed that they felt scared about asking and being asked questions in class.
Again, a closer examination of the children's accounts provides some clues to the
many explanations regarding this particular issue. As one 13-year old Chinese pupil
living in Britain for three years said, 'when I put my hand up to ask questions, they
just ignore us because some teachers do not like Chinese' (p.113). This hints at the
unequal nature of power underlying pupil-teacher relationships within the
educational institution, which does not go unnoticed by the pupil. Further
investigation can address this issue in the wider context of child-adult relationships
from the children's viewpoints.

Perhaps partly due to the fact that there is no single direct quote from the British-
Chinese pupils interviewed, Woodrow and Sham (2001) rely heavily on their
professional knowledge to explain what they observed among the British-Chinese
children. According to them, there is a differing educational preference of British-

Chinese pupils to that of the British-European pupils. Apart from the issues already addressed, it is also believed that British-Chinese children share a preference for working alone rather than in a group, which is in contrast to Simpson’s idea of the children favouring to work in a group as a strategy to avoid a possible ‘face losing’ situation, as discussed above. Woodrow and Sham argue that these are among the series of evidence which reveal that British-Chinese pupils ‘remain conditioned by traditional Chinese behavioural rules’ even though the majority of them were born and educated in Britain (p.377). The researchers go on to suggest that the specific preferences of British-Chinese pupils show that they ‘remain suppressed and covert’ in English classrooms, which is due to the ‘controlling influence of the imposing [Confucian] principles of “respect for superiors” and “loyalty and filial piety” to prevent overt challenges to authority and expressions of opinion’ (p.377). Woodrow and Sham therefore conclude:

That the Chinese pupils generally do well is a tribute to their hard work and commitment, and their unquestioning acceptance of adult authority hides the extent to which they are uncomfortable or not well served by the methods we adopt’ (p.393, emphasis added).

Within such a Eurocentric adult framework, with the patronising language, the children’s marginality is evident; it is a case of the alienated Chinese children as the others against the superior western adult educationalists. More importantly, most of these studies are notable for failing to embrace children’s perspectives of their own experiences to a meaningful extent, if at all. In explaining the Chinese children’s perceived attitudes and behaviour as essentially cultural, the complexity of the children’s experiences is reduced to some narrowly defined elements of a culture. Despite this, the recognition and general trends of the different learning styles preferred by different groups of children as identified in these studies are certainly useful. In one sense, it would be helpful to consider the British-Chinese pupils’ backgrounds in more detail. Teachers in An Ran’s (2001) case study who worked with some Chinese children in British schools – who all previously had education in China – noticed the way that some of the children worked in maths was different from what may be expected in Britain. According to the author, this appears to reflect the ‘approach to teaching maths in China’ which may have influenced the
children (p.320). Therefore, the children are not simply seen as being fixed by a particular culture with some intrinsic characteristics.

2.2.3 Peer Relationships among Chinese Pupils

Unfortunately, the culturalist approach to Chinese children's behaviour in British schools is more prominent in educational research. The notion of Chinese pupils as a homogenous group with distinctive characteristics has been further developed in relation to the themes of social activity and peer relationship at school; specifically how it constrains their peer interactions. As Simpson observed, Chinese pupils tend not to like 'body contact sport' or 'team sport', and 'girls do not like P.E. dress, changing' (1987:31). Moreover, he found that most of the Chinese pupils claimed not to like the majority of pupils in the class. They also complained that other pupils are 'silly, waste time and prevent them from getting on with their work' (p.30). Yet in Simpson's own case study, writing about the Chinese children he observed, it is clear that these children do in fact have close relationships with some Sikh, white and other children in school (pp.35-38). However, Simpson is in support of the idea that Chinese culture and language encourage a sense of superiority over other cultures and people, partly contributing to the Chinese pupils' unenthusiastic attitude towards other children. The same idea was also proposed by the Swann Report (Department of Education and Science 1985) and the Home Affairs Committee (1985) in relation to both Chinese children and adults.

Taylor (1987) was also convinced that Chinese pupils' ethnocentrism has led to some of them being prejudiced against children from other ethnic backgrounds, which then explains the tendency of Chinese children not to approach their peers, and thus have difficulty in making friends in school. Yet no ethnographic evidence or accounts from the Chinese pupils' were presented to justify the claims. Moreover, a number of researchers have expressed their concerns that Chinese pupils in British schools would not have many opportunities to interact with other Chinese children (Garvey and Jackson 1975; Fitchett 1976). This anxiety is noticeably built on the assumption that Chinese pupils would prefer to make friends with other Chinese children.
In fact, there is very limited information available regarding friendship issues among Chinese children in Britain. For instance, Woodrow and Sham (2001) found that the British-Chinese pupils described spending time with their Chinese friends in the school at lunchtimes, rather than joining in clubs, sport or team activities. The British-Chinese pupils' self-reported lower level of participation in school activities than their British-European counterparts is further explained by the researchers with the reference that 'in many Chinese minds, sports and school outing activities are viewed as frivolous play and a waste of time and energy' (p.381). Apart from the question of the validity of this claim as applied to the British-Chinese pupils, it should be noted that in the associated survey study, British-Chinese and British-European pupils indicated that they are equally active and interested in school activities (Verma et al. 1999).

A more detailed description of the Chinese children’s interactions with their peers is provided in Wong’s (1992) study. Wong observed that in an after-school Chinese class in a secondary school in London, two Chinese immigrant girls always sat together, with limited verbal exchange with three other British classmates. According to Wong, ‘it seemed that there might be some racial antagonism between the two groups of pupils’ (p.52). In another case, a teacher reported that two British-born Chinese girls seldom mixed with other children, but stayed together. Teachers could not understand why the girls were ‘reluctant to integrate with other children’ but simply worried about their ‘social and psychological development’ (p.52). Finally, a group of immigrant and British-born Chinese secondary school children were observed to attend a Chinese community centre ‘quite regularly after school’ (p.52). From interviews with this group of children and the author’s own observations, Wong argues that these children ‘had no intention of separating them from children of other races’ (p.53). Rather, it is simply a preference of keeping interactions with non-Chinese children within the school context while being ‘close to friends of their own race and culture in their own social life outside school’ (p.53). According to Wong, ‘the union of Chinese children is a signal of their inclination to maintain their cultural identity’ (p.53). These claims are certainly worth further investigation to contribute to the seriously under-researched area of Chinese
children's experiences of peer relationships, with a consideration of issues of race, culture and identity.

In other cases, racism has been offered as an explanation for the Chinese pupils' limited interactions with their peers in school and participation in school activities. While most of the earlier literature found that racial harassment partly caused the suppressed outlook of the Chinese pupils (Garvey and Jackson 1975; Ng 1984; Simpson 1987; Taylor 1987), writers of more recent studies largely believed that racism was a fact of life for most young Chinese in Britain (Wong 1992; Verma et al. 1999; Chan 2000). From the ways that different researchers defined the notion of racism, it is notable that the extent and nature of the pupils' experiences of racism reported in these studies are sometimes problematic. For instance, Simpson (1987) described a number of incidents which he regarded as reflecting Chinese pupils' experiences of racism. On these occasions, Chinese pupils' equipments had been taken by other pupils without asking. There are no accounts from the Chinese children to support the author's perception that these incidents were in fact experienced and understood as racially related.

Alternatively, Verma and colleagues asked the British-Chinese pupils to say if, and how often, they, and their friends 'ever felt they had been badly treated because they were Chinese' (1999:72). While the children's responses almost equally fall into the categories of 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' and 'never' in relation to their own experiences of racism, many children indicated that they were unsure of their friends' experiences, or believed that it 'sometimes' happened. According to the research team, however, 'even if it [racism] happens "hardly ever", its impact on the self-image and confidence of a young adolescent can be powerful, long-lasting and harmful. Merely to be aware of its existence can be damaging' (p.72). They further argue that name-calling relating to 'language and colour' was the 'commonest' form of racism experienced by the British-Chinese pupils (p.72). Yet, from the pupils' accounts, it appears that language was considered by one of the pupils as a form of 'discrimination', in that pupil's own language, although not necessarily racism, while the notion of colour was simply not a reference made among those pupils' narratives.
The concern of Verma and the researcher team regarding the impact of racism on British-Chinese children is in fact challenged by their own findings that the British-Chinese pupils had the highest self-esteem compared to the groups of British-European and Hong Kong Chinese. The researchers therefore conclude that the British-Chinese group ‘generally perceive themselves as capable, successful and worthy’; among the three groups, they emerge as the ‘best adjusted’. From this, the effects of racism on their self-esteem are ‘unquantifiable’ but are ‘certainly not substantial’ (Verma et al. 1999:185). What this illustrates is the danger of reducing racism and children’s individualism into some rigidly defined measurements, leading to a loss of the complexities of children’s experiences of identities. The discovery that racism may be a pervasive but not universal experience among Chinese children in Britain (in relation to young adults, see Song 1999; Parker 1995) has to be addressed through extended investigation of how children make sense of these experiences and how it potentially relates to children’s formulation of their identities and other aspects of their everyday lives.

2.2.4 Presentation of Chinese Family Structure

Certainly school is not the only social milieu in which children participate. Indeed, among educational practitioners, pupils’ performance at school is often believed to reflect their home backgrounds. While notions of class are often implied in these understandings, cultural factors are commonly assigned to Chinese children in Britain (in relation to South Asian and black pupils, see Connolly 1998). In a similar manner, many researchers have argued that the ways in which Chinese children behave in British schools are determined by their familial backgrounds and distinctive cultural features. In the language of these researchers, these reflect to a certain degree the kind of socialisation that the Chinese children received at home; what they have been trained to be by their parents. According to Sham and Woodrow (1998; Woodrow and Sham 2001), British-Chinese children ‘live in a cocoon within British society under distinctive socialisation practices in terms of language and heritage, cultural values and a set of behaviour rules from their family’ (p.223). As a result of this, these children are ‘conditioned’ by the ‘traditional Chinese behaviour rules’ of ‘respect for superiors’ and ‘loyalty and filial piety’
which 'provide a framework within which they create expectations and attitudes with regard to their education' (p.223). The authors were surprised by the 'the extent and depth of the enculturation' as there is 'little movement towards assimilation and adaptation into British-European culture even in second and third generation immigrants' (2001:392). The problematic nature of such conceptions of socialisation and cultural assimilation and adaptation will be discussed in detail in relation to sociological theories of childhood and race and ethnicity in the following chapter.

In fact, it is not difficult to realise that many of the researchers began their studies of Chinese pupils in Britain with an investigation of what Chinese culture is. In much of the research concerning educational issues of the Chinese children, it is rather common to come across detailed descriptions of various aspects of the so-called Chinese culture (e.g. Fitchett 1976; Taylor 1987; Simpson 1987; Verma et al. 1999; Woodrow and Sham 2001). As Simpson stated, 'much time was spent in background reading, for without considerable knowledge of Chinese history, culture, philosophy and language it would not be possible to collect, collate or analyse information [of Chinese pupils in Leeds schools]' (1987:4). It is from this constructed knowledge of the Chinese culture which many writers believed they had found their answers; or rather from which they had searched for explanations of the Chinese children's behaviours and characteristics. The implications for this enthusiasm of the Chinese culture, with either a politically neutral or biased intention, can be damaging.

From the limited ethnographic work on Chinese families in Britain, a rather disparate picture has emerged. Taylor (1987) suggests that traditional Chinese beliefs exist only in a secular and residual form in Chinese families in Britain. Yet this is dismissed by Simpson (1987) who argues that there seems sufficient evidence from the Chinese families he studied, along with local Chinese community reports, that Taoism and Confucian philosophy are still a dominant force in the family life. The evidence of the influence of Taoism includes an incident involving the father of a pupil who burned clothing in the garden to send them to his deceased mother, and

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5 For a critical discussion of the culturalist approach to the issue of social exclusion among Chinese adults in Britain, see Chau and Yu (2001).
pupils' reported ancestor worshipping and kowtowing to senior family members at Chinese New Year (p.9). Similarly, Simpson observed 'Confucian philosophy' which 'lays down duties and responsibilities in family relationships, and makes the family central to Chinese culture overriding individual or community', 'appears to be almost universally followed by the families' (p.9). Finally, 'Confucian thought' which 'stresses the importance of obedience, loyalty, trustworthiness, modesty, frugality, courtesy and similar character traits' are said to be 'all observable among the Chinese pupils' in his study (p.9; see also Verma et al. 1999).

Various research sources with a similar kind of culturalist and orientalist viewpoint have suggested that an overwhelming evidence of Confucianism, in particular a patriarchal and patrilineal structure, is found among Chinese families in Britain. These include Garvey and Jackson's (1975) observations of Chinese families across Britain and Sham and Woodrow's (1998) case study of five Chinese families in Manchester. According to these reports, Chinese family life is autocratic and firmly disciplined with little democracy in family decisions. Orders are given by the parents, usually the father who holds high authority and is unchallenged, and are unquestioningly obeyed by the children and the wife. Moreover, girls tend to receive a greater degree of restriction due to parents' anxiety about the social world outside the family. The female duty is subservience to the husband and son, and to look after all domestic work. On the other hand, boys have many duties to fulfil as they carry the family name and bear the burden of social and financial responsibilities. In general, children accept their parents' expectations, adopt submissive attitudes and are in deference to their parents. Among the families Sham and Woodrow studied, with children aged between two months and twenty-five, it was never found 'a home situation where the children argue with their parents, express an alternative opinion or disobey them' (1998:217).

Sham and Woodrow further argue that these children appear to have transferred their attitude to their parents as authority figures into school life, affecting the way they interact with the 'superior' adult teachers (1998:217). These children 'find it difficult to have an independent opinion since opinions are formed and slavishly followed in a Chinese household from family authority figures'; 'parents teach their
children to be unassertive and to listen rather than talk' (p.217). Moreover, these children, ‘through being obedient, appear to be less original in their thinking and less creative, and thus less fluent in their communication and ideas’ (p.217). These claims are notable for lacking convincing evidence and from being too simplistic regarding the children’s and parents’ experiences. From this ‘western liberal perspective’ and a ‘Eurocentric child development perspective’ (Francis and Archer 2005:106), both Chinese children and Chinese parents are problematic and pathological. They simply fail to meet the western expectations. I would argue that instead of treating Chinese culture as something intrinsic with its unchanging traditions predefined by the researchers as structuring the lives of the children and parents, an alternative and more fruitful approach would be to examine how children and their parents perceive Chinese culture itself, and how they may use it, or elements of it, in constructing their identities (in relation to education, see Francis and Archer 2005) and their relationships with one another. The children’s and the parents’ voices regarding child-parent relationships have been seriously lacking in these studies.

2.2.5 Chinese Families, Children and Catering Businesses

The generalised picture of the Chinese family in Britain has been justified by some writers indicating that the observations they made are not intended to be exhaustive accounts of how British-Chinese children are living their lives, but illustrative of educational issues (Sham and Woodrow 1998). Similarly, Garvey and Jackson (1975) cautioned that there were differences from one Chinese family to another, according to the parents’ origin, economic situation and their opportunities for daily interaction with their children. The latter aspect is particularly important in understanding how Chinese children, their parents and families have been presented by social workers, other practitioners (e.g. Fewster 1990; Pistrang 1990) and social researchers within the British context. These representations have been largely in terms of pathologies brought about by the social isolation and alienation which stem from the long working hours and the confinement of their running of takeaway or other catering businesses.
Jackson and Garvey’s (1974) report was among the first to raise the concern about the children’s labour in their family takeaway and fish-and-chips shops. As they suggested, among the children interviewed, the average child, including one child who was not yet ten years old, worked three and a half hours each evening. Whereas late night working resulted in late attendance at school, tiredness, exhaustion, and even the lack of registration of children for schooling, ‘the routine of school, work and bed’ made the children ‘tentative and isolated’ (p.22). Yet this proposed relationship between the children’s work and their education is difficult to justify; also the extent and nature of the children’s labour cannot be assumed to have a general unproblematic application. According to Parker, for the majority of the young Chinese adults in his study, ‘their childhood has been structured by having to help out in family catering businesses, often from as early as eight years old’ (1994:623). However, various sources from other researchers’ observation and young Chinese adults’ own reports suggest a less consistent trend. While some children reported to have started working in their parents’ shops from a young age, usually under the age of ten, others started in their teens (Sham and Woodrow 1998; Song 1999). None of these studies involved asking how children feel about their work participation (except for in relation to young adults, see Song 1999; Parker 1995) and only a few hinted at how factors such as age (Taylor 1987), gender and number of children in the family (Song 1999) may affect the kind of tasks that the children perform.

Even less consideration has been given to the notion of class in relation to the children’s labour, though Francis and Archer (2005) suggest that the conventional British understanding of social class may not be applicable to Chinese in Britain in a straightforward manner with regard to family education trajectories and the nature of takeaway ownership. Despite this, Fitchett (1976) compared his findings of the thirty Chinese children in an independent primary school in Derby with those of Jackson and Garvey’s (1974; Garvey and Jackson 1975) report. Fitchett concludes that among these children, ‘there was no evidence of children living in cold, uncomfortable store-room quarters, […] or working long hours in the evenings in the restaurants; but a group of ‘happy’ and ‘confident’ children (p.23). However, Fitchett’s findings show that the other group of Chinese children who were attending
local authority schools, at both primary and secondary levels, echo more or less those from Garvey and Jackson's study. According to Fitchett, this group of children were subjected to 'alienation from host peers', 'lack of social contacts', 'a routine "family-bound" existence' and 'work in the restaurant and takeaway shop', though they all 'displayed a high degree of contentment and philosophic adjustment to their new life in England' (p.18). What is significant is that children from both groups indicated how they 'like' working in their parents' restaurant (pp.18,23). Unfortunately, this was not being further pursued in great detail in the study or in fact in other more recent studies of a similar kind.

The closest investigation of this kind is provided by Song's (1999) qualitative study with over forty young Chinese adults, mostly in their early to mid twenties, in takeaway-owning families in the southeast of England. It was found that although the children largely disliked the work, none talked about exploitation either. What Song calls 'family work contracts' - which is understood by, and binds family members together - allows greater togetherness and financial independence (pp.73-74). Within this, the impact of Confucianism is mentioned, but as something to be negotiated by the children rather than as an unchanging force (p.204). Song's argument of a symbolic value of helping in the family takeaway, providing a sense of belonging to the imaginary Chinese community in Britain, could be a useful testing point for Chinese children of a similar background. However, Song's illustration of how differences in work contribution among siblings are understood by children in terms of siblings' respective family reputations and cultural identities may have a wider implication to examine children's domestic responsibilities and identities not limited to those involved in the catering sector. Further investigation can therefore explore how siblings may construct and experience their identities in different ways with a consideration of familial relationships and roles.

In spite of the contribution of Song's research highlighting the complexity of Chinese families running a takeaway business, there remains the dominant general perception of these families with a catering background as having a negative impact

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6 Song (1999) uses the term 'children' in the study to refer to a family relationship, vis-à-vis parents, rather than to individuals of particular age.
on both the children and parents. Sham and Woodrow argue that all the Chinese children in the case study ‘have huge workloads in the family catering businesses which involve unsocial hours in addition to their school lives’ (1998:222). Outside school, ‘these children rarely mix with other children unless with relatives or children of their parents’ friends on the regular weekend trips to China Town’ (p.222). They further suggest that ‘the lack of social mixing with British-white children leads to further isolation experienced by the children’ (p.222). While the authors failed to draw on sufficient evidence to illustrate that the children participate in their family business extensively, the missing children’s narratives means that whether or not the children themselves feel the way that the authors suggested cannot be justified. Moreover, the alleged isolation and limited social mixing among the British-Chinese children is in fact undermined by the questionnaire responses of the same study in relation to the children’s social activities outside school. The British-Chinese – the majority of whom had a catering family background – and British-European children both identified a very similar leisure activity pattern (Woodrow and Sham 2001; also Verma et al. 1999). They all reported spending a lot of their free time with their friends, talking, going to town, engaging in sports, among other activities. Yet it should be noted that, among these reports, there is an indication that some of the children’s leisure and family activities reflect their ties with Hong Kong Chinese popular culture (Wong 1992; Sham and Woodrow 1998; Verma et al. 1999; in relation to young adults, see Parker 1995). Further exploration could address how this may relate to issues of identity and friendship among the Chinese children, and the absence of ‘a socially validated form of Chinese youth culture’ in Britain suggested by Parker (1995:171).

The Chinese children’s perceived isolation is argued to be only part of the more general isolation that Chinese catering families in Britain experience (Sham and Woodrow 1998; Woodrow and Sham 2001). According to Sham and Woodrow, the way Chinese parents ‘become absorbed into British society’ is ‘much slower than for many other ethnic groups’ (1998:223). This is partly because of their unsocial work patterns in catering and limited English language ability and partly because of their desire to maintain family cohesion. As a result, the influence of ‘traditional Confucian culture’ is reinforced (p.233). The authors do acknowledge the fact that
there are Chinese families from a different milieu to catering, with possibly a different socioeconomic background. Yet, from the authors’ perspective, this ‘minority’ group of Chinese does not disrupt the ‘striking’ level of ‘homogeneity’ of the Chinese community in England (p.233). Indeed, they argue that among those who are outside the catering sector, ‘Confucian ethics would undoubtedly remain as an influence’ (2001:393). These claims would remain vague speculations until concrete analysis is available.

2.2.6 ‘Between Two Cultures’ or ‘Best of Both Worlds’?

The orientalist perspective of Chinese families in Britain as homogenous with its rigid traditional culture often leads to notions of members of the families as suffering from culture conflict and identity crisis. These ideas are found to be underpinning much of the existing educational literature on the experiences of the children. This can be seen as an elaboration of the ‘between two cultures’ discourse dominating studies of the British-born and educated young people of immigrant parents which emerged in the 1970s (Watson 1977; Anwar 1981). Such an approach has been rather strongly criticised; as Parker usefully argues that ‘this operates with a static notion of what constitutes culture and values’, assuming they are passed on wholesale from one generation to another, and which children either take up or refuse outright (1995:11). Within such an approach, children are problematised and pathologised as a cultural dope being pushed about by forces outside its own control. I would further argue that, while the supporting evidence of the alleged traditional Chinese family culture is vague, as shown before, the much talked about western culture, be it that of the school or of society in general, has always been left unexamined. The so-called western culture has always been taken for granted as the norm, against which the difference in the cultures of the others is measured; it has never been the subject of analysis but rather something built on general assumptions. The following provides a full illustration of the between-two-culture discourse which underpins many of the studies. In an action project concerning Chinese children in Britain, Chan relies entirely on accounts of the mothers and claims:
Chinese children who grow up in two cultural systems face many difficulties. The traditional authoritarian style of parenting, with less demonstrative love in demanding ordering and shaping children’s behaviour, is obviously not welcomed by many British-born Chinese children and adolescents. Chinese youngsters who learn Western European concepts of freedom, democracy, individualism and self-determination in schools and from their peers acquire attitudes that call into question their parents’ notions of propriety (1993:10).

In more or less the same terms, many researchers have expressed the view that Chinese children are living within two cultures. However, there is a difference in perspective among these writers in relation to the ideas of the difficulties that the children may experience. On the one hand, some authors, largely in the earlier literature, have observed that many Chinese children are unable to adjust as they negotiate daily between the two cultural and social worlds of home and school, and suffer from identity problems (Langton 1979; Fong 1981; Ng 1982; Taylor 1987; Wong 1992). Yet very little has been presented in these studies to illustrate this or, more importantly, has included the views of the children. On the other hand, others have argued that the Chinese children are ‘well aware of’ the differing cultures of home and school but are ‘avoiding conflict by successfully making accommodations to cope with them’ (Verma et al. 1999:178; see also Watson 1977; Sham and Woodrow 1998; Woodrow and Sham 2001). Verma and colleagues go on to assert that, ‘more importantly, they were managing it without having to discard any of the core values by which they identified themselves’ (1999:178).

2.2.7 The Question of Identity

The latter point about identity is a particularly crucial element in the debates around the between-two-cultures perspective. Unfortunately, literature concerning identities of Chinese children in Britain is very limited; among these, a couple have a specific concern with the young adults’ identities in relation to their involvement of family takeaways (Parker 1995; Song 1999). Nonetheless, from an earlier study of over two hundred Chinese children in ten Chinese language classes nationwide, Ng (1982) rather strongly asserted in the exact words that in spite of the efforts of the children – in terms of the ways they dress, behave, live and try to ignore the Chinese culture – they know that the reality is that they could never be accepted by parents and the
British as English. The children have facial features that will always render them distinctively Chinese. Moreover, since Chinese culture has no status in British society, although the older children know that they are Chinese, they are not reconciled to it. Younger children, mostly born in Britain, consider themselves to be British for this very reason. According to Ng, they are simply too young to understand their ‘real’ identities as Chinese. In this case, it is clear that the identity problem lies in the way that the Chinese children are perceived by the researcher, with a politically strong but restricted and problematic view of identity. The children’s perceptions, performances and constructions of their own identities are all disregarded in the name of identity politics and the children’s perceived immaturity.

The idea that ‘older’ children would have a ‘better’ understanding of their identities is somehow reflected in the survey study of Verma and his team (1999); however, even these older children were not regarded as being fully able to express the meaning of their identities. This research involved over three hundred Chinese children, largely between thirteen and sixteen years of age, across three locations in Britain, and is almost the only existing literature which has a specific focus on the identity issues of this particular group of children. The research team argue that because of their ‘youth’, all of the children – British-Chinese along with the comparative groups of British-European and Hong Kong Chinese – ‘often found it difficult to say with confidence what it meant to be British or Chinese’ as ‘expected’ (1999:168). It was also claimed that, ‘Chinese adolescents were faced with questions of their identities’, ‘in common with other young people of other ethnic minority groups in Britain’, ‘which their European British peers did not have to grapple with’ (p.168). Moreover, the British-Chinese children, ‘knowing themselves to be ethnic Chinese but growing up in Britain with the recognition that it was here that their futures lay’, are said to face the ‘particular problem of defining themselves’ (p.168).

Within this social developmental framework, the children’s, or rather adolescents’ competence to explain their perceptions and experiences of their identities is seriously and inappropriately undermined. This nevertheless explains the overall approach to the young people’s identities taken by many of the studies. This is particularly evident in the use of the cultural identity scale of various predefined
cultural items to measure the children's attitudinal cultural orientation. Deriving from this method, Verma and his team assert that 'in the three core elements of family, religion and language', the findings 'strongly' suggested that the British-Chinese adolescents 'were successfully preserving their cultural identities' (1999:174). At the same time, the research team suggests that these children exhibit an attitude orientation towards western culture. For instance, the children were found to believe that boys and girls should be treated the same. To the researchers, this shows that these children either 'have rejected or are in the process of rejecting' the 'traditional belief in the inferior status of women', and are 'adopting western European egalitarian beliefs', which they 'will put into practice in their maturity' (p.177). This, in the authors' terms, is a 'culture free adaptation', meaning that it does not 'threaten any of the core values of Chinese culture' (p.177). In concluding, Verma and colleagues claim that British-Chinese youth 'have “roots” in traditional family forms but they also have “routes” into British culture' (p.187).

Within this, the Chinese children are no longer being perceived to be 'caught between two cultures', as suggested in some of the previous literature (e.g. Pistrang 1990; Chan 1995), but 'getting the best of both worlds' (Verma et al. 1999:187). Yet, the underlying Eurocentric and orientalist attitude persists. In relation to British-Chinese children's 'ability to maintain separate identities', Verma and colleagues comment:

Whilst recognising the quality of British parent/child relationships, and in the school context exhibiting some envy of that relationship, they [British-Chinese children] were clearly comfortable and secure within the home, submitting willingly and without rancour to the hard discipline which obedience to the father demanded (1999:176).

In addition to the patronising language, the research team's overall approach to identity as something measurable with a rigid and essentialist definition is questionable. Apart from the technical issues which may embed the problem of being self-fulfilling, the child respondents played no part in the definitions of what constitutes Chinese, English or British cultures, attitudes and identities. Yet this limitation of failing to capture the complexities of the children's experiences of identity is to some extent compensated by the brief interview material presented.
From the children’s own accounts, some important issues in relation to their identities are revealed. Clearly, many of the Chinese children have multiple identities; these were articulated using terms such as ‘Chinese’, ‘English’, ‘Hong Kongnese’ or ‘Vietnamese’, though no one used the term ‘British’ (Verma et al. 1999:62-64). These children also mentioned physical features, interactional contexts and their parents’ ethnicities as affecting how they felt about themselves. Moreover, in describing how their identities were situational and dynamic, some children expressed their ‘partial identifications’ (Parker 1995:14) with both Chineseness and Englishness. This is also one of the forms of cultural identity talked about by some of the young Chinese adults, largely British-born and in their twenties, in Parker’s (1995) study.

2.2.8 Intergenerational Family Relations and Issues of Culture

Studies elaborating on the theme of ‘between two cultures’ have also focused on intergenerational relations between children and parents, whereby conflict and culture gaps are presumed. Within the discourses of the repressive traditional Chinese families in Britain as discussed before, conflict between children and parents has often been described as taking place in a more implicit form. As Sham and Woodrow argue, among the Chinese families studied, Confucian ethics are the dominant force in the family structure; ‘the authority of the parents must not be challenged and the children are frequently reminded of this’ (1998:217). As a result, the children are said to have adopted a ‘subservient attitude’, although ‘on occasions it was observed that there was suppressed anger [of the children] against their parents’ (p.217). The authors go on to assert that ‘subservience and a lack of overt aggression’ characterise the relationships between the children and parents in these families (p.217). In this case, intergenerational conflict is not necessarily interpreted as being caused by a cultural gap between children and parents, but more generally a suppressed traditional culture. In particular, the Chinese parents are often seen as a ‘problem’ and ‘deficient’, for their own welfare (Watson 1977; Home Affairs Committee 1985; Fewster 1990), their children’s welfare and education (Chan 1993, 1995; Verma et al. 1999) as well as the society. They are victims of their own economic success in catering and the Chinese culture and of their failure to integrate
into British society, thus remaining isolated and traditional (Watson 1977; Sham and Woodrow 1998).\(^7\)

In the other cases, the Chinese children’s silent resentment against their parents has often been explained as a clear case of western liberal Chinese against autocratic traditional Chinese parents (Pistrang 1990; Wong 1992; Chan 1995; Verma et al. 1999). Among a couple of cases in Wong’s (1992) study of young Chinese in London, it was found that the children, aged sixteen and seventeen, who had rejoined their parents in Britain after almost ten years of separation, often found it difficult to re-establish a close relationship with them. While one child went to three Chinese classes a week to avoid confrontation with the parents, another moved out from home ‘when she could no longer stand the pressure exerted by the parents and the traditional Chinese culture’ (p.55). With regard to the latter case, another reason for leaving home was said to be that the child was stopped by the parents from seeing her grandmother at an old people’s home. According to the author, this ‘prevented’ the child from ‘fulfilling the obligations expected in a conservative Chinese family’ (p.55). The flaw in a culturalist approach is self-evident; it cannot accommodate diversity and ambivalence in the behaviour of the two generations within the family. The author suggests that:

After knowing more about their rights of children at school, it is more unlikely for Chinese children in Britain to show respect for their parents if their parents fail to impress these children that they have fulfilled their duties as parents (p.55).

With no solid evidence to support this claim, it remains no more than a vague speculation. Despite this, the researcher is reasonable to suggest that these parents’ practice of sending young children back to Hong Kong to be cared for by grandparents may be a factor contributing to the conflicts between the children and parents.\(^8\) This is an issue that requires further investigation drawing from detailed accounts of both the children and parents.

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\(^7\) For critical discussion of the ‘Chinese problem’ in Britain, see Tam (1998) and Chau and Yu (2000).

\(^8\) Such a practice is believed to be common among Chinese parents in Britain. However, reports only consist of information up until 1990 (see Fewster 1990; Wong 1992). Therefore, the extent to which it represents the more recent Chinese families in Britain is unknown.
Although the author insists on a cultural explanation for the observed intergenerational clash, the leap between the argument and the empirical data presented simply appears too great. According to Wong, the intergenerational conflict arises from ‘the differences in the value system between Britain and that maintained by Chinese parents’ (1992:54). In more details, Britain is a welfare state, therefore, the Chinese children tend to feel less obligated to show respect for their parents as, theoretically speaking, they do not have to rely on their parents to support their education or their living if they cannot get a job when they finish their studies. At the same time, the children feel less obliged to look after their parents as benefits will be provided to pensioners by the government. Although insufficient evidence is presented for building on this argument, the attempt to locate child-parent relationships and individual understandings of familial identities within the wider social context is certainly a practice which can provide a fuller picture of family life and cultural issues.

The final issue to be discussed is the alleged communication problem between many Chinese children and their parents in Britain. It is generally believed, and sometimes supported, by various studies that difficulties in intergeneration communication are due to the parents’ limited fluency in English and the children’s Chinese language skills declining over time as their English schooling progresses. The practical complications experienced and expressed by some Chinese children have been documented in a number of studies (Sham and Woodrow 1998; Verma et al. 1999). However, among these children, there seems to be no sign of a sense of ‘living in a different world’ or of being a ‘stranger’ to their ‘non-English speaking parents’ as suggested by Garvey and Jackson (1975:61).

Moreover, there is also no indication of children ‘refusing to speak Chinese to their parents in an attempt to establish a different cultural identity’ as found in some earlier studies (Taylor 1987:250). Instead, what is manifest in the children’s and parents’ narratives about Chinese language in these studies is the underlying generational issues. For instance, a few of the children seem to be embarrassed by their parents’ English pronunciation and sometimes try to correct them (Sham and Woodrow 1998). Among some parents who have limited English skills, their
insistence on their children speaking Chinese appears to be a concern of being able to communicate with the children, to guide them, or simply to be a parent to them. The interpretation that the parents' act is a way to assert or maintain their power and authority over their children may be correct (Li Wei 1994; Sham and Woodrow 1998), reflecting the overall structure of many families within British and other societal contexts. However, when these behaviours of the children and parents are explained in terms of the traditional Chinese Confucianism, either as being challenged and preserved, the problematic culturalist discourse with an orientalist attitude is simply reinforced. This remains the dominant theme underlying much of the understandings of Chinese children, their parents and families in Britain within the field of research which this chapter has attempted to demonstrate. I would end the discussion with the following quote which I believe captures much of the spirit of such discourse:

These [British-Chinese] children cope with their multiple roles – as student of English and Chinese, as obedient child, as willing preparer of food for several hours each day, as supporter and translator for their isolated parent – with such cheerfulness, goodwill and success that as researchers we are stunned in admiration at the success of these children (Verma et al. 1999:186).

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter may have had a somewhat fragmented feel with inconsistent terminology. The fact that some studies reappeared in different sections reflects the limited amount of literature on Chinese children in Britain. These studies largely addressed the experiences of the Chinese 'pupils' with the particular concerns of the researchers, touching on various aspects of their lives as 'children' or 'adolescents'. Moreover, the various terminologies adopted in these studies – 'Chinese', 'British-Chinese', 'British-European', 'British-white' or 'English' – indicates individual researchers' own political stand on the concepts of race, ethnicity, culture and identity.

Working through these resources, the dominant perceptions of Chinese children in Britain within educational and social discourses have been realised. The teachers'
narrow and stereotypical perceptions of the Chinese children as passive and unassuming were criticised and challenged by researchers, for failing to recognise the ‘real divisions’ and ‘real problems’ of this group of children. From a child development standpoint and an orientalist perspective, the Chinese children, along with Chinese parents, families and culture, were homogenised, problematised and pathologised. These children were defused into the institution of the family and education, and defined as a product of the two fundamentally incompatible socialising forces.

What might have been a genuine concern within academia of Chinese children in British society has, through a culturalist approach, turned into a reproduction of Eurocentric discourse of ‘a dichotomy of “repressive traditional/liberal modern” cultures’ (Francis and Archer 2005:101). While Chinese parents and families were placed firmly in the traditional Chinese culture, Chinese children were ambivalently positioned in relation to both the traditional Chinese and modern western regimes. Under such a framework, these children would always be alienated and marginalised as the others but not a full member of the society.

All the studies are useful in the way that they have drawn attention to peer relations and family relationships, and the ambiguous concepts of culture, ethnicity, race and identity in the experiences of Chinese children in Britain. Though I have questioned the underlying essentialist approach and a deterministic perspective – in which culture and identity are seen as immutable sets of beliefs and customs predefined by the researchers, and something to be measured in terms of integration or acculturation – I have no intention of ignoring culture and the related matters altogether.

On the contrary, I aim to explore, through extensive ethnographic exchanges with children, how they make sense of their experiences of being Chinese and a child in Britain, and the elements they are drawing on in formulating their different identities. More importantly, I propose to enquire more specifically into how children, as embodied persons construct their connectedness with, and difference from, other individuals and groups. This would help to challenge and advance simplistic
understandings of race and ethnicity in dichotomous terms of nature and culture, and of fixity and mutability. In order to achieve this, a sound theoretical and methodological approach would be required. The next chapter will first address some of the theoretical arguments of conceptualising racial and ethnic issues and children and childhood.
Theorising Racial and Ethnic Matters among Children

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the drawback of much of the work informing Chinese children in Britain was discussed. This was largely the result of the underlying conceptual approaches to issues of culture, identity and children. There is a clear need to develop a framework which appreciates children’s subjective perceptions and experiences, specifically in relation to racial and ethnic matters. The basis for such a framework could be found in a variety of deconstructive approaches to identities both in racial and ethnic studies and in childhood sociology.

This chapter references the variety of poststructuralist positions on the construction of forms of subjectivity and identity, and builds around the paradoxes between the two fields of study in sociology. It shows how these disciplines can in fact be brought together in order to offer a more comprehensive conceptualisation of racial and ethnic issues in children’s lives. A crucial aspect involved in such a framework is to address the adultness of many of the theories of race and ethnicity, and similarly the general negligence of racial and ethnic issues of the theorisation of children and childhood. The basic principle would be to respect children as active competent social actors dealing with racial and ethnic issues in different domains of the social world. Then to locate race and ethnicity within children’s worlds, to understand race and ethnicity from children’s point of view and to look at children’s contribution to the meanings and understanding of racial and ethnic issues.

3.2 Children and Racial and Ethnic Issues

In developing an understanding of children’s ethnic and other identities, there is a need for a broader understanding of identity per se. Such a development has to start
by recognising its complexity. The concept of identity is more than just the question of 'who we are'. As Gilroy explains why identity is an everyday concern, he states that:

Principally, identity provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed (1997:299).

This indicates that identity is the subjective sense of the self of individual actors located within the social relations and institutions that constitute the societies of which they are a part. In other words, identity provides us with a position in the social world, presents the link between us and the society, and addresses the issue of how we relate to others. Since identity is something which allows us to define what is and what is not important to us, it is our source of meaning, giving significance and purpose to the self. Jenkins (1996) therefore is quite right in declaring that all human identities are in some sense social identities, for identity is about meaning, and meanings are always the outcome of agreement or disagreement, a matter of convention and innovation, and to some extent shared and negotiable.

From this, it can be seen that identity is fluid in nature and is essentially a social construction. Recent social constructionist approaches to child study (see e.g. Jenks 1982; Stainton-Rogers, Harvey and Ash 1989; James and Prout 1990) and studies of race and ethnicity have both taken a poststructuralist position on the construction of the relevant forms of identity. The underlying principle of these positions is to suspend an essentialist, biologically grounded understanding of identity, and be critical about the notion of an integral, originary and unified identity. Knowledge of what being a child is, or of a particular racial or ethnic background, is seen to be dependent on specific social, political, historical and moral contexts. In these explorations, therefore, the main purpose is to deconstruct the concepts in question.

To take on this deconstructive approach is particularly crucial to this research. Against the specific context in which the children are located, notions such as 'children', 'Chinese' and 'British' are fully examined. These elements are often
assumed to be particularly important to the sense of ethnic identity of the group of children of this study. Such a deconstruction can help to avoid treating the children’s experiences as just an ‘add-on’ – for instance the experience of a child with a racial or ethnic factor adding on – and hence restating essentialist and universalistic versions of childhood and race and ethnicity. It can also help to prevent a superficial assertion of a ‘hyphenated’ identity, for instance British-Chinese and hence re-inscribing and reifying old versions of singular and fixed notions of race, ethnicity and culture. In order to deconstruct the different identities which are significant to the children, we first have to look into some of the characters of identity and its nature.

3.2.1 Being or Becoming?

The binary opposition between being and becoming is one of the sets of conceptual dualisms within which the concepts of identity and children have been discussed. Although many of the theorists have agreed and stressed that identity is a matter of both becoming as well as being (see e.g. Hall 1996; Jenkins 1996), there seems to have been a preference for focusing on the becoming and abandoning the being aspect of identity. The main reason for this perhaps is because the notion of being tends to be perceived as implying a sense of fixity and stability. On the contrary, the term becoming is generally regarded as signifying something dynamic which is considered to be one of the crucial features of identity. For instance, Craib argues that much of the investigation of age-based identities has been on the being rather than the becoming aspect of the identities:

Thus, while we know something about what it is like to be a child, to be middle aged or elderly, the complex social processes and experiences involved in becoming a schoolchild, a grown-up or an old-age pensioner, and making the shift from one identity to another, still remain largely uncharted and certainly undertheorised (1998:9 quoted in Hockey and James 2003:5).

Considering the meanings of being and becoming in this statement carefully, what may appear to be in support of the becoming nature of identities is actually resonant with the urge of social studies of childhood to focus on the meanings of being a
child. The notions of being and becoming are at the centre of the primary distinction between the traditional conception of the socially developing child and the recent sociological approaches to the child. In the socially developing model of the child, within for instance, traditional developmental psychology and socialisation theory, childhood is spoken about as a becoming (Jenks 1996). The child is measured by stages or levels of attainment or social skills towards the achievement of adulthood and how far away they are from becoming an adult. In contrast, within the sociological approaches to the study of childhood, the child is understood as being, who is conceived as a person, a status, a course of actions, a set of needs, rights or differences – as a social actor (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). The being child is then to be understood in its own right and is not approached from an assumed shortfall of competence, reason or significance.

Such an approach, however, does not perceive the being child as static – being in the conventional sense - but rather is situated in particular historical, political, social and cultural settings. Furthermore, within the sociology of childhood, it is widely recognised that childhood is interrelated to other structural forms of social organisation such as class, gender and ethnicity (Qvortrup 1994; Alanen and Mayall 2001). This implies a complexity of identities so that a child, in different social settings, may have different identities or in some cases more than one identity, for instance a ‘school-child’ as suggested above. Nagel’s perception on ethnicity can be applied to explain this:

Since ethnicity changes situationally, the individual carries a portfolio of ethnic identities that are more or less salient in various situations and vis-à-vis various audiences. As audiences change, the socially-defined array of ethnic choices opens to the individual changes (1994:154).

What this points to is the idea that identity emerges and is defined interactionally and situationally. In this research, particular attention is given to the various identities that the children experience, take on, articulate or are assigned to, in different situations interacting with different people and with different particularities.
From the above, the 'being child' within the sociological discourses of childhood and the 'becoming child' as Craib (1998) and Hockey and James (2003) would argue are literally the same in principle. The identity of a child, just as in any other identities, is both an experiential and situated process, and is essentially changing in its nature. This perhaps shows another dimension of the 'problems' of language which is what many identity theorists have pointed out as limiting the understanding of the experiences of particular groups of individuals such as 'mixed-race' children (Ali 2003) and young British-Chinese (Parker 1995).

Another example of the problems of language is in relation to what can be seen as a preference of the term 'identification' over 'identity', which is related to the conceptual differentiated binary of being and becoming. Hall (1996) describes 'identification' as a process of becoming and as a process which is subject to fragmentation and change across time whereas 'identity' connotes simply a sense of subjectivity. He therefore favours the notion of identification over identity because it forces consideration of the active processes through which collectivities come to be identified or through which individuals are able to make some points of connection between themselves and others. I would argue that theoretically it is useful to clarify such a distinction. Yet the conception of identity in this research is in effect in agreement with the fundamental principles of the theorisation of identification, which is concerned with its processually produced, context specific, situational and fluid nature (see also Jenkins 1996). Therefore, the important elements as identified in Hall's vision of identification, including the relationship between self and/or us and others and the notion of collectivity, would also be useful for this research in developing an understanding of children's senses of identity.

3.2.2 Differences, Similarities and Belongingness

Just as conventional analyses of ethnicity have been criticised for their emphasis on the collective nature of ethnic allegiance (see e.g. Ali 2003), social structural approaches of childhood have been criticised for assuming a universality of characteristics of childhood and of the status identity of the child (see e.g. James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Investigation into people's identities has been increasingly
focused on ideas of difference rather than similarity; identities are seen as constructed in and through difference (e.g. Hall 1996; Jenkins 1996; Woodward 1997). As Hall (2000) argues, it is only through the relation to the other, that is the relation to what it is not, what it lacks, or to its ‘constitutive outside’ that the positive meaning of any term, its identity, can be constructed. In other words, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render outside, abjected.

Perhaps it is not difficult to make sense of the claim that identity is often based on difference by marking ‘us’ from ‘them’, that is we define ourselves in relation to others. For instance, experiences of black youths, in particular those of racism have always been studied and theorised in relation to their relationships with white youths (e.g. Hewitt 1986). Similarly, in the sociological study of childhood, it is generally agreed that the social positions in which children and adults are the beholders are defined in relation to each other, and constitute, in turn, specific social generational structures (see e.g. Alanen 2001).

In this sense, a person’s identity is always defined by what it is not or what it lacks. Children, for example, are often defined by their lack of adult competencies (Hutchby and Moran-Elllis 1997), a western conception which emerged in response to ideas about the nature of factory work and the suitability of particular kinds of people to undertake it (see e.g. Hendricks 1997). Furthermore, if children are small it is because they lack the height of adults. If they are innocent, it is because they lack worldliness, a quality that adults would have. These lacks and limitations are, however, only temporary, particularly in a society where children are frequently urged to be ‘grown up’ about things. The lack or the possession of competence therefore represents an insubstantial, time-linked boundary which tends to submerge within the flow of young people’s everyday experiences (Hockey and James 2003). So, can the same be argued in the case of race or ethnicity? Hockey and James argue not. In their view, while race and gender-based differences have an element of fixing and rarely overlap, age-based categories, by their very nature, do (2003:80). Yet the latter chapters of this research will show, such a conception not only fails to capture the dynamic of racial and ethnic identities which children skilfully and creatively
construct, but also the complexity of meanings of racial and ethnic matters in children's worlds.

To theorise identity as relational is not without its drawbacks. In principle, an identity takes meanings from all other identities; for instance, the identity of being a child is defined in relational to all other non-children identities such as teenagers, adults and elderly. However, in much empirical and theoretical work, the notion of relational has often been conceptualised as oppositional; it falls into the strict binary frameworks of, for example children and adults, and black and white in the case of race and ethnicity research. It would be wrong to deny the domination of these other halves in particular societal contexts. Yet, such a framework fails to appreciate the complexity of the identity by neglecting other groups of reference.

Furthermore, the dominant halves of these binaries or what Laclau calls ‘a violent hierarchy’ (cited in Hall 2000:18) are always left unexamined. Therefore, adulthood in childhood studies and whiteness in research of race and ethnicity are often conceptualised in an essentialised and normalised manner and left standing as untheorised. This research aims to fully explore these dominant categories in terms of how they are understood by, and what meanings they have to children. In particularly, this would help to break down the old conception or rather misconception of ‘ethnic’ as non-white, and more importantly, to avoid the dominant groups, in this case adults, white or English, as being taken as the equivalent of ‘human being’ (Dyer 1997). In viewing identity as constituted by the others and a product of the marking of difference and exclusion, does it mean that identity has nothing to do with notions of collectivity, commonality and belonging?

While I reject the perception of identity in its traditional meaning as being an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation, and that collectivity is an identical, naturally-constituted unity, I would argue that identity cannot be fully understood without considering the notions of similarity or commonality and belonging. As expressed in the form of ethnicity, identity at its most general level means consciously belonging to a particular group and sharing its conditions of
existence which means having the right credentials for membership (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993:8). According to Bulmer:

An ‘ethnic group’ is a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements which define the group’s identity, such as kinship, religion, language, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance (1986:54).

One important aspect of this definition is that it is a group’s or its members’ belief in its common ancestry and their perception and self-belief that they constitute a group which matters, and not any actual evidence of their cultural distinctiveness as a group. In rejecting the idea that ethnicity has a natural or objective existence, for instance by blood ties (Geertz 1963) or is predetermined at birth (Van den Berghe 1978), much of the recent work on ethnic identities insists upon the present, and the changeability of identity formations through time – for example, over a person’s lifetime, and in different geographical spaces and contexts – despite the often long shadow of the past. Along with the themes of assertion and choice concerning ethnic identity as influenced by postmodernism, these works once again stress the situational, contingent, and changeable aspects of identity formation and maintenance (Back 1996). In short, ethnic identity is socially constructed (see e.g. Barth 1969; Wallman 1978; Jenkins 1994).

Similar propositions have been furthered in sociological approaches to childhood within which childhood is understood as a social or cultural construction which cannot be straightforwardly read off from biological differences between children and adults, such as physical size or sexual maturity (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Some important empirical work has shown how children construct childhood as a social category and experience by establishing what characteristics they share with other members, for example in terms of work or moral status (Mayall 2002).

Furthermore, I would argue that philosophically, without commonalities or similarities, there would be no differences and vice versa. Therefore, no matter how important difference is in identity work, it cannot become meaningful without some
form of shared features with other individuals or individuals of a particular group. Although it could be the case that differences tend to strike in a more obvious way that people would pay more attention to, these differences always feed back to the awareness of what they have in common with others. In other words, commonalities are the reference points, but are at the same time triggered by differences. In addition, I would argue that different levels of significance are assigned to various commonalities and differences by the individual, and therefore would have different degrees of influence on the individual’s identity. Hence, we should not generalise either similarities or differences but place greater impact on a sense of identity.

These group constructions of belonging and not-belonging, of being included and excluded are the very elements which problemise the centralisation of communities, groups and boundaries. At the same time, they can facilitate a sense of belonging, which can be seen as formed partly in the imaginary and partly constructed in fantasy or within a ‘fantasmatic field’, yet at the same time ‘real’ to the individuals involved (Hall 1996:4). I would argue that a sense of belonging is crucial in understanding identity work but perhaps not so much in the conventional sense of ‘longing to be’.

In consideration of notions of process and movement inherent in forging belongings, Probyn (1996) critically explains that belonging can convey notions of ‘longing to be’ somewhere, or the desire to be part of something, which in turn entails a sense of security or stability. Probyn argues that it is best to consider notions of belonging as movements rather than as static positioning; belonging is not fixed or rooted in some deep authentic way, but is in constant movement. Modes of belonging are therefore perceived as ‘surface shifts’, given the range of desiring identities that are displayed ‘all around’ (Mahtani 2001).

Another way of conceptualising the notion of belonging is offered by the idea of a partial identification with the majority culture and society or one’s own ethnic community. In relation to cultural identity, for example, Parker suggests that some Chinese young people in Britain adopted a ‘subjectivity of conditional belonging’, in
which they felt a partial identification with Britain, despite their experiences of being marginalised:

This qualified sense of investment in Britain is one of the defining features of a subjectivity of conditional belonging. This involves a willingness to stay in this country, but on condition of being able to contribute to redefining the grounds on which identifications are made (1995:199).

This conditional belonging, therefore, involves a belief in open formations of identity, such that for example, what Chinese means changes over time, and is not traceable back to a single origin. To take up an open formation of Chineseness, or any other ethnicity for that matter, is to reject not only narrowly defined and racialised definitions of British nationality, but also the legitimacy of any kind of fixed script of behaviour attached to any ethnic minority group (Song 2003). Furthermore, the notion of conditional belonging conveys the idea that individuals who feel this way are staking a claim; they are refusing to accept the view that they do not belong in Britain because they are Chinese (Song 2003). These arguments about the notion of conditional belonging, while usefully illustrate how partial, fragmented and multifaceted the experience of belonging can be, are inevitably based on the specific position and status of adults within the society. Therefore, this research looks at how children may actively reconstruct, recreate and reinvent the meanings and practices associated with these categories, what Sollors (1989) calls the ‘invention of ethnicity’. In addition, this study examines whether or not children, like adults purposely try to make a statement in relation to their ethnic identities, that is to perform the ‘political construction of ethnicity’ (Nagel 1986).

### 3.3 How Are Identities Formed?

So far, the nature of the notion of identity has been discussed. The various characteristics acknowledged reflect the different theoretical positions from which identity is addressed. Accordingly, these theories have different conceptions about how identities are formed or how individuals come to form their identities. This distinction suggests that identity is on the one hand perceived as formed externally
or imposed by others and on the other as defined internally by the individual. These
two aspects of identity – what Jenkins calls the ‘internal-external dialectic of
identification’ (1996:20) – can no longer be conceptualised as standing
independently from each other. Instead, they can be understood using the principle
offered by the conception of structure and agency (Giddens 1984). Social structure,
as presented by for instance, representation (see Hall 1997) and categorisation (see
Jenkins 1994), is a social process rather than a rigid framework which affects and at
the same time is constituted by the agency of individuals without whom such a
process could not take place, and is manifested in the various ways in which the
individuals construct, articulate and negotiate their identities.

3.3.1 Identities as Discursive and Narrative Processes

Such a position is reflected by Hall’s (1996) theory of identity formation, which has
been particularly influential in recent years, especially in the field of cultural and
ethnic identity. According to Hall, exploring how identities come into being means:

Identity refers to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand, the
discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place
as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand the processes which
produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’ (1996:5).

In this sense, identity is constructed within discourse. Identity therefore has to be
understood as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific
discursive formations and practices, by strategies. And most importantly, as Hall
stresses, it involves locating these practices and processes ‘within the play of
specific modalities of power’ for identities can be invested within varying degrees of
moral worth and degrees of stigmatisation (1996:4). In other words, identity is
formed by and is the product of, a series of discursive practices originating in
disciplinary forms of regulation which operate to construct and regulate the form
and content of human subjectivity – and therefore identity – within particular
historical and social collectivities (see Foucault 1979).
What is clear is that identities are not only points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for the children, an effective suturing of them to a subject-position means that the children are recognised, and also that the children invest in the position. This means that suturing has to be thought of as an articulation, not as a one-sided process (Hall 1996). So, identities are results of successful articulation or chaining of the subject into the flow of the discourse.

3.3.2 Articulation and Performativity of Identity

Given the significance of articulation in identity work, this research gives as much attention to the discourses as to the mechanisms by which the children identify or do not identify with the positions in which they are situated; also how they fashion, stylise, produce and perform these positions, and why they are in a constant process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves. Therefore, for instance, instead of searching for what may be perceived as 'traditional Chinese' practices which are evident in the children's everyday lives, and their familial 'root' in China or Hong Kong, the research will investigate how these practices are made sense of by the children and how in certain situations the children use them to articulate their identities. As Hall (1996) argues, identities are related to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, and therefore it is not 'return to roots' but a 'come-to-terms-with-our-routes'.

This is linked to the notion of representation which is argued to be crucial in understanding the concept of identity. As Hall (1996) claims, identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture, in the process of becoming rather than being. It is not about who we are or where we came from so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Hall (1996, 1997) is correct in stressing that identities are constituted within, not outside, representation but it should not be mistaken that identity is constituted simply by representation, ignoring the inputs of the individuals involved. Furthermore, Hall's proposal that identity is a
representation of self is promising; the importance of what Goffman (1959) described as 'the presentation of self' during interaction. This draws to our attention the performative aspect of identity, and the fact that it is embedded within social practices. This parallels Giddens' (1991) argument that in late modernity, individuals are engaged in a reflexive project of the self. A fundamental part of this reflexive project is the ongoing formation and shaping of identity. In particular, through individuals’ choice or rejection of everything, people are actively attempting to develop and promote particular versions of who they think they are, or would like to become. This is Giddens’ view that ‘we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves’ (1991:75).

Not only have the notions of free choice and complete fragmentation in relation to identity been controversial, the way that an individual can articulate and perform an identity, and the way to present oneself to the others also has limitations and constraints. These will be discussed shortly in relation to embodiment. Furthermore, Jenkins argues that:

\[\ldots\] what people think about us is no less important than what we think about ourselves. It is not enough to assert an identity. That identity must also be validated (or not) by those with whom we have dealings. Social identity is never unilateral. (1996:21)

This once again highlights the potential contradiction between how we want others to perceive us and how we are being interpreted and defined – the interface between self image and public image (Goffman 1959). Where these mismatched identities occur, as illustrated by the children of this research, different strategies and attitudes are employed to handle the situations, ranging from aggressive yet playful contention to calmly disregarding identity assignment by others. These statements illustrate the children’s agency not only in terms of their capacity to construct, negotiate and assert their identities, but also their skilful handling of social interactions and situations. This is one kind of evidence which can dismiss traditional psychological approaches to children, which assumes that since children’s minds are naïve or egocentric, they have little or no capacity for handling complex abstractions applicable to social interaction (see Ramsey 1987; Aboud
1988), and therefore they lack intelligence and a mature awareness of social concepts such as race, ethnicity, gender or class, and cannot form identities based on these concepts (see Wardle 1992).

Another way in which children's agency can be seen in constructing and asserting their identities is the notion of new ethnicities, hybridity and cultural mixing, which dominates the so-called post-race thinking. Gilroy suggests that culture is 'a field articulating the life world of subject (albeit decentred) and the structures created by human activity' (cited by Frankenberg 1993:194). Hall's definition includes 'the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society' (cited in ibid). The role of culture is central to Hall's influential work on new ethnicities. Hall (1992) suggests that we can no longer identify a unified, simple black subject and black experience as stabilised by nature or by some 'other essential guarantee'. He attempts to reposition (black) Britishness as born out of a kind of cultural plurality that constantly creates new and dynamic forms. This cultural translation is fundamental in these new ethnicities.

Hall's work has been criticised for using the term black which 'calls upon an old recognisable racial category and, although not supporting it, interpellates an identification with a skin colour' (Ali 2003:10). Similarly, it is argued that British means that a person is a citizen of a country (England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland) who claims a national identity; however, this subverts not only the hegemonic discourses of nationality as conjoined with whiteness but also that whiteness in conjunction with Britishness implies 'racial superiority' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993:41). By looking at these issues from children's point of view, this research can certainly enhance the discussion with the much lacked voices of children.

Furthermore, there have also been debates about the theorisation of what are called the new ethnicities, which sometimes involve its perceived philosophical impossibility. First of all, it is widely agreed that culture, just as ethnic group, is never fixed but changing. For instance, according to Bhabha (1990), culture is subject to processes of translation, so it is difficult to locate the stable essence of any
one culture. Yet, if we cannot locate the perceived essences of a culture, then what cultures are the new ethnicities derived from, and how do we know new forms of ethnicities are emerging? To remedy this, it is suggested that new ethnicities are not simply additions to existing forms, they are evolved and metamorphosed in relation to ‘cultural hybrids’. Bhabha suggests that cultural hybridity develops not from ‘two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity is... the “third space” which enables the other positions to emerge’ (1990:211). In such a space, new hybrid cultural forms are emerging at the intersection of disparate cultures. However, this still does not solve the problem of having ‘disparate cultures’ in the first place. No matter whether it is real or imaginary, I would argue that there are some ‘ethnic cores’ (Smith 1990) which are significant to the individuals and, as Naficy (1993) cautions, there is a danger of a blind celebration of hybridity which may result in unattached and weightless hybrids who are neither this nor that, neither here nor there.

Parker (1995) argues that the forms of new ethnicities as found among British Asian and African communities are not yet evident within the Chinese community – a British-based collective identity. This is partly due to the limited interethnic interactions as a result of their concentrated participation in the catering businesses. Another reason is that there has been a limited or almost non-existent narrative of the history of the Chinese in Britain; and at the same time the Chinese have not been narrating their lived stories. As Hall (1987) remarks, identity is formed at that point where the unspeakable stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history and culture. What can be called the history of the Chinese in Britain may have impacted on the way in which Chinese are being represented in the society, which in turn may have something to do with the children’s sense of identity. However, variations within such a history cannot be ignored. Moreover, I would agree with Parker’s (1998) plea for recognition of the possibility of hybrid cultures and identities influenced by Chinese traditions and concerns as a precondition for greater visibility in both academic research and the broader political arena. What is more, it is crucial to include children, both their voices and contributions, in the discussions of new ethnicities, which have yet to be recognised by the wider public and within the academic sphere.
3.3.3 Resources and Materials for Identity Construction and Articulation

There is now more interest and emphasis on the active ways in which people may shape and assert their own ethnic identities, and the strategic ways in which they invoke their ethnicity, and in fact other identities (see e.g. Song 2003). For instance, some analysts such as Swidler (1986) have talked about how cultural practices and resources provide a kind of ‘tool kit’ of symbols, stories and rituals which can be used by individuals in a variety of ways, including constructing and asserting their ethnic identities, and their efforts to solve a range of problems. In addition, it is suggested that ethnic resources can be economic, territorial, cultural, and linguistic amongst others (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993:8).

In terms of the development of the investigation of ethnic resources, there seems to have been a shift from the ethnic contents as used by individuals to construct boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ to the power of categorisation, classification and representation, and recently to the materialisation of racial discourses. Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital and habitus have been largely found useful in understanding the relationship between resources and identity work. Connolly (1998) explains that the habitus provides the principal means by which discourses ‘enter into’ the lives and identities of individuals. It represents the way in which a person’s past experience and understanding of their social world has created a learnt, almost subconscious predisposition to think and act in certain ways. The particular way in which discourses do this is through the individual’s continuing attempts to acquire and maintain dominant forms of social, cultural, economic and/or symbolic capital. Such forms of capital are underpinned by particular discourses which have progressively come to define and order our knowledge and understanding of the social world. The strategies that individuals use in order to gain and hold onto particular forms of capital are those which eventually become internalised and underpin the development of habitus. It is through this process that discourses come to insert themselves into the very hearts and identities of individuals.

What I would regard as the major problem in Connolly’s approach is that there are assumptions about what constitutes dominant discourses and the presumptions that
individuals automatically pursue the relevant dominant forms of capitals. This is in spite of Connolly's idea that there is a number of interconnecting fields, each with particular forms of capital at their centre. Furthermore, although I agree with the notion that individuals apply different strategies to gain and hold onto particular forms of capital, we should not ignore that these forms of capital can actually limit or facilitate the kinds of identities that individuals can construct and articulate in a particular context. Physical capital is a form of capital which cannot be ignored and sees the body as a bearer of symbolic values.

Investigation of British-Chinese youths' ethnic identities has always failed to take into account the body while focusing on the particular familial and economic resources (e.g. Song 1999) and cultural or ethnic practices (e.g. Parker 1995). Yet it is now widely agreed that an adequate social theory must account for the body and the part it plays in social relations (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Embodiment in the context of sociology and cultural studies has a concern of how the bodily bases of people's actions and interactions are structured in different ways (Shilling 1997). Therefore, the body is important not only because it provides us with the basic ability to live, but because it shapes our identities and structures our interventions in, and classifications of, the world. In other words, the body, as both an objective and discursive object, mediates identity through the process of embodiment, and its very materiality provides the channel through which identities come to be ascribed and taken on by people in the course of their everyday lives (see Hockey and James 2003). Bodies are both material and representational entities.

While Jenkins is right to argue that although individuals are unique, their identities are constructed in and through embodied interaction with others, the notion that embodiment does not allow for fluidity is problematic:

The primary identifications of selfhood, human-ness and gender, in addition to their deep-rooting in infancy and early childhood, are definitively embodied (as local understandings of kinship and ethnicity may also be). Where locally perceived embodiment is a criterion of any social identity, be it individual or collective, fluidity maybe the exception rather than the rule (1996:21).
Bodies can be constraining in the sense that we do not have total control over our bodies e.g. they age. Not all bodily features can be changed, and the ability to effect change varies by class, ethnicity, age etc. Also, bodies are subjected to social judgements and classifications which are specific in particular social, cultural and historical contexts. These in turn may impact on the way we identify ourselves. Having said that, the body as a material basis for, and not just an effect of, the construction of identities, can be facilitating. The body therefore has to be regarded as a material and physical phenomenon which is irreducible to immediate social processes or classifications – humans are embodied beings (Shilling 1997).

Christensen (2000) argues in relation to the cultural meanings of vulnerability in childhood, that children are different from adults with regard to their attitudes to the body and its ailments, a difference revolving around their body as somatic – as observable object and incarnate – as subjective experience. Reflecting on the research data, it is apparent that the children’s concern over the bodies is in connection with the social world in which they participate, and their experiences of particular situations and associated interactions are integrated into their experiences of their bodies. James (1993) notes, the ways in which cultural stereotypes of particular aspects of the body including height, shape, appearance, gender and performance play an important role in children’s sense of identity, which children actively utilise to comprehend not only their own bodies but also its relationship to other bodies. Experiences of the body, both in terms of similarities and differences and the careful observation and understanding of the body within different normative frameworks in constructing their identities, are evident in the research data. The one thing that should be noted is that James is concerned with the particular British or English and perhaps middle-class culture in which the children draw reference to what is conceived to be a normal or ideal body type. As Ali (2003) notes, the basis for racial inclusion or exclusion is based at least in part upon physical appearance as well as cultural markers, such as clothes and accents. Perhaps unlike bodily changes which are perceived to be related to growing up and creating new possibilities for identity, racialised bodily characteristics are difficult to change. However, through skilful handling the body can be used as a flexible resource for translation into ethnic identities.
Most certainly, people often rely on visual signs to guide them in defining the individuals in order to work out how to get along with them. Unfortunately, the body may not always give out the right signs of what we are. This is what the notion of the 'mask of ageing' (Featherstone and Hepworth 1991) is describing – the experience of a mismatch between the self we think we are ‘inside’ and the much older self which others read off from the exterior of our visibly ageing bodies. Such a concept can be applied to any identity, be that ethnic, age, gender or others. This may be a reminder of the notion of ‘banana’ which is used by some people to describe the second-generational Chinese and Chinese in other western societies, as well as by the individuals themselves to describe their sense of being white or western in the inside and yellow, meaning Chinese, on the outside (see e.g. Macphedran 1989). Once again, these ideas, with the notion of ‘an avoidance response to the conflicts of dual racial membership’ (Bradshaw 1992:79) lack references to younger children and more crucially, children’s own voices, which this research commits to fill out.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter sets out to discuss different conceptual positions of identity with examples which are taken from the research data, in the hope of developing a framework to enable a more comprehensive investigation into the experiences of children’s ethnic and other identities. What I perceive as one of the major obstacles among the theorisations and analyses of identity is that they are still trapped by some kind of binary framework despite the efforts to try to break out from it. Some of the more recent work on identity, for instance that specifically in relation to children and childhood, and race and ethnicity, seems to have successfully achieved a synthesis between those conceptual dualisms of identity. Rather than regarding social structures be they generational, discursive, representational or others, as a rigid framework, they are recognised as a social process which incorporates the agency of individuals without whom such a process could not take place. In spite of this, it seems to me that much of these works tends to be drawn in by the effects of external processes on individuals’ identities. As a result, individuals’ agency in terms of the
processes by which they construct and articulate, and of the processes of which they translate various forms of materials into recourses for their identity work, has been regarded as constituted by rather than contributing to the social structures.

Furthermore, in a similar manner, theoretical discussions and some empirical work on identity are limited by the language that they use, which refers to not only the terms or words but the meanings that they signify and what they represent. Debates seem to have been around a number of binary oppositions which are to do with the essences of the nature of identity as relational. The concept of identification is preferable to identity, just as becoming is favoured over being. Similarly, difference rather than similarity or commonality is urged to be the focus of investigation, and the same applies to exclusion over belonging. I would argue that for identity to be relational, it should be made clear that it does not equate with binary oppositional. Other groups of reference are not only significant in individuals’ senses of identities; they can also show how these groupings are sometimes overlapped and have shifting boundaries.

While certain terminologies are preferable as they are believed to better describe the multifaceted, dynamic, fluid, temporal, fragmented, situational and interactional nature of the concept of identity, I would argue that this does not have to be achieved by not investigating what may be perceived as signifying the more ‘stable’ elements of identity. Also, it cannot be achieved by simply replacing old terms with new language. Rather, I call for the careful deconstruction of identities which are significant to the children of this research, drawing on the ways in which they may translate different discursive, biological and other resources in constructing and articulating their ethnic identities, which can be constituted by other identities. This deconstruction is carried out from the position that these materials and resources can potentially have an influential effect on the children’s identities but nevertheless are being created and transformed by the children, in a language that is closest to the children’s own.
Research Design and Methods

4.1 Introduction

Researching questions of race and ethnicity qualitatively with children in the home setting presented a particularly difficult set of methodological issues. This chapter focuses on the practical, epistemological and ethical considerations involved in designing and carrying out the research. It also provides a detailed account of the methods used in the collection of data, its management and analysis.

In relation to the research process, particular attention was drawn regarding children’s marginalised position in adult society, and my own position and power. Other issues were related to my own ethnicity, and the constraints of categorical thinking with ambiguous terminology in dialogues concerning concepts of race, ethnicity and culture. In order to try to counteract these, I drew upon a range of methods for understanding the children and their childhood worlds, including participant observation, interview and the use of innovative research techniques – photographs, activity sheets of board games and ranking labels, imaginative talk and storytelling with finger puppets.

This chapter opens with an explanation of the reasons for adopting an ethnographic approach with predominantly qualitative research methods. It then progresses to an overview of the characteristics of the child participants and how they were recruited, followed by a discussion of data collection, introducing the task-centred activities and other methods employed. A discussion of the research relationship is provided with a focus on the age and ethnicity issues between the participants and researcher. After discussing the management of data and its analysis, the chapter ends with a reflection on issues of research ethics and politics.
4.2 A Qualitative Ethnographic Approach

This thesis is concerned with what it is like being Chinese and a child in contemporary Britain. It sets out to examine how children may use racial and ethnic ideas to explain their own experiences, and to construct their own and others’ identities. I was interested in the processes and practices involved in the making of connectedness and differences. In identifying these, I was attempting to develop an understanding of the potentially diverse meanings of racial and ethnic issues in children’s childhood lives. There was no rigid hypothesis to be tested but a number of issues which I wanted to explore.

The design of this research therefore had to take into account two independent dimensions which together informed its overall methodological approach: doing research with children and researching racial and ethnic matters. In recent years there have been growing discussions of methodological, practical and ethical issues within the social research of children and childhood (e.g. Mandell 1991; Lewis and Lindsay 2000; Christensen and James 2000; Alderson and Morrow 2004) and of race and ethnicity (e.g. Gunaratnam 2003; Bulmer and Solomos 2004). The decision to adopt a qualitative ethnographic approach was significantly informed by particular methodological considerations within these two disciplines.

Previous chapters have already highlighted the limitation of children being seen but not heard in many studies both of Chinese children in Britain and in relation to children and race and ethnicity. This tendency to ignore the subjective experiences and concerns of children, and that their voices have not constituted a significant resource in social research, is partly due to the methodologies employed. Yet in some of the more recent ethnographic work, with its essentially qualitative focus using detailed observations and interviews with children in their natural settings, an appreciation of the complexities of issues of race, ethnicity, culture and identity in children’s lives is not always guaranteed (Connolly 1998). In these cases, it is often a question of the constraining influence of developmental perspectives of children and childhood.
The design of this research therefore reflects the recognition of children as competent social agents of knowledge and reflectivity, and also of their generally marginalised position in the adult world. I believe that a qualitative ethnographic approach was a useful way to address these appropriately and respectfully, and at the same time permit access to the data required to explore the questions outlined. Ethnography has been regarded as being one of the most valid and suitable ways to study childhood; it is useful in allowing children a more direct voice in social scientific accounts of their lives, arguably to a greater extent than it would usually be possible through experimental or survey styles of research (Prout and James 1997). To this I would add that the possibility of increasing child participants' involvement in the planning, progressing and influencing of other aspects of the research process is also desirable (Alderson and Morrow 2004).

More importantly, in exploring the subjective experiences and meanings of racial, ethnicity, culture and identity among children, I was encouraging them to speak for themselves and to share their ideas and feelings with me. Therefore, there had to be a considerable level of trust between us that would facilitate open dialogues. Through an ethnographic approach, the children and I could engage with one another on a more personal basis, developing an understanding and relationship in a setting which was alien to them. This also allowed me to be more familiar with the language styles of individual children and their everyday vocabularies. It has been argued that younger children particularly may have limited vocabulary and use different language (Boyden and Ennew 1997; Punch 2002). However, I was more concerned about developing a research process of sensitivity and respect with a recognition that, as an adult researcher, I might not have the full knowledge of children's language which may be rather unique to their peer cultures. In addition, I was aware of the potential constraints of categorical thinking of race and ethnicity (Gunaratnam 2003). Qualitative approaches allowed the child participants and me to work with and against these categories interactively.

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9 For an attempt to give children a voice in survey research and discussions of quantitative methodologies of childhood, see Qvortrup (1998, 2000) and Scott (2000).
Moreover, an examination of the children’s sense making processes and the practices of negotiating their connectedness with and differences from others meant attempting to develop a perspective ‘from within’, as far as possible (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998:10). In other words, I needed a means through which I could get closer to children’s perceptions and experiences from the point of view of the child participants. Ethnography enabled access to the occurrence of children’s verbal and non-verbal interactions both among themselves and with adults – including me as the researcher – and also the ways in which these incidents and discussions were jointly understood, negotiated and constructed within the particular context.

4.3 Accessing Children and Their Families

Before discussing the methods used in this research, an account concerning particular sampling issues would be useful in drawing attention to the characteristics of the child participants and the contexts in which the research techniques would be carried out. It is important to stress that the children and their families in this research were not intended to be representative of all Chinese children or families in Britain. Given the lack of existing information about Chinese children and families in Britain, it was tempting to try to produce detailed representative descriptions of how this particular group of individuals lived their lives. However, for the pragmatic reason of my limited resources it would have been difficult to address such a geographically dispersed population. More importantly, this research concerns the particular processes and practices of children’s everyday worlds, rather than any generalised patterns of their lives, behaviour or interaction. Therefore, the children and families in this study were intended to be illustrative rather than descriptive.

There are continuous debates regarding the use of race as a tool of analysis in social studies, arguably legitimating the reification of false abstractions of race which have no scientific basis (e.g. Miles 1989, 1993; Mason 2000). Others have discussed problems with the identification of individuals in terms of their ethnicity, which often involves creeping essentialism concerning race (see e.g. Ali 2003). In this respect, by using ‘Chinese’ as one of the sampling criteria in this research, I could
be seen as somehow categorising the children in a way that reinforces racial and ethnic concepts. This was justified and addressed in two ways: first, all the children in this study recognised themselves with, and responded to, the identity of being Chinese as stated in the research leaflet. Secondly, the temporary moments of closure in defining Chinese in recruiting the participants would be opened up again in the research process and analysis (Gunaratnam 2003). Therefore, how Chineseness was constructed and negotiated both during and beyond the research process was treated as part of the analysis. More crucially, particular attention was given to the ways that the children might assign meanings to the category of Chinese and other relevant categories. Thus I planned to develop an understanding of how children make sense of race and ethnicity.

The same principle is largely applied to the recruitment of participants in relation to the category of children. In addition, my original intention was to involve a small group of Chinese children under the age of 11, who were born in Britain. This was derived from the awareness that most of the existing literature on Chinese youth in Britain has focused on older children attending secondary school, with a mixing of those who were born in Britain and overseas. However, after talking to children in weekend Chinese language schools at the piloting stage, I realised that many of them regarded the age of 13 as marking the becoming of what they called a ‘teenager’. From this, I redefined the upper limit of the age range to 12 years old. The fact that one of the child participants in this study was not born in Britain reflected a limitation of the process of gaining access.

From April 2002, I started contacting various Chinese language schools and community, health and other organisations in the southeast of England through writing and phone calls. Among these, seven organisations agreed to put up the poster I had prepared, which contained the research information and contact details, within their premises and to spread the word. However, no responses were received through this means. Fortunately, headteachers of three Chinese language schools offered their help. A couple of them agreed to distribute the research information leaflets – one designed for children and another for parents, with reply slips, content forms and stamped addressed envelopes (see Appendix 1) – to any potential
participants. This resulted in the introduction of three families who then agreed to take part. Another headmistress presented me with the opportunity to help in the school and to approach the children, and then their parents personally. Through this, two families were recruited.

A number of researchers have commented on the difficulties they experienced in gaining access to Chinese parents (Song 1999), Chinese families (Verma et al. 1999), and ‘educated’ Chinese people (Tsow 1984) in Britain. This has been understood in terms of concerns about privacy and trust over business competition among those who had a catering business (Song 1999; Verma et al. 1999). The reasons proposed included that ‘Chinese people are reluctant to show or share their problems as they are afraid of “losing face”’ (Verma et al. 1999:132) and the researcher’s non-Chinese background (Song 1999). My experience was rather different and positive. Many of the parents, particularly the mothers of the child participants in this study, indicated that it would be ‘good’ for their children to talk to another Chinese person. I believe that my ability to speak Cantonese, the perceived Chinese identity, and perhaps being female and relatively young, could have worked to my advantage especially when first approaching the potential participants.

Overall, this study involved 11 children, of whom both parents are Chinese, from five families living in London areas. They were seven girls and four boys, aged between 6 and 12 and all, except one, were born in Britain. For the child who was not born in Britain but wanted to take part in this study, I believed that there were not sufficient reasons, either in terms of ethical or research consideration, for excluding this child as a participant. This child was born in China but settled in Britain at the age of four and therefore had been living in this country for eight years at the time of the research. The parents of this child were the only parents to speak Mandarin Chinese, whereas all other parents, including a mother from China, spoke the Chinese dialect of Cantonese. Some basic information on the child participants is presented in Table 4.1 with the pseudonyms that the children had chosen for themselves. The presentation of family units indicates the sibling groups and the fact that a large amount of fieldwork was carried out in pairs or groups among the siblings and was primarily taken place at the children’s family homes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Mother’s / Father’s Birthplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Michael (m)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Hong Kong / Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lorraine (f)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Acton (f)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Hong Kong / Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rachel (f)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>John (m)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hannah (f)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>China / Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jennifer (f)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jerry (m)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Christy (f)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>China / China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>David (m)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Hong Kong / Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kitty (f)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.4 Combining Conventional and Innovative Research Methods

A range of qualitative methods had been developed for researching the ways in which children, aged 6 to 12, make meaning of ideas of race, ethnicity and culture in relation to their everyday childhood lives. Given the multi-dimensional nature of the phenomena under consideration, the use of multiple methods aimed to help to comprehend the various dimensions and to approach the research questions in a more rounded and multifaceted ways (Mason 1996). In addition, this could increase the kinds of involvement that the child participants contributed to the research process.

The primary methods of data collection included participant observation within the home environment and occasionally other sites such as weekend Chinese language schools, task-centred activities and informal interviews with children, which were also carried out in the domestic settings. There were also unstructured talks with parents, and sometimes other family members. I spent between ten and twelve months (between summer 2002 and autumn 2003) with the children and their families, with no less than two visits per month on average. The regularity of the meetings and the length of each visit varied from family to family, and this was
planned with the children and parents according to their preferences and other practical issues. The meetings were largely spread evenly throughout the available period of time but gradually became less frequent towards the end. This pattern was important in corresponding to the need to build-up connections with the children and to maintain the familiarity of my presence in the families in the early stages and to prepare for my leaving of the field later on.

4.4.1 Participant Observation

As previously stated, this thesis has a general interest in the meanings of being Chinese and a child. I did not treat the home as a site that manifests what may be called ‘ethnic orientations’ of the children, parents or families, as some previous studies have suggested. Therefore, I did not enter into the domestic environments in search of what I subjectively believed to be Chinese, English or other cultural customs, practices or artefacts. Instead, I focused on whether the children drew upon, and in turn gave meanings to, particular elements within the physical home and the family context in discussing concepts of race, ethnicity, culture and identity. These elements were not restricted to certain practices or physical objects, but included relationships with siblings, parents or other family members.

It is important to locate the children’s identity of being a child within the familial context, one of the dimensions of the child identity as a family relationship vis-à-vis parents. In this sense, through my participation in the children’s homes, I was able to see some of the references that the children made in their talking about their home and family. Therefore, the purpose of observing children’s interactions with siblings and parents, and sometimes other relatives, in its ordinary setting was to assist me to contextualise the children’s accounts, rather than to provide me with data as such. Due to this particular nature of observation, I was not drawn into making sure that I had every detail recorded after each visit – though observation and reflection was kept in my research diary for potential use in analysis at a later stage. Instead, I paid more attention to my role within the households and my relationships with the children and their families, and reflected on how these might have affected the interviews and dialogues between us.
4.4.2 Task-centred Activities and Interviews

Informal and unstructured talks with both the children and their parents took place on every occasion I met the families. The topics of these conversations largely evolved by themselves, often deriving from the interests or concerns of the children and parents. Some of these conversations and all interviews with children were recorded. The children’s general fondness of the voice-recorder meant that I often found myself being requested to start recording as soon as I arrived at the house. Rather importantly, I took these incidents as the opportunity to discuss the research, particularly in relation to renewing the consent with the children and their parents.

The use of tasks and activities has been common in research with children (see e.g. Christensen and James 2000a; O’Kane 2000; Punch 2002a), many of which were inspired by those often used in participatory rural appraisal. Four task-centred activities were designed and employed during the research process. Although each activity was designed specifically for addressing particular aspects of the research questions, they all shared a number of advantages and limitations. These techniques provided a way for the participants, in this case children to concretise what are often abstract ideas, to encourage them to communicate their views more freely, and to become ‘reflexive interpreters’ of their own experiences and perspectives (Christensen and James 2000b:5; see also James, Jenks and Prout 1998; O’Kane 2000; Punch 2002).

A limitation of these methods could be that responses are often found to be brief and cursory and required further development (see also Punch 2002). Therefore, in this research, information gathered from the task-centred activities was treated as detection of issues identified by children as significant to them, and formed the focus of the interviews to follow. This was also an important and necessary measure to eliminate the danger of misinterpreting or over-interpreting what the children presented in the tasks. In addition, the visual elements of these techniques meant that questions would arise in a more spontaneous manner than from rigid predefined questions, and therefore interviews could take a more interactive and informal generic form (see also Ali 2003).
Photography

Each of the children was given a disposable camera of twenty-four exposures to produce images of their choice. The aim of this activity, as I explained to the children, was to help me to get some ideas about their everyday lives. One of the benefits of this was that the children took photographs of objects, people or scenes which I might not have direct access to. More importantly, any pictures of people, including those capturing the children's own images or others', had the potential to prompt the children to talk about their embodied sense of selves. The ways that the children read their own and others' bodily features were significant in developing an understanding of their perceptions about race, ethnicity and identities.

The cameras were later collected from the children and the films developed. The photographs were then given to the children who were invited to talk or write a brief description about the photographs. Prompts, if necessary, included asking the children if they liked or disliked certain pictures and the reasons, and about the content of the photographs, such as the kind of relationships they had with the people depicted or how they felt about the places or activities involved. The photographs themselves, just as the accounts given by the children about them, provided a rich sense of the children's social and family relationships, situations, personal characteristics and other important information. Yet in spite of the potential illustrating and contextualising values, the photographs were not shown but only presented through the verbal exchanges about them in this thesis. This was due to the issue of confidentiality; by displaying the photographs, it would significantly increase the likelihood of the children and the families, and also other people in the photographs, being identified. This was despite the permission given by all children and parents for me to reproduce the pictures.

Board Game Completion

The 'At Home' and 'At School' worksheets (Figure 4.1 and 4.2) were designed to produce a set of basic information about how children perceive and experience being a child in the settings of home and school. It aimed to facilitate children in thinking about their relationships with adults, and the identities and roles that they perform within the two contexts.
The children were asked to consider the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour at home and school, and to write down these behaviours in the spaces indicated moving upward and downward respectively. By encouraging the children that both normative and experiential events could be included, it aimed to widen the scope of investigation to contain discussions about their experiences of generational issues and perceptions of the social characteristics and status of childhood and adulthood.
I was concerned that some children might not like writing or that some children might feel restricted by having to write about their ideas. Therefore, all the children were offered the option to talk about their ideas, rather than actually writing them down. None of the children chose to do so. In addition, the process of carrying out this activity itself could help to facilitate communication between the children and me. While the children were filling in the activity sheets, they also described and explained their experiences and ideas about what lives were like at home and school in great detail. Discussions centred on the completed products, which the children and I sometimes played together, providing another prompt for subjective accounts of their childhood experiences.

**Imaginative Talk and Ranking Task**

The 'Hello Alien' activity was designed to explore children’s different senses of what they are. The first part of the activity involved inviting children to think of a situation in which they were talking to an alien over the phone, and having to introduce themselves to the alien. The children could decide how they wanted to perform the task. A voice recorder and a camcorder were offered to the children if they thought fit – though none chose to use the latter.

This activity was inspired by the Twenty Statement Test of Hutnik’s (1991) and Modood and colleagues’ (1997) survey study, both concerned with investigating individuals’ ethnic identities. The designed tool for this study has a more balanced approach in the sense that while it is not completely context-free, it does not restrict children to considering their identities with limited predefined facets. The idea of talking to an alien on the phone attempted to encourage children to reflect on their self identities more freely within a context which is independent of particular social structures and pre-existing relationships, and with someone whose gender, age and other personal attributes are more or less open to the children’s own interpretation.

The second part of the activity aimed to explore children’s views of their different identifications and their relative importance. The alien theme was carried forward and the children were asked to produce an information sheet about themselves to be
sent to the alien. A paper containing pictures setting out the alien theme was given to the children (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3** ‘Hello Alien’ activity sheet

A list of possible identities was carefully prepared which drew upon interviews with children at the pilot stage and consultation with citizenship education resources. These were presented as self-adhesive labels. The labels were in two forms: the first contained different options, such as ‘I am a girl/boy’ and ‘I am British/Chinese/English/Others’, requiring the children to pick an answer. But the labels were largely of the second type which required the children filling in answers in the space provided, such as ‘I was born in’, ‘Age’, ‘Music I like’, ‘Clothes I like’,
‘Things I can do’, ‘Where my parents were born’, ‘Family’, ‘Religion’, ‘Height and weight’ and ‘Colour of hair, eyes, skin’. There were altogether thirty-two labels (see Appendix 2) with some blank ones for children to add anything they wanted.

The children were asked to stick the labels onto the worksheet provided according to how important they felt the factors were to who they are; the most important ones on the top of the page and the least important at the bottom (Figure 4.3). It was made clear to the children that they did not have to use all the labels, but only the ones that they felt significant in telling who they are. This task may run the danger of encouraging the children to think of identity in a limited and categorical way and as something fixed. However, this temporary closure was opened up again in the interviews with discussions around the meanings of the children’s sense of self, how they experienced and understood these identities in different situations and at different stages of their lives.

**Storytelling**

The relative significance of the different aspects involving in the children’s sense of identities was supplemented in another activity, in which forty finger puppets representing four extended family units were used. A sample of these finger puppets is presented in Figure 4.4.
The aims of this activity were to interrogate the embodied nature of the children’s understandings and experiences of identities, how they may read visual characteristics in constructing others’ identities, and to investigate if children would draw on bodily and visible features to form connection and differentiation among people. The use of ‘fictional’ materials, as compared with, for example, using images of ‘real’ people, could foster a wider space for children to reflect on their experiences and perceptions. The range of social characteristics of the puppets in terms of age, occupation, gender and ethnicity could expand this space and therefore the range of topics for further discussions.

The children were invited to talk about the puppets, which were not given to them in any kind of grouping, and to use them to create stories. These stories could be audio-recorded or video-recorded according to the children’s preferences. The fact that the majority of the children chose to have their stories audio-recorded meant that I had the opportunity to ask them to assign names and descriptions to the puppets in order to keep an accurate record of the puppets involved. Through these accounts, I could learn more about the children’s use of terminologies and language in describing people, groups and social characteristics. The language used could then be adopted in forming my questions in our discussions. These exchanges and interviews about the puppets and the stories produced by the children enabled an examination of the meanings of ethnicity, gender and other social characteristics among the children, both on perceptional and experiential levels.

The potential problem of this approach was that it might encourage stereotyping of, for instance, racial or gender images. However, attention was given to what these ideas might mean in the children’s experiences and interactions with others, and how they put these ideas into practice. The fact that the puppets are designed by adults but targeted at children provided an interesting opportunity to compare the adult perception of racial, ethnic and cultural issues – as these puppets are designed for multicultural education – with what children actually see in and through the puppets. The potentially wide-ranging themes of the stories that the children produced could help to develop an understanding of the children’s interests and concerns.
4.5 Research Relationships

The ways that the children responded to the research activities and how effective these tasks were in addressing the research questions was determined to a certain extent by the kind of relationship I had with the children. Much has been discussed about how adult researchers could build rapport and facilitate communication with child participants. While some have suggested the different kinds of observer role that adult researchers could adopt (e.g. Fine and Sandstorm 1988; Mandell 1991; Corsaro 1997), others have argued for the use of task-based activities (e.g. Hill 1997; Christensen and James 2000a; Punch 2002). The underlying concern was the alteration of the unequal power relations so that researchers could get access to children's worlds (Morrow and Richards 1996).

My interaction with the children was not guided by a belief in Mandell's 'least-adult role' which claims that 'all aspects of adult superiority except physical differences can be cast aside, allowing the researcher entrée to the children's world as an active, fully participating member' (1991:39). Neither did I think that the use of task-centred activities in this research would automatically form some kind of common ground between the children and me, and therefore enrich our relationship. The principle underlying my conduct in the field and my relationships with both the children and their parents was based on respect; in particular to have respect for children as people, for their individuality and perspectives, and for any rules or customs that the children, and also their parents and family as a whole might have.

Therefore, I did not reject when a few of the children liked to sit on my lap occasionally, signifying their position as a child and mine as an adult. I also accepted that I might be held responsible if anything happened to the children when I was with alone them. At the same time, I did not join in all of the children's activities; I did not try to volunteer to be in any of the boys' play-fighting, nor attempt to skate on one of the child participant's mini-size skateboard. However, this does not mean that I did not enjoy playing the game 'It' with the children, watching 'Tom and Jerry' or drawing pictures with them. However, a number of children, mostly girls asked me about my 'future wedding' and if they could be the maid of
honour while a couple of the boys particularly enjoyed exchanging our knowledge about cars and driving. These indicated that I was clearly an adult to the children, but an adult who they could and would talk to and with whom they seemed to enjoy spending time. It was through all these different ways and our differences and commonalities that the children and I created our relationships.

In some respects, it seemed that it was precisely my adultness and the general segregation between children and adults which made our ‘friendships’ – as many of the children referred me to as a ‘friend’ on different occasions – more special. I believe that the age and the related social status differences between the children and myself should not be seen as an obstacle in the research process. Rather, it was something that the children and I had to work on and which I intended to investigate from the children’s perspectives. In relation to the debates about matching the identity of the researcher and participants, while an age-matching between the children and me as an adult researcher would never be possible, unless children are involved as researchers (see e.g. Alderson 2000; France 2000; Kellett et al. 2004), our Chinese ethnicity might be seen by some as somehow matched. Yet this could not be taken as something that would guarantee to bring me closer to the children.

In entering into the field with an open and curious mind to explore what Chineseness means to the children and the ways that the children construct ethnicities, I was always consciously reflecting on the children’s and my own ethnicities. Quite often, we displayed our shared knowledge about Hong Kong, certain Chinese, Cantonese or Mandarin words, or particular Chinese eating or shopping places in Britain. I had no ready answers to whether these exchanges were a performance of our Chinese identities, or if they bridged a potential ethnic gap between the children and me. When Hannah, a ten-year-old girl in this study, said to me that I was ‘Chinese and part of British, kind of, a little bit’ as against her ‘half Chinese and English’ identity, it confirmed my belief in questioning the ethnic matching strategies much debated in some disciplines of social studies. Simply put, I did not think that in any interview
situation there could ever be a total and unproblematic ethnic match (see also Parker and Song 1995; Lamont 2004).

I believe that the range of social characteristics which different children perceived me as possessing are all part of the ‘whole matrix of social and interactional relations within the research’ (Gunaratnam 2003:104). These include, in the children’s words, ethnicity (‘Chinese and part British’), age (‘18 plus 6’), sexuality (‘having a boyfriend’), religion (‘don’t eat pork’), the fact that I ‘go to school’, live at home with parents, and my parents do not have a takeaway shop, as one child asked. The children and I could create differences and commonalities between us, which might or might not affect the way we interacted with one another at a particular point of the research process, and the research relationships in general. Whereas I saw respect could enable honest and positive relationships between the children and me, I regarded reflexivity as crucial to an understanding of the complexity in the research process and in the data collected.

4.6 Managing and Analysing Data

It should be evident that in this thesis the information gathered, which I considered as data, was largely in the form of verbal narratives. The data was about how the children talked about their lived experiences and construction of identities. These accounts were constructed and produced through means of discussions about their perceptions of themselves and others, and conversation about their reflection of their home and school lives and relationships.

All interviews with the children were transcribed word for word, keeping the occasional Chinese, Cantonese or Mandarin vocabularies in the texts with English translation and explanation as fully as possible. Making verbatim transcripts and the presentation of extensive abstracts in their original form was important. It could help to preserve the lyricism and speech style of individual children. With the recognition

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10 For a detailed discussion about ethnic matching strategies in qualitative interviews, see chapter 4 in Gunaratnam (2003).
of the ethnomethodological tension between the written and the spoken world (see e.g. Ifekwunigwe 2001), it was hoped that the children's personal characteristics and individualism could be more clearly reflected in the texts. Transcribing the interviews in full myself and listening to them more than once enabled me to reflect on the responses on an on-going basis, maintaining a degree of openness in the direction of the research. This also allowed me to identify the areas which needed further information as I returned to the field.

While the transcribed interviews were transferred to the Atlas.ti computer package for coding and analysis, materials produced in the task-centred activities and fieldnotes of observation and dialogue were evaluated systematically and manually. The analysis of the children’s narratives took an approach which consults discourse analysis (see e.g. Burman and Parker 1993) and narrative research (see e.g. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilmar 1998). In developing ‘literal’, ‘interpretive’ and ‘reflexive’ readings of the transcriptions (Mason 1996:108), I identified the themes raised in the interview discussions, which were then coded.

Evaluation of the materials of the activities and fieldnotes assisted me in understanding individual children’s personal and social characteristics and home situations. I was therefore able to be sensitive to the contexts of the children’s voices and meanings, and reflect on the connections between theoretical arguments and data. It was through engaging in this ‘interactive process’ of reading the data and in the process of ‘circle of understanding’ that I could refine and expand the coding (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilmar 1998:10; also Strauss and Corbin 1998), and thus develop a more structured and thorough analysis.

4.7 Research Ethics and Politics

In this final part of the chapter, the question of the validity of the analysis will be discussed in relation to issues of research politics and ethics which inform the wider context of researching race and ethnicity with children. Both childhood and race and ethnicity research ethics stress the need for researchers to consider the power
imbalances between the researcher and the researched, in particular the presentational power of the researcher over the participants. Within this research context, this would mean practices and procedures that could ensure the processes of analysing and writing, the transformation of the words of the children into data would remain true to their intended meanings.

There has been much sociological debate around the epistemological and methodological implications of the insider and outsider position as a researcher (Merton 1972). As I suggested earlier, neither myself nor the children would ever have a fixed and singular identity during the research process. Rather, the children and I both had ‘multiple positionings and (dis)identifications’ which shifted during the course of interviews and interactions (Song and Parker 1995:254). Therefore, the question is not about whether I share sufficient similarities with the child participants to claim the authority to speak for them and the ‘truth’ (see also Gunaratnam 2003). Instead, I try to de-centre my own voice – though it would only be permitted to a certain extent – and to present more inclusively the textualised voices of the children and dialogues between us with a recognition of the limitation of texts.

Moreover, in admitting that what I claim to know about the children was partial and situated (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Haraway 1988; Harding 1991), I attempted to document the different aspects that made up the overall context of the analysis and presentation of the children. This does not merely mean a description of what I had observed in the families and what I thought I had learnt about the children, but also an open discussion of my own political positions in relation to, for example, children or ethnicity, and of any personal and emotional connections felt with the children and their narratives. In doing so, I aim to minimise the possibility of falling into the ‘dangers of proximity’ of interpretations (Gunaratnam 2003:100), to prevent the element of exploitation implicit in mixing up my own personal history with the very different experiences of the children (see also Reay 1996).

To develop non-hierarchical, trusting and reciprocal research relationships should be desirable in any qualitative research. In the hope of building a relationship with the
children and their families based on respect and openness, I was prepared to invest myself emotionally in the interviews and to answer any personal questions (Oakley 1981). In fact, the question of power relations is among the many ethical issues which I had to consider carefully prior to and throughout the fieldwork, and also during the writing up process. Various sources have been consulted, including the ethical guidelines for social researchers (British Sociological Association 2002), particularly those working with children (Alderson 1995, 2000; Alderson and Morrow 2004), also discussion with other researchers, and reading about childhood researchers who had experienced ethical dilemmas (e.g. Mayall 1994; Lewis and Lindsay 2000).

Despite these efforts, I found that careful planning and professional advice could only prepare me to some extent for the ethical dilemmas I might experience once I had entered into the somewhat private domain of the children’s and the parents’ lives and the complex relationships we developed. Having read about how the gatekeepers, the parents, could be suspicious about a researcher as mentioned previously (see also Ali 2003), I rehearsed what I would say to the parents to explain the research, going through all the details as stated on the research information leaflets. However, many of the parents seemed too readily to agree to their children’s participation in the research. I was pleased that responses were positive and things could move on smoothly, yet I was also worried that the parents might not have fully understood what was involved – visits to their family homes, interacting with their children on a regular basis, for almost a year, which was a rather long period of time. The parents’ friendly and welcoming attitudes persisted throughout the fieldwork, as well as their tendency of not asking me many questions about the research. It was therefore my responsibility to make sure that both the children and parents were fully informed and consented about the research.

Soon after the first few meetings, all the parents trusted me to be alone with their children to different degrees. While a few of the parents would like to pop in to where we were and see what we were up to from time to time, others would just leave me with the children for hours without ‘checking on’ us once, and on various occasions, the parents were simply not present in the house. The parents’ trusting
behaviour certainly gave the children and me more space and time to interact and develop our relationships. I believe the home setting partly contributed to the reason for this; the parents did not have to worry too much about the potential ‘dangers’ of the street. From this, the children and I had developed some kind of mutual trust and appeared to have a genuine fondness for each other. My presence in the family had also become a kind of routine that the children, the parents and I seemed to accept.

But herein lie the dilemmas which were not uncommon in other researchers’ ethnographic experiences (see e.g. Alexander 2000; Ali 2003). I believe my position as a researcher had been shifting with other positions, such as in some children’s words, a ‘friend’, ‘big sister’ or ‘babysitter’. The blurred boundary that I felt between a research relationship and friendship with both the children and the parents forced me to reflect on some situations from an ethical point of view. My contact details had been given to the children and parents on the research information leaflets so that any questions regarding the study could be answered. Yet I was contacted by some children and parents for a simple ‘hello’, a chat or sometimes confessions about personal stories. The children could be telling me things about their families, just as some parents would talk to me about their children. Could these, and what I had been told and observed when I was invited for dinner, or going to the park or badminton with the families, be justified as legitimate data? The problems derived from this kind of ‘research-friendship’ (Ali 2003:27) could not be solved simply by renewing the consents given by the children and the parents regularly.

On the contrary, issues of confidentiality were somehow easier to tackle. I often left the decision to the children, respecting their competence and preferences. The children decided if they wanted to talk to me alone or with any of their siblings or parents. While the majority of the children preferred to be interviewed with their siblings, their parents joined in on some occasions without the children’s objection. When the children wanted to tell me ‘secrets’ which they did not want other ‘people’ to know, they seemed to be able to find the place and time to do so. In these situations, I found myself having to decide if it would be appropriate to ask the children if they wanted me to write about what they had told me. Often, these were
secrets that the children wanted to keep from their parents, sometimes siblings, but were given me permission to use in my ‘homework’ or ‘project’, as the children and I came to call the research. Moreover, many of the parents had told me ‘issues’ about their children and would sometimes want me to talk to the children accordingly. In these situations, I often felt a sense of guilt about my refusal to take on the ‘counsellor’ or ‘investigator’ role. As a few of these parents explicitly said that it would make ‘useful’ data for my research, this intensified the sense of uneasiness I experienced.

Clearly, the children, the parents and I were all negotiating our relationships in terms of reciprocity. In one respect, I felt that we all took the opportunity to just talk to each other, sharing our experiences. The children and I exchanged our stories about, for example, racism, parents’ favouritism or other ‘difficult’ behaviour of parents, and were being sympathetic to one another. At the same time, I tried my best to be a sensitive listener while the mothers were telling me about their experiences, such as about divorce or losing a parent; yet neither could I offer them much relevant personal stories or help of any kind. On the immediate level, I would always try to give something to both the children and parents, struggling not to conflict the relationships with either.

However, ultimately I would leave the lives of the children and parents, as a researcher following the professional norm of practice, irrespective of what some of the children and parents might have wanted. While I was transcribing the children’s words and writing about them, I lived with a conscious thought that my best intention of getting their voices heard might be of limited implication, and it could mean little to the children themselves. While I was presenting their lives to the readers, hoping that it might make a difference to them, I had to bear the fact that a year since the fieldwork had completed, I still got phone calls and emails from some of the children and parents wanting to maintain what was regarded as friendship.

Words from a fellow childhood researcher who suggested, ‘the children will forget about you before you know it, they are used to adults coming and going in their lives’, were of little comfort. It struck me that I could have left some children feeling
in their usual marginalised position and status in the adult world. My failure in balancing a relationship of trust and a relationship that was emotionally too involved meant that no matter how hard I have tried to minimise the power imbalances in different aspects of the research process, the empowerment of the children would be temporary and some of the potential benefits for the children are yet to be confirmed. With such sentiment at heart, I hope I would be able to make good use of the research findings for the benefit of the children in the future, and on a more immediate level, I hope I could present the children faithfully in the following chapters which would be read with an open mind.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the overall research design from its inception through to completion and beyond. The qualitative ethnographic approach was developed taking into account the nature of the research questions with a general aim to interrogate the meanings of concepts of race and ethnicity in children’s childhood lives. The research design also emerged with a recognition of the position of children’s generally marginalised status in both adult society and in social studies, where their voices have not always been heard. The research approach therefore aims to bring me, an adult researcher closer to the child participants’ worlds.

The innovative methods designed for this research in addressing the different aspects of the research questions, including photographs, activity sheets, imaginative talk and finger puppets, have been explored in depth. The materials and procedures involved, and the advantages and limitations of these techniques have also been discussed. It was through these methods that children’s narratives of their subjective experiences and perspectives were generated. These accounts were contextualised by observations carried out with the families and also other conversations with children and their parents.

A brief discussion has been provided to outline the management and analysis of the data. Through an approach consulted by discourse analysis and narrative research,
the interviews were evaluated on different levels. Themes were then identified, with reflections of the issues within the wider context and relevant theoretical arguments which became the foundation of analysis.

The chapter has concluded with a detailed reflection on research ethics and politics which centre on the blurred boundary between the research relationship and friendship. I have argued that a trusting relationship with research participants should be built on mutual respect and embrace both commonalities and differences between the researcher and the researched. Whereas a positive relationship could be beneficial in relation to access, communication and other research aspects, a relationship with excessive emotional attachment could put the 'harm's and benefits' of the research in doubt. From the next chapter on, I will present the children's narratives, which I hope will be faithful, but also knowing that it is only partial and situated.
‘My friend Rosie’ by Rachel aged 7
5

Making Sense of the Others:
Identity and Difference

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the ways in which the children use different concepts to classify and assign identities to individuals and groups, and attempts to establish the meanings of racial and ethnic matters in children’s worlds. These issues will be explored through the children’s commentary on the finger puppets, and the stories that the children told through them. Children show that they often use visual, both bodily and non-bodily, characteristics as markers of identity and difference, but these differences do not translate strictly into the simplistic understandings of concepts of race and ethnicity representing fixity and mutability respectively. Far from being determining, the identities and differences are employed by children only as part of their negotiation of peer relationships, activating their own sense of individual and group identification.

I would argue that if a better comprehension of racial and ethnic issues in children’s everyday experiences is to be achieved, an understanding of the complexity and fluidity of children’s peer worlds, their relationships, values and concerns cannot be ignored. It is found that the children utilise similar racial and ethnic discourses to those of the wider societal context, with their own strategies and creativity and largely among themselves in their peer groups. The children are also found to be reflexive in relation to their parents’ and siblings’ racist attitudes, as well as regarding their own perceptions of racism. Through these, an understanding of the relative and partial significance of racial and ethnic matters in the children’s complex social worlds began to emerge.
5.2 Identifying Categories of Identity

The children were presented with all the forty finger puppets to create stories in no set grouping, and this led to a discussion into the area of racial and ethnic identities among people and groups. Upon seeing these materials, different puppets with particular visual features caught the eyes of individual children. For example, a number of the children, all of them girls exclaimed, ‘how cute!’ or ‘so sweet!’ while picking up the little ‘baby’ puppets. Some of the boys mentioned their experiences of kungfu or martial arts as they saw the character in a karate [a martial art originating in Japan] costume.

These initial reactions were encouraging in the sense that the material provided did seem to be able to attract the children’s interests and facilitate the children to talk about their ideas and experiences. As they continued to examine the puppets and were planning how to use them to produce stories, I took the opportunity to ask the children about what they thought of the puppets and the names to be given. The latter was necessary due to the practical issue that the stories would be audio-recorded, but it would also help to clarify the children’s language and vocabulary choices which could be adopted in the discussion to follow.

5.2.1 ‘Black’ and ‘African’

The fact that the puppets are not real people meant that the children could merely identify them based on visible features. The children were therefore being prompted to give their generalised views of people and groups. Given that the puppets represent characteristics other than those of racial and ethnic nature, such as age, gender or occupation, the children were not encouraged into stereotypical and categorical thinking of only race and ethnicity. However, on a superficial level, the children largely chose to identify the puppets along the lines of racial and ethnic concepts. The term ‘black’ was assigned by almost all of the children to describe the characters with the relatively darkest colour, with two using ‘African’. The identity of black is often regarded as a racialised category of skin colour. Yet the following exchange with David E (8) shows what constitutes blackness is often ambiguous:
Figure 5.1 Puppets identified as ‘black’

Daisy\textsuperscript{11}: Um, how about that, what would you call him?
David: He’s black, all of these are black [\textit{picking up some puppets, Figure 5.1}] and he, um, she as well [\textit{pointing to a puppet, far right in Figure 5.1}].
Daisy: Yeah?
David: Oh, no! She’s Chinese [\textit{sarcastically}]! What do you think!
Daisy: Right.
David: Black, black, black! You see that?

My first response to David, calling certain puppets black, was not meant to be of a questioning nature, but it was apparently taken as so. This generated a rather interesting reaction from David, who suggested Chinese as a category that is supposedly in contrast to black. Clearly, David assumed both black and Chinese as a straightforward concept, and that I should share this knowledge. I believe that a large part of David’s use of Chinese as a reference was because of my, if not our, Chinese positioning. However, Chinese is not a category that is always associated with skin colour. Therefore, David’s comments forced me reflect on what I saw in the puppets; perhaps there is more than just the colour of the skin to the identity of black that we usually speak of. David’s sarcastic attitude on this matter made me wary of probing further on this particular occasion. Yet some other children’s comments did touch on issues about hair type and to a lesser extent clothes, along with the ‘dark’ skin of these puppets.

\textsuperscript{11} My English name Daisy was the name that the children knew me as but never used within the present academic institution.
5.2.2 ‘Chinese’ and ‘English’

Another identity that the children assigned to some of the puppets was ‘English’ (Figure 5.2); this was the only term that the children used at the initial stage. Many of the children explicitly talked about the ‘blonde hair’, ‘ginger hair’, ‘green eyes’ or ‘blue eyes’ of the characters, providing more hints about what they saw in these puppets. For these children, these bodily features are significant markers of Englishness. Interestingly, these particular characteristics of hair and eye colour identified by the children are the very elements that constitute the adjectival term for white people in the Chinese language. Originating from ancient China, white people have been described as being hung so luk ngaan [reddish beard/hair green eyes]. It is generally believed that this, along with their perceived fair skin – and also their alleged barbaric behaviour during their invasion of China – had led to white people being called gwai [in Cantonese, or Mandarin gui], meaning ghost or devil, in Chinese common discourse. This is a term referred to by some children and parents at times, which will be seen in some of the abstracts shown later.

None of the children called these particular puppets by the name ‘white’, and neither did they make any reference to ideas of skin colour. Among these ‘English’ puppets and those largely referred to as ‘Chinese’ and ‘Indian’ by the children, the skin was not an issue that the children took an interest in or commented on. The skin colour of these characters was not invisible to the children in the literal sense; rather it seemed to be something taken for granted as being within the normative standards. Moreover, there were a couple of puppets which many of the children felt could fit
into both the Chinese and English (Figure 5.3) or Chinese and Indian groups (Figure 5.4). These cases suggest that a degree of ambiguity or flexibility could be embedded in the skin or hair and eye colour and possibly other bodily features, which may not mark the characters as strictly belonging to just one particular group.

Figure 5.3 Puppets identified as either ‘Chinese’ or ‘English’

Figure 5.4 Puppets identified as either ‘Chinese’ or ‘Indian’

It would be inappropriate to assume that the children’s efforts to fit ‘things’ into categories could be translated into the ways they perceive people in practice. Yet it is equally important to recognise the link between ways of sorting the puppets and the children’s experientially based perceptions of individuals and groups in relation to bodily markers. In the next abstract it can be seen how Christy D (12) commented on some puppets by drawing on her careful everyday observations and understandings of people:
Daisy: What would you call her \( \text{[the puppet on the right in Figure 5.5]} \)?

Christy: Um, Indian maybe. My friend’s got a nose like this. Not like this but it just reminds me of it. It goes like, a bit weird. It’s not like mine. It’s a Chinese friend but she doesn’t have a Chinese nose. Chinese people, their noses go like, I mean like it’s really flat, but hers, there’s a big bump here \( \text{[pointing at the bridge of her nose]} \), and she really doesn’t like that but it’s ok, I think, but she’s always saying she wants to get rid of that bit.

Daisy: So, you think that looks a bit like your friend’s nose?

Christy: Um, not really, it’s just that some Indian have quite big noses, like bigger noses than ours. So, she \( \text{[the puppet]} \) looks more like Indian and maybe, um, he’s \( \text{[the puppet on the left in Figure 5.5]} \) Chinese? Because his nose is wide, the bottom bit. When your nose is flat, it tends to be wider at the bottom, like not pointy like English people’s noses.

In working out the identities of the puppets, Christy drew upon the image she had about the groups of Chinese, English and Indian. Rather specifically, Christy put forward an association between nose types and these groups. Accordingly, while Chinese have ‘flat’ noses, English people have ‘pointy’ noses and some Indian people have ‘bigger’ noses. Christy’s account illustrates that the bodily features which can be associated with particular groups can only take meanings in relation to one another. Therefore, the opposing property of the nose types identified represents precisely the differentiation separating these groups.

Moreover, it is evident that individual and group identity is linked to, but not determined by, a particular bodily feature. Christy claimed that her friend ‘doesn’t have a Chinese nose’ but one that resembles an Indian’s ‘bigger nose’, yet she is nonetheless regarded by Christy as a ‘Chinese’ friend. This means that there must be
something else that makes Christy’s friend Chinese. This example indicates that identity assignment and group construction are subject to both negotiation and fixation.

5.2.3 ‘Indian’, ‘Muslim’ and Others

Another similar illustration of the dual forces of mobility and fixity in the children’s construction of identities is in relation to the puppets with a ‘red dot’, a bindi on the forehead (Figure 5.6). Many of the children assigned these characters with an ‘Indian’ identity unanimously and confidently. These puppets in fact share many of the bodily features with the characters that the children called ‘Chinese’, such as eye and hair colour. However, these potential markers of identity are disregarded by the children; they are being undermined by the bindi which is read by the children as a signifier of Indianness. A number of children relate the bindi to ‘religion’ whereas others believe it is simply something that Indian people have. The children show that what is commonly regarded as a cultural element is essentialised and naturalised in attributing an identity to others, while physicality is relatively mobile in the process. It works the same way in relation to the puppet with a turban (Figure 5.6).

![Figure 5.6 Indianness: bindi and turban](image)

The complexity of the children’s identity assigning practices is further exemplified in the next exchange among siblings Hannah C (10), Jennifer C (11) and Jerry C (12). The conversation began with Jennifer displaying her interest and ideas about a puppet with a hijab and another with a sari (Figure 5.7):
Jennifer: I think they’re [puppets in Figure 5.7] with those desert men.
Hannah: I saw it on TV. They live in the desert. They have camels and they wear this thing on their heads. They’re a bit like those ah cha\textsuperscript{12} [Indian].
Jennifer: Like a cloth around their heads.
Jerry: I want to fight in the war. I’m going to get a gun and kill Saddam!
Hannah: Maybe in a hundred years time.
Jerry: My teacher told us some Chinese fight in the war too.
Jennifer: I’m going to hide under the duvet. This is just scary. Those people are really bad.
Jerry: That’s why I’m going to kill them!
Hannah: I know, I know! I think they’re called um, that religion, um, what, what/
Jerry: /Muslim.
Hannah: Yeah, yeah, I think so.
Jerry: They have a book like bible but it’s called something different.
Jennifer: They have a mat for praying and they pray to where god is.
Daisy: How do you know all these?
Jennifer: We learned it in R.E. [Religious Education].

A number of observations could be made about this extraordinary exchange. What the children were doing was pulling all the information that they had gathered from different sources – which included television, teachers’ accounts and religious education lessons – in constructing concepts of different individuals. The children

\textsuperscript{12} Ah cha is a Cantonese term used commonly in Hong Kong to loosely refer to South Asian people. Possibly, its origin dates to the 1940s when many Indian people, especially Sikh, were employed by the British colonial government to work in the Hong Kong police force. There is no reliable source of how the term had been developed but a number of speculations have been put forward such as names of a ‘tra’ sound are common among Indian people, or ‘good’ or ‘yes’ in Hindi [achcha] sounds like ‘ah cha’. Poon (2005) argues that the correct origin of the term comes from the Hindi word ‘acharya’ meaning teachers or intellectuals.
regarded all the named individuals as belonging to one group, and the specific term that they came up with and agreed on was ‘Muslim’. The children hinted at the general physicality of individuals of this particular group, resembling something ‘a bit like ah cha’, a term used by the children interchangeably with the term Indian in English. However, it is evident that the children also drew upon other cultural aspects in describing this group, such as the way they dress, that is wearing ‘cloth around their heads’, their lifestyle which involve living in the desert with camels, and their religious practices to ‘pray’ on a ‘mat’ facing ‘where god is’.

I should stress that this particular exchange has to be understood against the background of the 2003 invasion of Iraq; the interview took place about a week before the beginning of the invasion. Jerry was clearly subscribing to the position of being a Chinese male with the potential to be qualified to ‘fight in the war’ within the wider adult discourse which he learnt from school. Yet Jerry’s seemingly grown-up and macho act in relation to ‘gun’ and ‘killing’ was quickly knocked down by Hannah. As Hannah argued, Jerry’s ambition may happen ‘in a hundred years time’. The negative images of the former Iraqi ruler Sadaam Hussein and ‘those people’ that are ‘really bad’ seems to reflect a degree of Islamaphobia which has been increasingly felt in wider society.

Certainly, the children are constantly presented with a range of information about individuals and groups to which values are sometimes attached. The children therefore have to try to make sense of and make use of all the information in their own way. In this case, it appears that the children’s ideas of Muslims are not fixed as something strictly negative or positive. Nonetheless, the positioning of the group of Muslims as the others is evident. It is interesting how my own Muslim identity had largely been excluded from this more general othering discourse of Muslims. The children were rather excited when they first found out that I am a Muslim and were keen to ask me questions about it. This happened some time prior to this interview during Ramadan when I was fasting while visiting the children. Yet it simply did not occur to the children I am ‘one of them’. This brings back the question of visible markers of identity, referring not only to bodily features but also perhaps the *hijab* and *sari* to which the children assign significance as a marker of the Muslim identity.
5.3 Constructing Meanings of Identity and Difference

After getting to know more about how the children identify individuals and groups using various visual clues, it was important to explore further the meanings of these identities in relation to the children's interactions and relationships. These issues are addressed through the stories that the children created using the puppets, the related interviews, along with other discussions.

5.3.1 Significance and Complexity of Peer Relationships

The schools that the children attended are all multiethnic to varying degrees, reflecting the larger composition of the local areas in which the children lived. It was found that school is a central site within which the children have direct personal experiences of other people, perhaps largely children, of various ethnic backgrounds on a day to day basis. In all the schools of the children, multiethnic literally means white children being the numerical majority and non-white children being in the minority. The children's awareness of other children's ethnic and national backgrounds can be seen to be reflected in the following account of Acton B (6) and Rachel B (7). I was talking to Acton and Rachel's mother, Mrs B, about the children's school:

Daisy: Are there any Chinese in their school? [T]\(^{13}\)

Mrs B: I don't think so. [T]

Rachel: No. We're the only two in our school but there're two Japanese boys.

Acton: I know them. Japanese people wear funny shoes [presumably geta\(^{14}\)]. When they walk, it makes loud noise, *kok, kok, kok, kok*.

Daisy: They wear those shoes to school? [jokily]

Acton: No! [laughs]

The way that I used the term Chinese in the question intended no more than the everyday usage, referring largely to someone's parentage. This was also how it was

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\(^{13}\) [T] indicates a translated transcription from either Cantonese or Mandarin Chinese to English.

\(^{14}\) Geta are clogs held on with cloth thongs attached in the front centre of the clog. Today, few people wear them except when dressing up in *kimono* for special occasions. Geta have been replaced by shoes. See the Japanese Forum at [http://www.tjf.or.jp/eng/ge/ge02kutsu.htm](http://www.tjf.or.jp/eng/ge/ge02kutsu.htm)
understood by Rachel and Mrs B. Against this background, Rachel suggested Japanese as somehow a 'substitute' for Chinese. This seems to imply that there could be some perceived similarities between the physicality of the Chinese and Japanese people. Yet Acton put forward the idea that 'Japanese people wear funny shoes', injecting a cultural dimension to the discussions about the Japanese identity. One way to interpret this would be that Acton was outwitting me as an adult researcher and was purposely evoking stereotypes of certain essentialised 'traditional' cultural practices about the Japanese. Irrespective of the reasons behind this, the fact that Acton was constructing a stereotyped image is something of significance. The ways that some children work with and negotiate stereotypes of a particular ethnic group among themselves is illustrated in the next exchange. The following discussion is between siblings John C (6), Hannah C (10), Jennifer C (11) and Jerry C (12). It began with Hannah collecting three puppets; one with a turban, another has a *bindi* (Figure 5.6) and the other with the *hijab* (Figure 5.7):

*Daisy:* What would you call them?
*Hannah:* *Ah cha!* [*laughs*]
*Daisy:* Which is?
*Hannah:* Indian! [*laughs*]
*Daisy:* All of them?
*Hannah:* Yeah.
*Daisy:* Do you know anything about them?
*Hannah:* These *ah cha* stink! At school yeah, if you touch them, you have to touch someone quickly. [*laughs*]
*Daisy:* I don’t get it.
*Jerry:* It’s like a poison.
*Hannah:* Like I touch a *ah cha*, so I go and pick you up and make you stink too! [*everyone laughs*]
*John:* They’re horrible people.
*Daisy:* Why are they horrible?
*John:* I don’t know.
*Jennifer:* *Hak gwai* [lit. black ghost/devil, black people] stink too.
*Hannah:* Um, some of them are, some of them are not.
*John:* They’re horrible.
*Jerry:* But you play with *hak gwai* [lit. black ghost/devil, black people]!
Hannah: Um, I don’t know.
Jerry: You went swimming with your friend! And you went to her birthday party, remember! Does she not stink [in a teasing tone]?
Hannah: I don’t know.
Jennifer: Do you have any friends like that then gor gor [elder brother]?
Jerry: No, and I’m glad.

This was a significant yet rather distressing exchange. While I was taking part in this discussion, my self-conscious adult researcher role meant that I must maintain a neutral and non-judgmental attitude. Yet I was also reflecting that if my relationship with the children was on a basis of openness, I should be honest with them about the sense of uneasiness I felt about what they were telling me. However, this should not take away the fact that I appreciated and valued them sharing their experiences with me, explaining to me various aspects of their peer world enthusiastically. All these worries perhaps limited me from involving myself in the discussion more openly in this particular instance.

The benefit of taking this less active role was evident; the children directed the discussion and conversed with one another interactively. The ways that stereotypes could be exchanged, appreciated and reproduced within the children’s peer worlds is reflected here at different levels. The children first recollected a ‘rule’ – which was based on the idea that Indian people supposedly ‘stink’ – governing their interactions with Indian children at school. This idea was then reworked among the siblings. Besides, the siblings were also negotiating the way they presented their relationships and friendships with black children to their siblings.

Although the stereotype of the way that Indian people allegedly smell bad was initiated by Hannah, it was evident that Jennifer and Jerry shared this knowledge. This means that the same longstanding stereotype of South Asian people within the wider adult society is also present and being reproduced in many of the children’s peer groups. Besides, the siblings, who attended different schools, also displayed the shared understandings about the particular ‘rule’ that if one touched an Indian child, that person would have to try touching someone else, to ‘make you stink too’. This suggests that the practice could be a common feature present in many children’s peer
worlds. The discussion between the children does not provide an answer to the question of how these ideas and practice had first entered into their peer groups. However, it seems that children are just as likely to have acquired this particular knowledge from other children as from adults. As can be seen in the exchange, John did not explicitly display the relevant knowledge but was then given the details about it by his siblings.

Moreover, it is clear that Hannah’s enthusiasm dropped when Jennifer extended and applied the stereotype of the way that Indians allegedly smell bad to black people. Hannah appeared to be more anxious and hesitant and argued cautiously that it does not apply to all black people. As Jerry pointed out, Hannah indeed has a rather close friend who is black. Neither did Hannah acknowledge this friendship nor did she deny it. Similarly, Hannah did not directly respond to Jerry’s question about her friend in relation to ‘does she not stink’. In this sense, negative perceptions of Indian and black children may not stop other children from interacting with them entirely. Yet at the same time, these kinds of relationships seem far from being guaranteed to eliminate stereotypes altogether. This paradox reflects the possible contradictory nature of racist discourse and the fluidity of behaviours, relationships and interactions among children.

The children’s accounts so far point to the idea that Indian and black children are amongst the least popular within their peer worlds. This could be argued to reflect the construction and an existence of a racial and ethnic hierarchy among children. However, I would argue that racial and ethnic matters are only present as part of children’s complex worlds. For instance, the inconsistency embedded in Hannah’s reported self attitudes to Indian and black children and her actual relationships and interactions with children from these backgrounds, is best interpreted as reflecting Hannah’s multiple and fluid sense of identification and disassociation. Therefore, racial and ethnic issues have to be understood against the wider context of children’s peer groups, their relationships with one another, activities, values and concerns, and organisation. The complexity involved can be found in the narrative of Michael A (6). The first part of the following interchange occurred while Michael was producing the puppet story, and the second part was carried out subsequently.
Daisy: What are they doing?

Michael: They keep on punching people.

Daisy: Who're punching people?

Michael: They! The black boys! He says “going to go, not playing with you anymore”.

Daisy: Who’s the other boy?

Michael: The, um, English boy!

Michael felt like having our usual ‘picnic’ in the living room. After he got the food and set everything up, our conversation resumed.

Daisy: Can you tell me something about your friends?

Michael: Some of them are English and some of them are Japanese, and some of them are black and some of them are Indian.

Daisy: What do you do with them?

Michael: I just play with them sometimes. Raymond is my best friend. He always finds ladybirds.

Daisy: Whow!


Daisy: Why don’t you like them?

Michael: Timmy is always nasty to people, he always push people over and he always hit someone. And Simon keeps on punching me. I didn’t like it. He keeps on punching me with his long pen.

Daisy: Who’s Timmy?

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15 All the names in this account have been changed to pseudonyms.
Michael: He’s the black boy.
Daisy: And Simon?
Michael: He’s the other black boy. They’re the bad boys!
Daisy: Why are they bad?
Michael: Because they’re naughty, nasty to people!
Daisy: So, you don’t play with them?
Michael: Yes, they’re my um, third and fourth best friends.
Daisy: But you said they punched you?
Michael: But they can fight, scare people off.

In this lively account, Michael identified his friends using the categories of ‘black’, ‘English’, ‘Japanese’ and ‘Indian’. These identities do present generalised meanings and that Michael does not like ‘yucky’ Indian people and black people. Michael’s portrayal of black boys, both in the story and his comments, seems to reflect the popular imagery of black males as physically strong and athletic. However, I would argue that the way in which Michael talked about black boys derives more from his direct personal experiences rather than from a stereotyped notion. It is quite clear that the black boys in Michael’s story were meant to be his two friends at school who are black; and when Michael described his friends as ‘the black boy’, he was referring back to the characters in the story. This is not to deny the fact that the ‘bad boy’ image of young black males presented in Michael’s account may help to reinforce the particular stereotype. Rather, it points to the complex relationship between stereotypes and subjective experiential beliefs, and notions of reality and myths.

In fact, contradiction is a significant feature of Michael’s narrative. The two black boys are aggressive, ‘naughty’ and ‘nasty to people’, yet they have the ability to ‘fight’ and ‘scare people off’ which appears to be highly valued within Michael’s male peer group. The two black boys also ‘push people over’, ‘always hit someone’ and ‘keep on punching’ Michael with a ‘long pen’, yet they are Michael’s ‘third and fourth best friends’. Indeed, the very characteristics of the black boys seemingly exhibiting their masculinity are the two sides of the same token. More importantly, Michael’s narrative suggests that, in children’s social worlds, they and their peers can embody many identities with varying degrees of status simultaneously. In this
case, Michael’s own sense of affiliation and disassociation is illuminated in relation
to his peers’ positions of being black, a boy, a best friend, an aggressor and someone
with admirable talents or skills. The fluidity and multiplicity of identities among
children is clearly exemplified here. One aspect relating to why ‘people always hate
Indian people’ was not fully elaborated by Michael in the discussion. However, the
following story presented by David E (8) and his commentary may shed some light
on the matter. The characters were named by David as ‘black boy’, ‘kung fu kid’ and
‘Indian man’ (Figure 5.9).

![Figure 5.9 A story about a ‘black boy’, a Chinese ‘kung fu kid’ and an ‘Indian man’](image)

**Black boy:** I’m going to kick your butt back to India!

**Indian man:** Oh no! \[flies up then falls on the ground\]

**Kung fu kid:** Watch me, here I am, the one and only *kung fu* kid! Wa ha, I’m Bruce
Lee. I’m going to sort you out! \[facing the black boy\]

**Black boy:** Oh master, don’t kill me, please don’t kill me!

**Kung fu kid:** Ok, you can be my pupil and I’ll spare your life.

**Black boy:** Thank you master. The end.

[Discussion began]

**Daisy:** It’s really um, dramatic, just like a movie.

**David:** Yeah, have you seen this um, I forgot the name, um, a Bruce Lee’s film.
He really had a black pupil. Did you know that?

**Daisy:** No, I didn’t know that. Is that why you chose these characters?

**David:** Um, yeah.

**Daisy:** How about the Indian man?

**David:** ‘Cause Indians are pussy.

**Daisy:** What do you mean?

**David:** They’re like girls basically.
First of all, I would like to draw the attention to the ambiguity embedded in David’s choice of puppet to represent the kung fu kid. As can be seen in Figure 5.9, the kung fu kid character is represented by a puppet with green eyes and ginger hair in an outfit of karate, a martial art originating in Japan. This character emerged in David’s story as the martial art icon Bruce Lee who has a Chinese background. The eye and hair colour of the puppet simply does not fit into the common notion of what constitutes Chinese physical features. Therefore, in this context, clothing is an important symbol of the particular culturally associated abilities and attributes, which overrides any stereotyped visible bodily characteristics. It can be seen that this practice of essentialising certain ethnic elements – which can transcend bodily features – to assign an identity to other people is a recurring theme among the children’s accounts. In doing so, the children are disrupting the often assumed fixity of the physical and the malleability of the cultural. The cultural markers that are commonly thought of as fluid, such as clothing, become fixed as markers of identity, whereas the physicality is flexible and open to change and negotiation.

Moreover, the content of the story shows how David constructed blackness, Chineseness and Indianness relatively to one another and was essentialised along the gendered lines. The basic paradox is about physical strength and power, with the Chinese and black boys as perceivably young and strong in contrast to the Indian man as effeminate and old. In this particular portrayal, the ranking at work is straightforward. The Indian was assigned the lowest status in terms of his physical weakness, which served to intensify the physically powerful image of the black character. Yet in spite of his physical fitness, the black boy was defeated by the Chinese kung fu master, who was certainly given the highest positioning. David may not have explicitly expressed a sense of identification with the Chinese character on this occasion, but it would be fair to argue that Chinese martial art and internationally recognised Chinese martial art actors such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan could provide a positive sense of identification of Chineseness among many Chinese children, perhaps in particular Chinese boys.
5.3.2 Racism in Children's Peer Worlds

David’s discussion raises the question of whether it is possible that boys are employing racist discourses or even behaviour to signify their masculine identities. David could be staging a particular masculine identity within the specific research context which involved a female adult researcher. There is no simple answer to this question; and this is not to suggest that girls do not ‘do’ racism. As illuminated before, for example in the discussions among the sibling group, girls and boys could equally work with stereotypes of black and Indian people. However, it was found that children’s discourses on gender largely show that girls and boys are believed to be different in terms of what they are like and what they do, hence the different behaviour in relation to racism. A common theme of the girls’ perception of boys is that boys are ‘rude’, which is reflected in the following abstract. Inspired by the puppet with karate outfit, Acton B (6) and Rachel B (7) were talking about a boy who always goes to the church they attend in his kung fu suit:

*Daisy:* So he wears a kung fu suit to the church?

*Rachel:* Yes.

*Daisy:* Do you know him well?

*Acton:* He’s eight years old and he has a little brother. And then he is squeaky squawky, and he is naughty and rude. And then he goes to his see fu [martial art teacher]. He goes to beauty and the beast, and then he goes to a baby sitter.

*Daisy:* What is squeaky squawky?

*Acton:* He talks like a girl!

*Daisy:* And he’s naughty and rude?

*Acton:* Yes, because he’s a boy and boys are rude.

*Rachel:* Yes, boys at school, they call you names.

*Daisy:* What names do they call you?

*Rachel:* They call us sort of rude stuff.

In Acton’s narrative, the identity of the particular boy is multiple and contradictory. While the boy is ‘squeaky squawky’ talking ‘like a girl’, he is also ‘naughty and rude’ ‘because he’s a boy’. This exchange in fact illustrates how girls may perform the act of rudeness in a way that could be different from boys, perhaps with a less
aggressive approach. Yet this is a dimension which has not been fully addressed in this particular account. Nonetheless, in other girls' discourses, racism is regarded as an extension of the perceived connection between masculinity and rudeness. This is illuminated by the following discussion of Christy D (12) who had just finished talking about her experiences of racism outside the school context:

*Daisy:* How about at school? Has it [*racist harassment*] ever happened at school?

*Christy:* My school's an all girls' school and many respects. It's always boys being racist, nearly always. We don't see each other as you know, "oh you're Chinese and you're English", we're just like friends.

It is apparent that the notion of respect is central to Christy's construction of her personal as well as group identity. Christy is identifying herself with other girls among whom relationships are argued to be based on mutual respect, and not defined in terms of being 'Chinese' or 'English'. Such an identity involves another crucial aspect – the projection of being 'racist' onto boys. A story which is performed by Kitty E (12) recreates and further illustrates the complexity within girls' peer world. The story involves Anna who is 'Indian' and Emily who is 'English' (Figure 5.10, from left to right):

*Anna:* What do we do today?

*Emily:* I don't know.

*Anna:* What's the matter with you? You've not been talking to me for two days.

*Emily:* Don't want to talk about it.

*Anna:* Tell me, we're friends.

*Figure 5.10* A story about negotiating meanings of racism in friendship
Emily: We’re not really.
Anna: What?
Emily: You’re just an annoying cow and you get onto my nerves. You’re Indian. Look at your hair, your face. I just don’t like you.
Anna: How can you say such things! We’ve been friends for so many years! Fine, we better not be friends.
Emily: Fine.

[The girls leave the scene and return after a while]
Anna: I’m sorry Emily.
Emily: I’m sorry too. I didn’t mean what I said about you. But you shouldn’t have told Lisa that I was seeing Ben ‘cause that’s not true.
Anna: I didn’t! Lisa’s such a liar!
Emily: I guess. Let’s forget about this and we’re still good friends right.
Anna: Of course!

[After checking Kitty has finished the story, our discussion began.]

Daisy: Is the story based on a real incident?
Kitty: Nah, I just made it up but it could be true. We always fall out with each other and then make up later.
Daisy: Is it common that you and your friends make racist comments to each other?
Kitty: It’s not really racist, it’s nothing like that. You say silly things when you’re angry. When you argue with someone, you don’t mean half of the things you say anyway.
Daisy: So you don’t think that the character, Emily was being racist to Anna?
Kitty: No. She’s not being serious and they both know that. At the end of the day, they’re friends.

From Kitty’s discourse, it can be seen the meanings of racism is fundamentally a subjective experience and is conditional on the organisation of children’s peer worlds. Perhaps as an oversensitive adult researcher, I interpreted the story along the line of racism; in particular from the insult ‘you’re just an annoying cow and you get onto my nerves. You’re Indian. Look at your hair, your face. I just don’t like you’. However, this personal adult value judgment was immediately dismissed by Kitty. As Kitty explained, in a heated moment, what might be seen to be racist comments could be exchanged between friends. Yet these remarks are not ‘true’ and not
intended to be ‘racist’, but rather they are something ‘silly’. More importantly, Kitty argued that there is a shared knowledge between members of the friendship group, which is a mutual understanding between the friends that the comments are not meant to be ‘serious’.

Perhaps from the general adult perspective, Kitty’s account may seem to suggest a ‘denial’ of racism, and it may even serve to legitimise or encourage racism, resulting in issues not being tackled appropriately. Yet on the micro-political level, children are clearly constructing, managing and sometimes repairing their relationships with one another. For these processes to work effectively, the shared norms and values among them prove to be crucial, which could include elements relating to racism. In the following abstract, Kitty further explained racism in relation to the particular context of children’s peer worlds. In a previous conversation, Kitty’s father spoke about a number of racist incidents that his friends had experienced. He then asked Kitty if racism is a problem at school and to which Kitty replied:

At school, racist is those bak gwai [lit. white ghost/devil, white people] bully those hak gwai [lit. black ghost/devil, black people]. No one would be racist to Chinese because there’re only three Chinese in my school, so no one would notice, pick on us. Three in three hundred is like none. Every time the teachers talk about racist, those hak gwai [black people] always say “ah yah, those bak gwai [white people] are so bad”. So they wouldn’t talk about us, there’s nothing to say about us.

At first glance, this account seems to reflect that in both school and the general societal contexts, racism is often be perceived by many children and adults in terms of a dichotomy of black victims and white bullies. Kitty explains this in the particularity of the school context with two specific dimensions. In one respect, the small number of Chinese children in the school means that they do not always form a numerically and therefore visibly significant group. At the same time, it is apparent that children’s own discourses of racism often emphasise exclusively the relationship between black and white people. Children are therefore experiencing and constructing notions of racism collectively within their own peer relationships. As a result, racism could have particular meanings in children’s peer worlds, which
may not entirely fit into the adults’ expectations and definitions. In Kitty’s account, she also specifically used the concept of ‘bully’ in accounting for ‘racist’ behaviour. Bullying is in fact found to be a rather common notion in the everyday language of many of the children, which again is sometimes talked about along gender lines. For instance, as Lorraine A (11) narrates about her identity of being a girl, she claims, ‘boys are kind of more lessly to get bullied than girls ‘cause the boys are basically the bully’. The following story produced by Jerry C (12) and crucially his rationalisation of it, shows the complexity of what bullying and racism may mean in children’s peer worlds. The main character of the story is called Jamie who along with other characters is found in Figure 5.11:

Figure 5.11 A story about bullying and racism in peer relationships

[The puppets are shown in their order of appearance in the story from left to right.]

Boy A: Look at that boy [Jamie], looking around. He’s got ginger hair and funny green eyes.

Jamie’s Brother: He’s my brother, unfortunately.

Boy A: Yeah, he’s a geek.

Jamie’s Brother: Well, you can say that.

Boy A: Hey shorty.

Jamie: What... [shakily and in a high pitch]

[The boys start hitting Jamie who is then on the ground. Jamie is sobbing ‘help, help’ as a teacher walks in.]

Teacher: What’s up you boys?

Jamie: Um... not... nothing sir.

Boy A: Oh, hi sir. There’s nothing. We’re just playing with Jamie.

Jamie: It’s really nothing sir, surely.

[Teacher and boys A and B leave. Two girls join Jamie]
Jamie: Um... the boys just beat me up.
Girl B: How could they do that! Come on, let’s go and tell the teacher.
Jamie: Please don’t. They will probably bully me more.
Girl B: Alright, we’ll have a word with them. They can’t keep doing this to people.

[Jamie and the girls meet the boys]
Girl B: Hey you, how could you guys do that to Jamie? ‘Cause you’re bigger, you think you can bully the little ones?
Boy A: What does it got to do with you, you stupid nosy lousy girl. What do girls always have to stick their nose in people’s business?
Girl A: You should always look out for your younger brother.
Jamie’s Brother: You’re just like my mum. Alright, whatever.

[Discussion followed]

Daisy: Um, is the story about racism?
Jerry: It’s about bullying. Well, um, I guess you can say that it’s racism. Think about it yeah, um, put it this way yeah, if they were all English, then it wouldn’t be racism ‘cause you can’t be racist to someone who’s the same, um, the same as you. But they were not all the same. English people can get racism sometimes, like people bully them, call them names ‘cause they’re English.
Daisy: So, are bullying and racism not the same?
Jerry: Well, bullying is just about you, like you get picked on ‘cause you’re small or ugly or something, you know. Racism is always something to do with your parents, your family, so it’s more serious. It makes me real angry and want to beat someone up.

Jerry’s narratives provide much detail about the social world of which children take part in and manage among themselves. It is evident that the concept of difference is extremely important in children’s interactions. The children are constructing differences between themselves and other children drawing on various bodily features. Through these processes and the relevant practices, children are forging both personal identities and group memberships for both themselves and other children. In the particular story put forward by Jerry, the group of children assigned the identity of a ‘geek’ to another child because of the ‘ginger hair’, ‘green eyes’ and
being short. Although this could imply a racial aspect, Jerry’s rationalisation suggests that the primary focus is about how the group of boys attempts to construct their relationships in terms of status, identity, power and acceptance and rejection. This is not to deny that racial elements can be strategically employed in this process, equally as any other components, but I would argue that to construct a racialised relationship is simply not the primary concern and goal among the children.

Furthermore, Jerry’s story reflects an understanding and construction of differences between girls and boys. Once again there is a portrayal of boys as acting rather violently and being aggressive and mean towards other people. On the contrary, there are the girls who are acting in a non-aggressive, mature, sensitive and caring manner, though ‘nosy’. Significantly, in Jerry’s account, he makes clear his own sense of having to be masculinity and tough, specifically in relation to how racism makes him ‘real angry’ and ‘want to beat someone up’. This instance suggests that some children’s masculinity may at times transcend issues of race, but can be a means through which they construct their masculinity.

Moreover, what is also significant in Jerry’s story and discussion is ideas about family. In the story, the character Jamie’s brother did not defend Jamie when someone suggested that Jamie was a ‘geek’. Yet according to the girl, ‘you should always look out for your younger brother’. The response from Jamie’s brother was ‘you’re just like my mum’. These are all discourses created by Jerry and appear to have a strong manifestation of his position of being the eldest brother of a sibling group of four and the eldest child in the family. The centrality of the family in Jerry’s sense of identity is further illustrated in his argument about racism. According to Jerry, racism is ‘more serious’ than bullying because it is about one’s ‘parents and family’. The relationship between ideas about family and children’s sense of identification is a significant theme emerging in the children’s accounts, and will be addressed in more detail in the chapters to follow.
5.3.3 The Familial and Generational Context

In the final section of this chapter, the construction of identity and difference of the others will be located within the family context. The notion of generation is significant in understanding children’s conceptions of racial and ethnic matters. In the following discussion, Lorraine A (11) talked about how individuals’ identities allegedly reflect their family backgrounds.

Daisy: How would you call this one [a puppet]?
Lorraine: English!
Daisy: Ok, can you tell me something about English people?
Lorraine: Um, I think they’re brought up better. Um, black people are probably brought up a bit religiously for their own religion kind of thing, like Islamic people, they have to go to Mecca and other places and go to their church kind of thing, I don’t know what that is. Um, and some Indian people are always vegetarian and that, they believe that eating meat are bad luck kind of thing.
Daisy: English people are not religious?
Lorraine: Well, they’re basically Christians or otherwise most of them don’t really believe in anything. Um, English people, um, they have better manners kind of thing. But I just don’t understand how god can be at all different places at a time.

Lorraine demonstrated how she defines ‘Englishness’ in relation to the identities of ‘black’, ‘Islamic’ and ‘Indian’ people. All of these individual and group identities are differentiated on the basis of Lorraine’s understandings in relation to religious beliefs and practices. Although Lorraine did not seem to have talked about these faiths in any explicit hierarchical way, it is clear that Christianity is placed at the centre of the mainstream religions and as the norm. Within such an understanding, English people either are the normalised Christian or ‘don’t really believe in anything’, whereas black and Indian are the religious others. In spite of this, Lorraine did explicitly claim that English people are ‘better’ – though not necessarily in terms of religion; they are ‘brought up better’ and ‘have better manners’ in comparison to the others. The significance of this is that religion and other cultural elements are constructed as things which may be passed on to children
from their parents. From this, one’s identity is perceived to be something that can be fixed in cultural terms, and a person’s religious and cultural characteristics as a naturalised and essentialised entity.

In the same interview, Lorraine produced a story which appears to coincide with the ideas about how children with a non-English family background may not be brought up as well as other children. The story is about ‘the Brown family’, consisting of the child Bill, his mother and his baby brother (Figure 5.12, from second left to right). The Browns were attending a parents’ evening at school:

*Figure 5.12 A story about the ‘Brown’ family*

Teacher: Good evening Ms Brown [*Figure 5.12, first left*].
Ms Brown: Good evening sir.
Teacher: As you read from the report card that Bill hasn’t done really well this year.
Ms Brown: What report card? Bill!
Bill: Um, sorry mum.
Ms Brown: We’ll talk about this later. Has he done really badly?
Teacher: Well, I’m afraid it was really bad, Ms Brown. He didn’t do very well in English and he was talking all the way through Science. He failed his Maths test. He did ok but it’s just not too brilliant, and he’s below average. Is it because of something at home? Is it because he can’t catch up at home? Because we can arrange something for that.
Ms Brown: The problem is sir, I don’t know. I got a little baby and I got to work and I don’t have a husband to help. We haven’t been talking really. You know the um, council flat that we live, it’s always noisy and that. Maybe Bill can’t focus on his work that much.
Teacher: [sighs] I'll have a chat with him. Bill, you should never rip off your report slip and that lot. Never mind, why don't you follow me to the hall for some refreshment.

Lorraine’s choice of puppets to represent Bill and his family may have been an indication of her appreciation of the popular stereotypes of black people. The common images include black boys as underachievers at school and black families as having poorer housing and being often financially deprived, both on a general national level. However, I would argue that this may also have been motivated by the character of the teacher who is black, as a case of matching the characters’ identities. Perhaps more importantly, I could identify a number of parallels between the story and Lorraine’s personal and family situations, such as living in a single-mother household and being in a child-mother relationship which is reported by Lorraine as characterised by a lack of communication. To a certain extent, it would be fair to argue that Lorraine was projecting certain elements of her subjective experiences onto the character Bill, who is a boy and black. This seems to suggest that children often value and are concerned about their shared experiences of being a child vis-à-vis parents and teachers, which can at times undermine any racial and ethnic differences among them.

The notion that parents may pass on certain cultural knowledge and values to children is sometimes translated into a suggestion that a racist family environment might engender racism in children. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that the children are simply reproducing stereotypes or racist thinking of their parents. Without denying that children are living under the influences of their parents, the following interchange can offer an alternative view about how children process what they learn from their parents. Rachel B (7) and I were discussing a puppet with a turban:

Daisy: What would you call him [a puppet]?
Rachel: Um, ah cha [Indian, see footnote 12]?
Daisy: Do you know anything about them?
Rachel: I’ve seen an Indian woman in the shop, she has a red dot on her face, here [pointing at her own forehead]. And mum said those ah cha [Indian] don’t
turn the light on their cars when they drive, because they want to save money, and they're bad drivers.

*Daisy:* Do you think that's true?

*Rachel:* No, I don't think all of them are bad drivers.

In this discussion, Rachel shows that she is fully aware of her mother's discourse of Indian people in relation to the way they drive. Yet although Rachel may have adopted her mother's language in describing Indian people, she clearly disagrees with her mother and is reluctant to make generalisations about them. The following final abstract shows how children may disagree with their parent's racialised stereotypes of individuals and groups in a more explicit manner. Kitty E (12) was talking about how she disagrees with her mother in relation to her mother's racist view about black people. Before Kitty and I started our interview, Kitty's mother talked or rather complained to me about her 'black boss' about how they did not get on well with one another. This became an issue that Kitty brought up in the interview later:

*Kitty:* My mum always says like her boss is trouble and she's black, "*hak gwai po* [lit. black ghost/devil woman, black woman] blah, blah, blah". I have lots of different friends from school, black, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, English. They're all my good friends.

*Daisy:* You don't mind about their background?

*Kitty:* No, as long as they're nice people and fun to be with.

It seems that Kitty feels quite strongly about the matter and felt the need to criticise or point out her mother's racist attitude is not correct. In doing so from her position as a daughter, this not only disputed the notion that racial views are transmitted from one generation to another, but may also indicate a generational shift in opinion of racial and ethnic matters. Through her reflexivity in her mother's discourse, Kitty unambiguously states her stance. As far as Kitty is concerned, she likes to make friends with people who are 'nice' and 'fun' irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, Kitty may identify others using the familiar language including 'black', 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Japanese' or 'English', but at the same time she is working with these terms as against any simplistic categorical and racist thinking.
5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has taken children’s narratives seriously and has regarded what is being portrayed by the children in their stories as ‘real’ experiences, perceptions and emotions. It has shown the wide variety of identities that children may draw on in order to define people and groups, including those that may be seen as racial and ethnic. The children’s accounts reveal the significance of visible markers in their definition of the others, which include both bodily and non-bodily features. The way that the children read and understand the physical and social characteristics of individuals in effect disrupts the simplistic conception of race and ethnicity as represented by fixity and malleability.

Within the children’s accounts, cultural elements which are commonly thought of as fluid at times become markers of fixed identity and difference, so that for instance bindi or a turban can be naturalised and essentialised in reference to Indianness. Opposite to this is in the relation to physicality and the often perceived racially fixed bodily features. Although for example, skin colour is always constructed in popular discourses as a natural and essential feature in which blackness is fixed, it has been shown how this can be at times downplayed or reinstated, or at times eliminated in the children’s accounts of interactions. Just as it has been seen in the way Michael described his dynamic peer relationship, the same child could embody the multiple and shifting identities of being a boy, black, an aggressor and a best friend.

Through these accounts, the children have shown the variety of ways in which racial and ethnic matters may appear in the children’s everyday experiences and discourses; in particular in relation to their own complex peer worlds and fluid peer relationships. The children, for instance, described how they generate popular stereotypes about Indian and black people, which leads to insulting behaviour towards Indian children, yet is inconsistent to the actual interactions and friendships they have with individual black children. The children also reflected on their perceptions of racism. While some of the girls talked about racism in relation to masculinity, it would seem that to interpret aspects of children’s peer worlds in
racial or ethnic terms could sometimes miss what is really meaningful to them; that is their shared values and concerns.

In sum, the children's accounts in this chapter have demonstrated the dual forces of fixity and fluidity embedded in the processes and practices through which the children construct other people's identities, with visual markers playing an important role. This raises questions about the conceptions of race and ethnicity and their meanings in the children's complex social worlds. The emerging idea about the meanings of racial and ethnic concepts as partial and situated within children's peer worlds is explored in the next chapter, specifically in relation to the children's experiences and perceptions of their own bodies and how this may relate to their sense of identity.
'Football kick'

'Big bully boy'

'Friend and school'

'Phantom of ghost and home'

by Michael aged 6
6

Embodying Identities:
Children’s Reading and Experience of the Body

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has touched on the significance of embodiment in children’s everyday interactions. In this chapter, children articulate in a variety of ways their subjective experiences and perceptions of both their own physicality and that of the others. The children reveal how their appearance can provide them with a sense of who they are in relation to other people, and is often strongly emotionally invested. The children also show the ways in which they partially draw on ideas of physicality in constructing attractiveness and desirability among the others. More importantly, the children demonstrate that racial and ethnic concepts are sometimes found in their discourses of the body, though these are not always in the form of an explicit concern or simplistic hierarchical framework of beauty.

The chapter focuses on three particular aspects of the children’s experiences of their bodies; emotional embodiment of differences and similarities, embodied performance of identities, and gendered and sexualised gaze of physicality. It was found that the body is a crucial site within which meanings of various identities are negotiated by and for both the children and the others. Through these discourses and practices around the body, the children’s multiple and partial identifications are made apparent.

6.2 Embodiment of Identities

In the alien task activity, I invited the children to produce a self-description to an alien over the telephone in an imaginary scenario. To most of the children, having to introduce themselves to other people was not a new experience. Some children
talked about how they had to speak to their fellow pupils about themselves at the beginning of a new school year, or they had to write about themselves in their English homework. In these situations, the children would be presenting themselves either in an embodied face-to-face interaction or based on an already established embodied relationship. Therefore, the way that the children look would be immediate available to the audience, in contrast to the context that was set out in the alien task. In the activity, the children imagined talking to a new acquaintance who did not have previous or direct access to how they look. This could prompt the children to include details of their physical appearance in their accounts and in fact many of them did so. The significance of the children’s perception of their own appearance in their sense of who they are is illuminated in the following abstract of Christy D’s (12) self-narrative of the alien activity:

Well, hello, I’m a girl, I’m normal height, I got short hair, I got glasses, I have braces, I just got the braces. I have black hair and dark brown eyes, and my family is my mum and dad. I like to play the clarinet, I like drawing and I want to be a fashion designer.

It can be seen that a considerable part of Christy’s account is constituted by the various aspects of her physicality, along with her family, interests and ambition. The notion of ‘normal height’ suggested by Christy is crucial in understanding the children’s perceptions of their bodies. It implies that there is a standard against which children perceive and measure their own bodies, and is in line with the developmental discourses in both medical and common sense terms, concerning whether a child is growing ‘healthily’ and ‘normally’. In this instance, despite Christy’s claim that she is of ‘normal height’, she seems to be largely drawing on the particular bodily features which may be seen as varying from the ‘normal’ framework in her presentation of self. That is, Christy points to how she is different, or even deficient, in physical terms. For instance, whereas ‘having glasses’ means that Christy is short-sighted, ‘having braces’ implies that Christy may not have ‘perfectly’ formed teeth. As it will become clearer in the course of this chapter, these specific physical characteristics are in fact a significant part of Christy’s discourse on her appearance, which is a rather critical matter to Christy and often involves a strong sense of emotion.
In fact, the idea of looking different from other people is a central theme that runs through the children's accounts. Since specific physical features are often associated with racial ideas, one line of enquiry would be in relation to the common discourse and to examine if children's sense of looking different may translate into a sense of being Chinese. In this instance, Christy did not talk about skin colour, which is perhaps the most common aspect in racialised discourses. Instead, Christy drew on the idea that she has ‘black hair’ and ‘dark brown eyes’ in describing herself. Without a direct probe, however, a conclusion cannot be drawn in relation to whether Christy felt a sense of Chineseness from having the particular eye and hair colour. On the contrary, in the following narrative, Rachel B (7) explicitly acknowledged the specific link between her Chinese identification and her eye and hair colour:

*Daisy:* What would you say to the alien?

*Rachel:* My birthday is on July 18\(^{th}\) [changed]. I have brown eyes, I have black hair, I’m in Year 3, my mummy's called May [pseudonym], I am seven, I have a little sister, I was born in 1995, I like to work, my favourite colour is purple. I like salad, custard and ice-cream. My favourite pet is ginger cat. My best friend is Charlotte [pseudonym]. She has blonde hair, she has blue eyes, she has a little sister, she is eight years old, she is in Year 3, her favourite colour is blue. My favourite subject is Halloween. My teacher is funny, and I can swim fifty metres.

*Daisy:* You wouldn’t tell the alien you’re Chinese?

*Rachel:* I am. I said I have black hair and brown eyes.

*Daisy:* And the alien would know that you’re Chinese?

*Rachel:* Yes.

Just as in Christy's account, Rachel combined particular bodily features, again hair and eye colour, along with age, family and favourites in constructing her self-presentation. For Rachel, her ‘black hair’ and ‘brown eyes’ should provide sufficient information about her Chinese imagery and identity in this specific context. I would argue that Rachel may not have intended to assert her Chinese identity as such, but rather she was merely describing how she looks. Nonetheless Rachel acknowledged that ‘black hair’ and ‘brown eyes’ together could work as a signifier of her Chinese
identity. In other words, Rachel’s primary aim was to describe how she looks rather than to assert the identity of being Chinese.

Particular physical aspects are certainly significant in the ways that many of the children feel about themselves. The element of relativity embedding in this sense of individuality among the children corresponds to the way that Rachel carried out her presentation; specifically how she contrasted herself with her best friend. In one respect, what makes who Rachel is takes meanings from how she relates to, as well as is different from, the others. Therefore, for instance, Rachel and her best friend both are in Year 3 and have a little sister. However, while Rachel likes the colour purple and has ‘black hair’ and ‘brown eyes’, her best friend likes blue and has ‘blonde hair’ and ‘blue eyes’. What is evident is how physical features work only partially in children’s sense of who they are. Eye and hair colour is considered by Rachel to be important in differentiating her from her friends and could signify her own Chineseness and her friend’s whiteness, or more precisely Englishness as in the children’s language. Yet there are other non-physical elements which either connect Rachel to her friend or mark their individuality. The following discussion further shows children’s experiences of being defined as Chinese because of their body. Lorraine A (11) described a situation at school in which she was positioned by a teacher as the others, specifically Chinese based on the perceived hair colour. This interview is based on the alien task after Lorraine identified herself with the categories of Chinese and English.

Daisy: Do you think that Chinese and English people are different?
Lorraine: Different colour hair and eye colour. Once at school in PE lesson, we played rounders, you know what rounders is yeah. The teacher divided us into two groups, one with dark hair and one with blondish hair, light hair colour thing. I dyed my hair brown, it’s not blonde but it’s brown but I was in the dark colour group.

Daisy: How did you feel about that?
Lorraine: I didn’t really care. She’s not really putting us into the groups by hair colour. I was in the group with Indians and all that. She thinks I’m Chinese, so I’d have black hair kind of thing. But it’s alright, I don’t mind. People think you are what you look kind of thing.
Daisy: Do you want to look more like your English friends?
Lorraine: Yes, I want blue eyes. I dyed my hair brown.
Daisy: Does it mean that you want to be English?
Lorraine: No, no, I just want to have whatever is nice.

Perhaps with an innocent intention and practical consideration, from Lorraine's point of view, the teacher had nonetheless reinforced the common naturalised and generalised ideas of physicality with racial and ethnic connotations. The children were therefore reduced into the binary opposition which is represented by dark and light coloured hair. Whereas Chinese, Indian and some other people are supposedly having dark hair, white, or in the children's word English, people are assumed to have light coloured hair. This adult perspective appears to reflect the fact that children and adults may at times experience and remark the body and its features in dissimilar ways. Yet this kind of adult discourses and practices can penetrate and in part organise different areas of children's everyday lives.

What is clear in Lorraine's discussion is the strong sense of embodied emotions embedded in the incident. Lorraine showed her frustration about the teacher's, and in general people's, ignorance and inability to see through one's assumed physicality. Lorraine expressed her sentiment of this superficial way of perceiving and interacting with people in the following terms, 'people think you are what you look'. In this case, they fail to see her as anything other than visually Chinese. Lorraine stressed repeatedly that she does not 'mind' or 'care' about what had happened. In spite of her effort to downplay and not to be emotionally drawn into it, it is apparent that the event is in some way significant to Lorraine. In agreeing with my probing, Lorraine stated that she 'wants blue eyes' and she 'dyed her hair brown' as an effort to 'look more like her English friends'. Yet as led by my question, Lorraine made it clear that this does not simply imply a desire 'to be English'. This is about the way in which Lorraine is being positioned and presented in relation to others, in this case her peers. Whether this reflects a belief in the beauty framework of whiteness as the preferred standard will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Nonetheless, this points to the need to differentiate conceptually the children's desire to identify themselves with their friends who are English, and a desire to be English.
6.3 A Body that Blends into the Scenery

In fact, the children’s experiences and perceptions of their specific bodily features marking them to be different from others have to be examined in more detail in order to specify what exactly the children are trying to match or differentiate themselves from. The following exchange provides one example of this examination. In the photograph task, Lorraine A (11) had invited her younger brother Michael A (6) to pose in the park. Although the red eye effect cannot be seen in any of these pictures taken, Lorraine started a discussion of the topic while she was going through the photos.\(^{16}\)

\textit{Lorraine:} You can’t see it in here but Michael’s the only one who has red eyes.

\textit{Daisy:} The only one in/

\textit{Lorraine:} /my family or the only Chinese person!

\textit{Daisy:} You don’t have red eyes in photos?

\textit{Lorraine:} No, Chinese people don’t have red eyes, only English people have red eyes.

\textit{Daisy:} He’s an exception then?

\textit{Lorraine:} Well, yeah, maybe it’s the genes or something like that. Um, I don’t really know. They always say I look like my dad [Chinese] and he looks like my mum’s [Chinese] family, people. Maybe that’s why.

In fact, Lorraine is not the only one who commented on the red eye phenomenon – which is perceived to be associated with English people – from their position of being Chinese. As Jerry C (12) claimed, ‘English people have red eyes in photos. That’s why I don’t want to look English.’ The idea that Michael with both parents being Chinese but having red eyes disrupts this neatly proposed naturalised discourse, and requires explanation. Lorraine reasons this with the notion of genealogical connections signified by ‘genes’; Lorraine and Michael are said to have inherited their ‘looks’ from their father and mother and maternal kin respectively. I would argue that as a child, other people’s discourses of whether you look like your mother, father or sometimes other family members are rather common. In this

\(^{16}\)Red eye effect is because of the light of the flash is reflecting from the retina which is covered with tiny blood vessels. Red eye is more pronounced in people with light eye colour because they have little light-absorbing pigment in their pupils (see http://www.colorpilot.com/redeye_effect.html).
account, it can be seen how these discourses are employed by children in talking about themselves. Lorraine’s suggestion that her brother Michael may not be wholly Chinese genetically seems somehow creative. Yet it brings to mind the piece of information that Lorraine’s mother had told me once that her ‘great-grand uncle is a quarter of Spanish’. If Lorraine is aware of this information, it could be the background against which Lorraine’s idea can be understood, but at the same time, it would be useful to try to establish why Lorraine never acknowledges this fact in presenting her sense of identity.

More importantly, Lorraine’s discussion shows how she uses cross-gender genealogical reference to explain her own and her brother’s perceived inheritance of physical similarity and difference from their parents, which is linked to notions of Chineseness and Englishness. Lorraine’s discourse of biological differences reflects her perceived positions of herself and her brother within the separated paternal and maternal sides of the family. At the same time, it is something that Lorraine uses to construct her relatedness to her parents and other family members. Given that Lorraine and Michael’s parents are divorced and that they live entirely with their maternal family, this could be something of particular importance to Lorraine’s sense of self identity in particular within the family context. Looking like her father in part seems to have contributed to Lorraine’s sense of being not as close to her mother and maternal family as her brother, a sentiment which she expressed at times and which will become more evident in later chapters. In this respect, Lorraine’s experience of her appearance is largely concerned with a sense of being part of the family and how she relates to other members of the family. Therefore, Lorraine’s idea that Michael has red eyes in pictures reflects more about Michael’s perceived favourable position in the family rather than an idea that Michael is somehow being identified with Englishness.

The following account echoes this partially expressed concern about the various aspects of physicality, which is primarily about group participation and membership, though it may incorporate notions of Chineseness and Englishness. In this instance, it is in relation to the children’s peer group rather than family. The embodied feeling of being ‘out of place’ among her peers is addressed by Christy D (12). Christy is
the only child who did not include herself in any of the photographs produced for the research activity. My query about this led to an extensive revelation about Christy’s dissatisfaction with her appearance.

*Daisy:* You didn’t take any pictures of yourself?

*Christy:* No, because I wouldn’t have looked nice in them.

*Daisy:* I’m not very photogenic either.

*Christy:* No. I want to be more beautiful, my whole body would be more beautiful, you know, everything, it’d be perfect, like my legs would be a bit thinner, and my face would come out a bit more ‘cause you know it’s really flat, like Chinese people’s faces are really flat, so I’d have a more outty face, and bigger eyes, and no glasses and more eyebrows. Look, my eyebrows are really light. And then I’d have perfect teeth and no fillings.

*Daisy:* I guess you can wear contact lenses maybe?

*Christy:* Yeah but my eyes wouldn’t get any better with contact lenses, and also my ears would be in nicer shape, they look a bit weird, don’t they?

*Daisy:* No! I really don’t think so.

*Christy:* Yeah! When I looked, on the school photo, everyone’s ears were nicer and round, my ears were pointy, and um, also my nails would be nicer, they’d be more strong and nice shape, yeah and my nails flick upwards like that and everyone else’s goes like that [touching her finger nails].

*Daisy:* That makes you special.

*Christy:* No, some of mine go down, and some of mine go up, and some don’t know which way to go, go up and then down. They’re really weird. I don’t think I drink enough milk, today it just peeled off, and then I’d have perfect teeth and not, no fillings, I had some fillings, when I was small I had really bad teeth, so there was a hole and you had to fill it.

*Daisy:* You can’t tell that!

*Christy:* It’s black. You can refill it with white stuff but then you have to pay a lot. Well, um, people say they like my hair but I think it’s really brown, I want it to be more black, it’s dark compared to English people’s hair but it’s really thick but then I don’t have a lot of it. Actually, it’s alright, just bit more shiny, and I’d have more hair here [pointing to her forehead].

*Daisy:* Well, I think your hair’s nice

*Christy:* Um, but English people got really light and soft hair, they can do something with it and it’d just stay there but we have to use lots of mousse and stuff to make it stay. […] I’m not very skinny, my legs aren’t very
skinny, I don’t like my legs, arms are ok. English girls have pretty skinny legs, unless they are fat English girls, most English girls have really thin legs, and there are also fat ones, only a few, so it makes me feel really fat.

_Daisy:_ I think you’re fine as you are. I think it’s not good to be too skinny. I’ve been trying to put some weight on.

_Christy:_ I guess, maybe. I’d also get myself some eyelids. You know like English people have the lines [above the eyes, ‘double eyelid’], so when you put eye shadow on or something you could see where it stops, if you put it on until you meet the line you just keep going forever, and so I want to change every bit.

I found Christy’s self-criticism in relation to her physicality rather moving. To Christy, her experience of her body certainly has not provided her with much self-confidence. This is a reminder of the image-conscious society that we live in and the effects it can have on us. It is apparent that on one level, concepts of Chinese and English are crucial in Christy’s construction of a ‘perfect’ and ‘beautiful’ imagery of the body. Chineseness and Englishness are addressed in physical terms, based on a chain of relational equivalents of Christy’s carefully observed and differentiated physical features. Within this framework, Chinese people have ‘flat faces’, ‘dark’ hair and nothing that English people have, including ‘outty faces’, ‘eyelids’, ‘skinny legs’ and ‘soft hair’. Christy has identified herself and her Chineseness through the bodily characteristics defined as Chinese and English relatively to one another. Christy’s own body is understood in terms of how Chinese physicality is defined and judged in relation to English physicality; it is precisely the idea that ‘most English girls have really thin legs’ which makes Christy ‘feel really fat’. This discourse is evidently different from what would conventionally be regarded as racial discourse of Chinese and English or rather white physicality that no reference to skin colour is made.

Even though Englishness is somehow exoticised and idealised by Christy as her preference of physical beauty, I would argue for the need to see beyond this

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_17_ ‘Double eyelid’ describes a visible crease on the eyelid which may give an impression of bigger looking eyes whereas the ‘single eyelid’ refers to the type without a visible upper eyelid crease. It is commonly believed that ‘oriental’ people are more likely to have ‘single eyelid’ resulting in smaller looking eyes. (see http://www.drmeronk.com/asian-eyelid.html)
discourse of physicality in simple racial and ethnic terms. It is obvious that Christy worries about whether she looks good, but just as importantly, she is also concerned about whether she, or rather her body, fits in with her peer group and more generally the majority of people in society. This is illuminated by Christy’s rather touching and upsetting account about how her ‘pointy ears’ and her finger nails of an ‘unnatural’ shape make her feel that she stands out from the rest of her friends. This refers to a sense of being different and not properly connecting to her peers and others in the society of which she is a part, both as physically captured in the school photo and as conceptualised in Christy’s mind.

So far, it is evident that the feeling of having different physical features to those of most of the others and therefore not completely fitting in is shared by some children. Christy’s idea of a more normal and perfect body coincides with the idea of looking more ‘like the rest’, whereas Lorraine indicates that she would welcome being seen as ‘one of the rest’ at times. The notion of ‘the rest’ or ‘the majority’ here can be assumed to be more or less referring to Englishness, or whiteness in the more common language. In contrast to Christy and Lorraine, Hannah C (10) and Jennifer C (11) appear to take another stand on the matter and employ an alternative strategy to handle the relating issues. While Hannah and Jennifer were going through the pictures that they produced for the research activity, Hannah initiated a discussion on the topic of hair. This led to a more general conversation on appearance:

*Hannah:* Do you like my hair?
*Daisy:* Yes, it’s very nice. [*Hannah and Jennifer laugh]*
*Jennifer:* I tell you something, many people say my hair’s very nice. “Oh, I like your hair” [*laughs]*!
*Daisy:* Who says that to you?
*Hannah:* Friends from school, customers [*of family takeaway shop*] and sometimes on the street. Everyone says that.
*Jennifer:* Yes.
*Daisy:* Do you think it’s nice then?
*Jennifer:* Very nicey!
*Hannah:* Very, very, nice, Chinese hair [*laughs]*!
*Daisy:* How about the way you look?
Jennifer: Yes.
Hannah: We have these eyes.
Jennifer: Chinese eyes [laughs]!
Hannah: Those English people, their eyes are like in a hole, going inside [laughs]. They go like this to us [holding the outer corners of her eyes upward] but their eyes are just like little balls [laughs]!
Jennifer: English people think we have funny eyes. Dad has eyes like this.
Hannah: No, Chinese people have eyes like this. If they think we have eyes like this [holding the outer corners of her eyes upward], their eyes are like these [pressing her eyes hard]!
Jennifer: I quite like my eyes.
Daisy: So you like your eyes and you don’t want to have like blue eyes?
Jennifer: No! Because we’d look stupid! [Jennifer and Hannah laugh]
Daisy: What if one day you wake up and look into the mirror, you see yourself turned into an English person. How would you feel?
Jennifer: That’s not possible because you know your mum and dad are Chinese.

Having participated in this exchange, I am confident to suggest that there was certainly an element of playful sarcasm in the way Hannah and Jennifer talked about their hair and ‘Chinese eyes’. These two particular bodily features are experienced somewhat differently by the sisters. Whereas their hair – which is long, straight and dark – has attracted some positive comments from others such as ‘friends from school’ or ‘customers’ of the family takeaway shop, their eyes have been the target for other people to make fun of them. The particular bodily features appear to be in relation to the two elements of the popular imagery often associated with Chinese people: the exotic and desirable Chinese females and the slanted eyes18.

On the one hand, Hannah and Jennifer seem to be amused by the fact that others pay much attention to and also think highly of their hair. Yet comments like ‘oh I like your hair’ and ‘very, very, nice, Chinese hair’ seem to suggest that this praise is at times understood by Hannah and Jennifer as patronising. Hannah and Jennifer are therefore being sarcastic about the patronising praise of their hair, which in effect undermines the credibility of the gendered and naturalised image of Chinese girls, and mocks the people who deploy such admiration. Explicitly talking about it as

18 In both Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese, this perceived eye shape is called ‘phoenix eyes’.
'Chinese hair' indicates that Hannah and Jennifer are indeed working with these discourses of their hair from other people in their own manner and are incorporating them into their sense of Chineseness. It is through these processes that hair gains specific meanings and become a crucial marker of Hannah’s and Jennifer’s sense of Chinese identity.

On the other hand, Hannah and Jennifer recalled negative remarks about their eyes from other people, which also contributed to their sense of being Chineseness. The described acts of the others making fun of Hannah and Jennifer reflect the longstanding image of Chinese and perhaps Japanese and Korean people as having eyes with a slanted shape. Whereas Jennifer claimed that her ‘dad has eyes like this’, Hannah argued that ‘Chinese people have eyes like this’. This shows the group-based nature of the Chineseness as negotiated by Hannah and Jennifer. They are constructing a sense of relatedness with their family and other Chinese people through the naturalisation of the particular bodily feature of eyes. Through this, Hannah and Jennifer position themselves at a distance from what they regard as English people. As it is evident that the discourses of what Jennifer called the ‘Chinese eyes’ were expressed in opposition to the kind of eyes that English people allegedly have.

Switching from a casual funny manner to a rather furious one, Hannah talked about how English people’s eyes are like ‘in a hole, going inside’ and ‘little balls’. According to this discussion, these rather hostile and offensive comments aimed at English people in relation to their perceived eye shape appear to be a response and a counter-defensive mechanism to the attacks which Hannah and Jennifer felt received from English people. It seems that the idea that their father and family also have the particular eye shape is a factor that contributes to Hannah’s strong emotions about it. As indicated in the previous chapter, children often regard racism as involving an insult to their family which intensifies the seriousness of the incident.

This discussion confirms that the body is a crucial site within which children interactively construct notions of difference from each other. According to Hannah and Jennifer, discourses and experiences of their bodily feature of eyes may create a
sense of difference from English people. Yet they appear to have established a sense of pride and confidence in their physical appearance generally. They do not signal a wish for changes in their physicality, wanting to fit in more to the norm and to look more like the English, as some children do. In one respect, this may reflect the idea that they accept, and to an extent enjoy, their perceived and experienced physical differences. Yet it has to take into consideration the complex emotions embedded in the children’s perception of how they want, or do not want, to change the way they look, and how they could or could not actually change physically. As illustrated in this exchange, the children’s identity and emotional embodiment could be so strong that the thought of not looking like Chinese and losing the embodied connectedness with their parents and family would be unimaginable.

6.4 Working with the Body

The idea of altering particular bodily characteristics is not a complete novelty in many of today’s societies. Some examples of these measures are hinted at in the children’s accounts presented above, including having braces or dyed hair. Common views and attitudes towards these acts vary, as does the level of political sensitivity attached. An example would be the notion that, for instance, black people who want to have paler coloured skin is often seen by others as a form of identity political performance linked with their blackness, yet the acts of white people who have a tan or Chinese people lightening their face colour are seldom perceived as related to their whiteness and Chineseness respectively. The following account shows the particular meanings that could be assigned to changing hair colour among the children.

During a conversation I had with Kitty E’s (12) father about his migration experience, Kitty broke it up by asking her father, ‘Why can’t I dye my hair?’ Kitty’s father replied that ‘this is not the time to talk about this’ [T]. The issue of hair dye was raised by Kitty on more than one occasion while I was talking with her parents. Perhaps with my presence, Kitty thought that her negotiating power on the

19 [T] indicates a translated transcription from either Cantonese Chinese or Mandarin Chinese.
matter may increase, though it did not happen that way. I took an opportunity in one interview to find out more about why she seemed desperate to have her hair dyed:

*Daisy:* You said you wanted to dye your hair?
*Kitty:* I want to dye my hair but my parents don’t let me. They said I’m too young and they think I’m trying to look English or something. But I just want to have some highlights. It’s so unfair, my friends can dye their hair.

*Daisy:* Many of your friends dye their hair?
*Kitty:* My English friends, their hair’s not just one colour anyway, so you can’t really tell if they dyed their hair or not, but their parents don’t mind anyway. Many of my Chinese friends, they dyed their hair and their parents are cool.

*Daisy:* What colour would you have for your highlights?
*Kitty:* Purple, it goes well with black. My friend has it and it’s nice.

According to Kitty, there are two main reasons for her parents’ objection against her dying her hair. The first reason is that Kitty is ‘too young’ and the second that hair dye means ‘trying to look English’. The topic has become sensitive and even a taboo between Kitty and her parents, so that limited communication is permitted. As a result, Kitty’s parents continue to misunderstand and therefore forbid Kitty’s desire for hair dye which is seen as an act aspiring to Englishness. Yet it is very clear that Kitty in fact wants to have ‘purple highlights’ that would go well with her ‘black’ hair, matching the popular youth style. In this sense, Kitty’s longing to dye her hair is about ‘looking like’ her Chinese friends. More generally, Kitty simply wants to be able to do what her friends can do; ‘it’s so unfair, my friends can dye their hair’. Therefore, it is a concern about being parting of the group, conforming to the norm among the peers. The end product – that is how the hair looks – seems to be just as important as the act itself. The norm of Kitty’s peer group is to have dyed hair, and the resulting looks may vary. There is not a standardised way of presenting hair, but simply the children being creative with their hair. Kitty also identified the naturalised and differentiated hair type between Chinese and English people; the English multicoloured hair in contrast to Chinese single-coloured hair, with the former having the advantage of disguising the fact of having hair highlights. Despite this, parental influence remains a strong force enabling or limiting many children’s
creativity acts performing on their hair. The following dialogue between Kitty and her mother Mrs E further illuminates the contradictory positions and concerns between the two generations:

*Kitty:* I need a new eye liner.
*Mrs E:* Purple?
*Kitty:* No, black’s nice, purple’s gay, it’s horrible.
*Daisy:* You wear makeup often?
*Kitty:* I only wear eye liner. Mascara glues your eyes together and you can’t see.
*Mrs E:* She doesn’t always wear a lot of makeup, just plays with the eyes. I told her not to wear too much makeup, like not appropriate for school. Can you wear makeup in school? [T]
*Kitty:* Yeah.
*Mrs E:* See, that’s the problem, those English\(^20\) girls always dress like as if they’re going out, not going to school. [T]
*Kitty:* If you don’t wear it, then you look like you’d just woken up ‘cause everyone else’s wearing it, it’s kind of scary if you don’t.
*Mrs E:* It’s cultural difference, they don’t concentrate on their education. Everyone just wears makeup and tries to look nice. Other people do it doesn’t mean that you have to do it. [T]
*Kitty:* Yeah, whatever.

The one thing that Kitty and Mrs E appear to agree on is the importance of presenting oneself appropriately in terms of appearance. Yet the embedded idea of appropriateness is evidently negotiable in this context. In keeping with her belief that Kitty is too young to dye her hair, Mrs E also argues that as a pupil, Kitty should not ‘wear too much makeup’ that is ‘not appropriate for school’. She also argues for Kitty, and girls more generally, to present themselves in the way that corresponds to their identity as pupils in terms of how they dress. According to Mrs E, ‘English girls always dress like as if they’re going out, not going to school’, who ‘don’t concentrate on their education’ and ‘just wears makeup and tries to look nice’.

Within Mrs E’s naturalised discourse of Englishness – which explains the children in terms of ‘cultural differences’ – Kitty’s position is rather ambiguous. Mrs E

\(^{20}\) In everyday Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese languages, the terms ‘English’ and ‘British’ are generally used interchangeably, more specifically the term ‘British’ is generally used to refer to ‘England’.

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clearly wants to think that Kitty is not, or at least should not be, like ‘those English girls’, and therefore tries to distance the English peers from Kitty; ‘other people do it doesn’t mean that you have to do it’. In this sense, Kitty’s position of being a child, a daughter and a pupil is made apparent through Mrs E’s naturalised ideas of the English others.

By contrast, Kitty does not explicitly employ the notion of Englishness in her discourse in relation to girls wearing makeup to school. Rather, she states that she wears eye liner to school because ‘if you don’t wear it, then you look like you’d just woken up ‘cause everyone else’s wearing it, it’s kind of scary if you don’t’. Kitty is once again expressing her concern about whether she fits into her peer group of girls; she does not want to look ‘tired’, less feminine and different from her friends. Yet in doing so, Kitty is in fact talking about, and more importantly being part of, a specific feminine peer world which constitutes the idea of Englishness, which is at least recognised by some such as Mrs E. In a similar way, Christy D (12) talked about her attempts to work towards a body that would blend better into the peer group in the specific English context. As discussed earlier, skinniness among girls is associated with Englishness in Christy’s account. The following exchange continues from the conversation about Christy’s dissatisfaction with her appearance as discussed before:

**Daisy:** Will you actually do something to change your appearance?

**Christy:** I tried to go on a diet but I didn’t really want to hold on to eat ice-cream and stuff. I don’t diet anymore but I try to not eat chocolate but it doesn’t really work either. I think I’ll go to the gym, twice a week, I want to buy a running machine. If I get rich, I’d get laser treatment for eyes, to make it perfect, so I’m not short sighted anymore, to make it a regular shape [medically]. My eyes have a different shape like an oval instead of an eyeball.

**Daisy:** Have you ever talked to your parents about this?

**Christy:** Not really but they’ll be ok with it. When I’m older, they just don’t care what I do. Well, they don’t really care. They’d just say, “well, if you really want to do that, then you can do that, if you want, but they might be bad for you”. But they don’t care that much, they just think I shouldn’t wear too much makeup on my eyes ‘cause I got bad eyesight, but I don’t know
how that affects it, and my parents think that I don’t have any chocolate now ‘cause I have braces, but I do anyway.

It is clear that Christy has a rather strong desire to have a ‘normal’, healthy body that would match those of the others. For instance, a controlled-diet of no ice-cream and chocolate was used as a means through which Christy tried to achieve a more skinny body that would be identifiable among other English girls. As this did not work for Christy, she thought that she would try exercising and going to the gym regularly. Moreover, it is apparent that to Christy, a normal healthy body also involves aspects that may not be visibly meaningful to others. Christy points out that her ‘eyes have a different shape like an oval instead of an eyeball’ because she is short-sighted, and she wants to have ‘laser treatment’ so that she will have ‘perfect’ eyesight as well as ‘regular shaped’ eyes and eyeballs.

What is also significant in Christy’s narrative is that she is speaking of her experience of her physicality from her position of being a child and a daughter. Just as in the case of Kitty, Christy shows that what she can do with her own body is sometimes constrained by her status as a child, with general financial dependency and perceived immaturity among adults. As Christy indicates, as she gets older, she will be trusted to have a greater level of maturity and therefore to take responsibility over how she handles her own body. According to Christy, as she becomes ‘old enough’, her parents would simply say that ‘well, if you really want to do that, then you can do that, but they might be bad for you’. This shows the parents’ perceived lack of interest and empathy with the children in relation to their experience of their physicality. In these cases, both the children and their parents are equally concerned about the children’s bodies; what is done to the body and how the body is presented. Yet the fundamental concerns of the children and parents could be different. For instance, both Christy and her parents shared the idea that chocolate would be best avoided, but while Christy is worried about how she looks and how much she weighs, the parents’ are concerned about Christy’s dental health.
6.5 Boys' Performance of Masculinity

In this final part of the chapter, gender issues in the children’s experiences of the body are addressed in relation to two aspects: first, the ways that boys may be seen as performing their masculinity; and second, how girls read and discuss the physical attractiveness of boys. Overall, the girls were found to be much keener on talking about issues around physicality with me than did the boys. It seems to me that this is to do with the boys’ own sense and presentation of their gender identities as well as my perceived gender identity. The boys simply did not initiate conversations about their own or others’ appearances with me, an older female researcher. Despite this, the boys were often observed to address their own physicality in a different way, most often in terms of what can be seen as physical performance of their masculinity.

For instance, Michael A (6) in his sister Lorraine A’s (11) words is rather keen to ‘show off his boyish things’. On the day when I joined Michael’s family on a trip to the park, it was full of incidents of what I believe to be Michael’s displays of his masculine performance. Before we set off, Michael’s mother told Michael that his skateboard would be too heavy for him to carry all the way to the park, and therefore should be left at home. However, Michael insisted that he could manage. While we were heading to the park, Michael seemed a bit exhausted, yet he kept chanting ‘it’s not heavy, I can carry it’ and he succeeded. Once we arrived at the park, Michael could not wait to present us with his skating skills. Michael was shouting comments such as ‘I can go really fast’, ‘I go downhill really fast’, ‘I’m not scared’ or ‘I don’t get hurt’ while he was skating, more or less for us. In addition, upon his sister Lorraine inviting him to pose for the photography activity, Michael with his own initiatives voluntarily posed standing at the top of a climbing frame and on a moving swing. From what was seen in the last chapter, physical strength and fearlessness is a highly praised quality within Michael’s masculine peer group, and Michael’s behaviour appears to be in line with that. Therefore, it seems fair to believe that Michael’s displays of his particular abilities and characteristics reflect much about his identity of being a boy. Yet Michael’s mother, Ms A, suggested that notions of whiteness and Englishness is key to understanding this gender behaviour, as shown
in the following description. During a visit in the summer, I found Michael running around the family fish-and-chips shop topless:

*Daisy:* Hi Michael, what’re you doing?

*Michael:* Hello, you see my muscles? [holding up his arms] They’re very hard. Touch it.

*Daisy:* [touching Michael’s arm] Oh yeah, I can feel it.

*Michael:* I’m filling up the fridge [of the shop with cans of drink]. [going to the storeroom to get drinks]

Upon seeing this, Michael’s mother, Ms A said to me:

He’s been hanging around with the *gwai jai* [lit. ghost/devil boy, white boy] next door. That boy doesn’t have a top on all day, and now he’s acting like a *gwai jai* [white boy], he wouldn’t wear his top, and he can’t stop showing off his muscles to everyone, saying how strong he is! [laughs] [T]

Michael’s mother appeared to find Michael’s behaviour amusing; she was commenting on it in a cheerful tone with a smile. It is apparent that in this instance, the important thing for Michael was to parade his masculinity and maturity, being physically strong and perhaps being helpful around the shop. In searching for an explanation for Michael’s behaviour, Ms A believed that it was due to the influence of the boy, the ‘*gwai jai*’ [white boy] next door. Unlike what has been seen earlier, Ms A did not seem to be disapproving or to perceive it as a kind of negative influence on Michael. I would argue that Ms A’s use of terminology of ‘*gwai jai*’, both in describing the neighbour and how Michael was acting, is best understood as having an emphasis on culture, though this is not to deny the racial elements that can be embedded in the concept. According to Ms A, Michael had learnt the specific embodied way of behaving and performing the identity of being a boy within the particularly English cultural context. Perhaps it should be added that I had only once observed Michael’s gender performance of this kind. A couple of months later, Michael was teasing a boy of his age as being ‘gay’, and when I asked Michael what ‘gay’ meant, he said it refers to ‘a boy who takes off his clothes in front of people’. A new meaning of being topless seemed to have been negotiated among Michael and the boys of his peer group. The result is that a boy being topless is no longer
seen as being positively masculine but rather negatively ‘gay’ at the particular moment in time.

I believe that Michael is a rather confident child who enjoys ‘showing off his boyish things’ just like his sister Lorraine suggested. However, Ms A had talked to me about her worry that Michael was ‘small for his age’ on more than one occasion. In fact, the image of Chinese male has always been seen as somewhat lean and of a smaller build; even the martial art iconic figure Bruce Lee fails to fit into the conventional western standard of masculine body type. How this image may inform the boys sense of self identities cannot be fully invested in this study since insufficient evidence was gathered in relation to how the boys feel about their physicality. Nonetheless, some of the boys showed how they could increase their physical strength in acting out their masculine identities through various means, such as Michael’s skateboard and in the following case of Jerry C (12), munchaku which is a martial art instrument. On many occasions, I found Jerry ‘exercising’ while I was talking with his younger brother or sisters. These included Jerry using weights, a bendy bar and a munchaku, and doing push-ups. Jerry was also found to be play-fighting with his younger brother and cousin boy quite often. This involved, for example, Jerry lifting them up and throwing them onto the sofa. It seemed to me that this could be a way to try to impress me, the young woman researcher. One of the pictures produced by Jerry’s younger sister Hannah C (10) captured a moment when Jerry was play-fighting with their younger brother John C (6). The following discussion was based on that picture:

\[\text{Daisy:} \] So you are quite active then?  
\[\text{Jerry:} \] Yes.  
\[\text{Daisy:} \] Do you play any sports?  
\[\text{Jerry:} \] I’m not learning any at the moment, but I want to learn karate [a Japanese martial art] self-defence. I used to go to this club but ‘cause it’s too far, I stopped going.  
\[\text{Daisy:} \] Why do you want to learn karate?

\[\text{Nunchaku} \] is a weapon of Japanese origin, consisting of two hardwood sticks joined at each end by a short length of chain or cord. Bruce Lee is said to be among those who popularised it through films.
Jerry: Any martial art, so that I can fight properly. I want to fight those racist people, people at school who take the mick out of me and my family, and you know what yeah, if I can fight, I’ll go back and beat the mickey out of that woman, you know that that racist old witch on the bus, you know I told you what happened the other day.

The incident that Jerry referred to is a racist encounter which happened to Jerry and his younger sister on the bus on their way to school one day. Jerry told me that a ‘tarty old woman’ who ‘took the mick out of him, his sister and his dad’. The woman shouted at Jerry and Jennifer with words like ‘chinky’, ‘fucking Chinese’ and ‘stupid children’. Jerry also said that he got really ‘angry’ and ‘p-doff’ from that; his ‘fist was so tight’ and he ‘wanted to hit the woman’. At the end, Jerry added, ‘when I’m older, she’s going to get it one day’. It can be seen that Jerry’s desire to learn martial arts and to be able to fight is partly in response to the racist assaults that he had experienced. From Jerry’s point of view, having the skills of martial arts could certainly compensate for any potential disadvantage due to his age and, arguably his size and height. It is apparent that Jerry is strongly offended by the racist insults which were directed not only at him, but also his parents and younger siblings. Therefore, being a macho boy is particularly important to Jerry; he wants to be able to defend and protect his family. In this sense, Jerry’s masculinity is linked to his identification with his family and his identities of being an elder son and brother. In contrast to Michael and Jerry, Jerry’s young brother, John C (6) seemed to exhibit his gender identity in a rather different manner. In the following dialogue, John hints at one way in which he experiences his body. John’s sister Hannah C (8) had taken a picture of John while he was taking his medicine. I asked John about the picture:

Daisy: Who took this picture?
John: Hannah je je [elder sister].
Daisy: Did you ask her to take it?
John: No.
Daisy: Do you like the picture?
John: No.
Daisy: Why don’t you like it?
John: I don’t like medicine.
Daisy: Oh, it doesn’t taste nice!
John: No. My body’s red and itching, and my eyes. Mum puts yeuk yau [medical oil] on me.

In the picture at issue, John has a big smile and I could not see that he was actually unwell at the time when the picture was taken. John certainly does not think that the picture captures his most attractive and best physical form; his experience of his body due to the illness is definitely unpleasant. John has eczema and he is allergic to dairy products. Therefore, he has to take medicines regularly and be very careful about what he eats. During the fieldwork period, John was found to be affected by his eczema in various ways. He sometimes had red patches on his face and other parts of the body, and would often have a distinctive smell of Chinese medical lotion which was used to ease the discomfort of the skin. John’s siblings constantly watched out for him in terms of what kind of food he would be allowed. On one occasion, John’s aunt bought some ice-cream for the family. Before John said anything, his elder sister Hannah immediately told John that he was not going to have any. In another incident, John was eating some crisps in the living room, and again Hannah walked in and took the packet of crisps away. As Hannah explained, John could not eat crisps because it would make him ‘turn into a goldfish’ with ‘red puffy eyes and mouth’. Hannah, being an elder sister shows how much she loves and cares for her younger brother John. The same applies to John’s mother whose caring for John includes feeding him at almost every meal. Arguably, these acts constantly position John as a small child who is believed to lack any ability to look after himself and his body. How John responds to this is partly illuminated by the following abstract. John was given the voice-recorder and so was in charge of the conversation.

John: What is your favourite sport?
Daisy: Um, I like badminton. What’s your favourite sport?
John: Running.
Hannah: Running? [sounds surprised] How fast can you run then?
John: Not fast.
Hannah: Didn’t you say you like football?
Jerry: No, his favourite sport is crying, "wa wa wa [crying sound], mummy, gor gor [elder brother] hits me". People tell him off and he'd say that people hit him.

It is rather evident that in this discussion Hannah and Jerry enjoyed teasing their younger brother John, and considered him weak, both physically and mentally. Crying could be seen as a sign of weakness, perhaps more so among boys. During my stay with the children, I had never seen John cried; even when his elder brother Jerry was holding him by his top and shouting at him. Jerry's belittling actions against John were observed on another occasion. John was about to cut his fingernails and Jerry said to me, 'he's going to cry like a baby and run to mummy when he cuts himself'. John's reaction was to ignore his brother's comment. In the end, John proved Jerry wrong by cutting his nails without hurting himself. In fact, I observed different situations in which John was interacting with his three-year-old cousin in a confident, caring and competent manner. For instance, John showed his skills and ability in helping and even teaching his younger cousin various tasks, such as assembling a Power Rangers model, a popular toy among young boys. Therefore, with all the potential limitations for John to perform his masculinity – which could be derived from the fact that he is a 6-year-old, the youngest child in the family and has a condition that has been affecting his physicality – he nonetheless interacts in different ways with different members of the family and acts out his various identities. These limitations could sometimes work to John's advantage; when he felt like it, he would sit on my lap, breaking the boundaries of age and gender.

6.6 Girls' Construction of Physical Attractiveness

This final section focuses on how the girls talked about physical attractiveness of boys. What is significant is that the notion of Chineseness and Englishness are made apparent in various complex ways through these children's gendered and heterosexual discourses. Despite the girls' age, 'boyfriend' appears to be a significant part in many girls' sense of gender, sexual and other identities. One of the ways that the girls talked about their perceptions of the others' bodies emerged
from their readings of young male family members. Hannah C (10) and Jennifer C (11) were browsing through the photos which they had produced for the research, including some depicting their elder brother and younger cousin, a boy also.

Jennifer: You see how skinny gor gor [elder brother] is.
Daisy: Is he?
Jennifer: I don’t want a boyfriend like gor gor. I don’t like glasses and I don’t like thin.
Hannah: I don’t like fat but gor gor’s too thin.
Daisy: You don’t like thin either?
Hannah: Err, ugly!
Daisy: Yeah?
Hannah: You see, fai ja [fat boy] [pointing to a photo of her three-year-old male cousin], he’s a cute baby.
Daisy: So you like fat?
Hannah: I know, I know, jei jei [elder sister] loves rich boys.
Daisy: Oh yeah?
Jennifer: Yeah, he has to be rich.
Hannah: He has to be very kind and he has to love babies.
Jennifer: I like Chinese boys.
Hannah: I like Chinese too.
Daisy: English?
Jennifer: No.
Hannah: Um, maybe, I don’t know. Some of them are quite good-looking. But not Indians! [laughs]
Jennifer: No! They’re ugly, they stink, those ah cha [Indian, see footnote 12] “gi li gu lu” [imitating the sound of a ‘foreign’ language], don’t know what they are saying! [laughs] Hak gwai [lit. black ghost/devil, black people] are ugly as well.

It can be seen that from the very beginning of the discussion, Jennifer and Hannah are constructing a dialogue of physical desirability largely within a framework that inevitably objectifies and sexualises the boys. Except for Hannah’s comments on her three-year-old cousin as ‘fat boy’ but a ‘cute baby’, Hannah and Jennifer are largely concerned with the physical and non-physical characteristics they prefer and deem to be desirable in their perceptions of boyfriends. From talking about a healthy and
balanced body – which means no ‘glasses’ and not ‘fat’ or ‘thin’ – to attributes such as being ‘rich’, ‘kind’ and ‘loving to babies’, Hannah and Jennifer suggest ‘Chineseness’ as a crucial aspect in a desirable boyfriend. In one respect, Chineseness clearly refers to a particularly perceived physicality. While Hannah and Jennifer agree that Chinese boys are physically attractive, they argue that some English boys ‘are quite good-looking’, though Indian and black boys are ‘ugly’. In spite of this, it is also apparent that concepts of Chinese, Indian and black in this discussion do not only represent physicality. In addressing Indianess, Hannah and Jennifer once again draw on the stereotype of Indian people about the way they stink, as discussed in the previous chapter, and also the idea that Indian people speak a language that is foreign to Hannah and Jennifer. This is expressed in the idea that Indian people ‘“gi li gu lu”, don’t know what they are saying’. Therefore, from this gendered and sexualised gaze, the non-Chinese boys are largely positioned as the undesirable others. Yet I should stress that this assigning of ‘ugliness’ is through both the fixing of particular bodily features and the naturalising of the non-physical elements. This complexity of the girls’ accounts of heterosexual relationships is further illuminated by the following account. Lorraine A (11) initiated the topic during one visit. We were watching some cartoon on television and not talking about anything specifically.

*Lorraine:* You have a boyfriend, haven’t you?
*Daisy:* Yes, I have. Have you?
*Lorraine:* Not at the moment but I had a boyfriend before. He’s English but I broke up with him.
*Daisy:* Do you prefer to go out with English boys?
*Lorraine:* Well, not with Indian.
*Daisy:* Why not?
*Lorraine:* Unless they are both the same culture, like Indian and Indian, they’d like each other.
*Daisy:* How about Chinese?
*Lorraine:* Yeah, they could be handsome.
*Daisy:* Black?
*Lorraine:* Not much of a thought.
*Daisy:* What else, um, Japanese?
Lorraine: If they can speak English or Chinese to communicate, I guess they could be handsome too. As long as it's not Indian or black, I don't mind. I found them ugly. I can think that they're English people, but then a bit ugly. If they kind of like speak English or born here, I don't really mind. Um, no, if you ask me “are they English”, I'd say they're English, but they're not exactly handsome enough kind of thing. [giggles]

In this exchange, my asking Lorraine if she prefers to go out with English boys drove her to reflect on and construct her complex ideas of Englishness. In Lorraine’s framework, the concept of culture is important in understanding the overall attractiveness between the genders; people who share 'the same culture’ tend to be attracted to one another, ‘like Indian and Indian’ would like each other. This naturalised sense of same culture attraction explains why Lorraine does not think of Indian boys as good to go out with. By doing so, Lorraine is inevitably positioning Indian people as the others while distancing herself from this particular group of people. However, in finalising her construction of Englishness, Lorraine proposes that in fact Indian and black boys could be seen as being English, yet ‘they’re not exactly handsome enough’ to go out with.

What Lorraine produces is therefore a flexible framework of togetherness and otherness; a boy could be seen as English if he ‘speaks English or born here’ but he could be distanced and regarded as the others on the basis of physical attractiveness. More importantly, it is evident that within such framework, Lorraine herself can be fitted into the category of ‘English’ with the criteria that she puts forward, such as language and place of birth, but which at the same time does not clash with her potential Chinese identification. Moreover, Lorraine claimed that she could consider Japanese boys to be ‘handsome’ and to be her boyfriend on the condition that ‘if they can speak English or Chinese to communicate’. This shows her belief in a ‘shared culture’ as crucial to a relationship, but which is not defined in any simplistic or rigid terms. This is also a notion which is particularly crucial in Christy D’s (12) narrative of a potential husband, as reflected in the following discussion. This continued from our dialogues about Christy’s dissatisfaction with her body:
Daisy: So I guess you just have to wait before you can have your laser treatment for your eyes. Is there anything else that you can’t do right now?

Christy: Um, I want to have my own like designing company and design stuff, make lots of money, have a husband, a big house, just unlike this one.

Daisy: Did you say husband?

Christy: Yeah, I said husband, in the future, not now.

Daisy: What do you think your future husband is like?

Christy: My husband has, he’s not allowed to be too good-looking ‘cause then other people would like him but he has to, no, he can’t be ugly, he just has to be above average, but below perfect, below like handsome ‘cause you don’t want him to cheat on you. He has to be loyal and kind and he has to like kids ‘cause we’re going to have three kids, and um, he should, um, he shouldn’t smoke or take drugs but he can drink, not a lot, a glass of wine every night, and um, should be quite funny or can be quite funny, um, he shouldn’t have too long work hours, should come home and um, be a good husband, and invite me out to dinner, buy me flowers, but I don’t want him to spend too much money because we have to put it towards the house and two cars. I’d like him to be Chinese, I don’t mind that much. Well, it um, I prefer he’d be Chinese so I could speak Chinese and you know have separate festivals, and he’d understand me better, and we should talk to our children in Mandarin.

Daisy: Do you think your parents prefer you to marry someone Chinese?

Christy: I think my dad would want me to marry someone Chinese. Mum, she doesn’t really mind. My dad’s very overprotective, and I think he just trusts Chinese boys more.

Daisy: Can you think of any examples of an above average but below perfect looking guy?

Christy: Um, not my dad, which is why I’m not very pretty! [smile] I can name some people that my friends like, like my best friend likes Josh Hartnett, and my other friend likes Brad Pitt, they are perfect to them, and some of my friends used to like Leonardo Dicaprio, used to and, um, some of my, some of the girls in my class like Justin Timberlake, but they’re not Chinese and I don’t care about these pop idols, but I can’t think of any real examples.

Christy’s detailed projection of her future family life clearly explains her perception of what a heterosexual married relationship involves and the gender roles of a
husband, and to a lesser extent of a wife. In Christy’s account, it can be seen that physical appearance, how ‘good-looking’ and ‘handsome’ a husband is, is considered along with other non-physical characteristics, including being ‘loyal’ and ‘kind’, to have a liking for children, a sense of humour and romance, and being Chinese. In relation to how Christy thinks that her husband should look, she thinks that he ‘can’t be ugly’ but ‘just has to be above average’ yet ‘below perfect’. Christy’s philosophy behind this is that ‘you don’t want him to cheat on you’. In this sense, in Christy’s thought of a husband, good looks are perhaps not as important as the values, beliefs and behaviour of the person. Given that Christy is rather drawn into ideas of physical perfection in relation to the way she perceives herself as seen in her earlier accounts, this is quite an interesting contradiction.

Moreover, Christy made clear that she would want a Chinese husband, yet the primary consideration of this does not seem to be about appearance, which Christy does not really have any ‘real’ references for. Rather, it is because Christy ‘could speak Chinese’ with him – a language which Christy is less fluent than in English – and ‘have separate festivals’, presumably of Chinese and English cultures. In this sense, the Chinese husband in Christy’s perception is indeed someone who is like herself, that is, someone who enjoys both Chinese and English cultures. The other reasons include Christy’s belief that a Chinese husband would understand her better and be able to talk to their children in Mandarin. This idea of passing on the cultural knowledge of language to the next generation is central in Christy’s perceived parental role. Through these, both Christy’s and her children’s Chinese identification could be formulated. This conception of Chineseness, which is central in aspects such as language and festivals, and also physicality, is found to be in contrast to that of Kitty E’s (12). Kitty appears to be the child who has the most extensive and personal experiences of girlfriend-boyfriend relationships, and generally the widest friendship network among all the children. This is reflected in the photos that Kitty had taken in the research photography activity, capturing many of her friends. While Kitty was looking through these pictures, she introduced them to me, leading to a revelation about her boyfriend and ex-boyfriends. The following is an abstract of the conversation regarding these issues:
Kitty: You’re not meant to tell my mum. I went out with this guy, he’s not in here [the photos]. He used to go to Chinese school, but he left. His name’s Vernon [pseudonym], same age as me. He’s a hundred percent Chinese, BBC [British-born-Chinese], just like me. We broke up two months ago. Then I met Simon [pseudonym], he’s English, well, half Irish and lots of other stuff, but to me he’s English. He fancies me but we’re only friends, very good friends. We talk on the phone a lot, msn and emails ‘cause he lives far way, and here comes my boyfriend of two weeks so far, he’s called Ken [pseudonym], he’s Chinese to me but he’s really half English, a quarter Chinese and a quarter Portuguese.

Daisy: Why is he Chinese to you?

Kitty: He could look Chinese to me and I think he’s better-looking than normal Chinese. He has nice eyes and nose, and I feel comfortable with him, it’s like I feel that we’ve known each other for a very long time.

Daisy: Does he speak Chinese?

Kitty: No, he doesn’t, he doesn’t know much about Chinese festivals and things.

Daisy: Do you prefer to go out with Chinese guys? I mean not Chinese-Chinese, but a bit Chinese?

Kitty: Yes. I like Chinese guys more. I think they’re better-looking than English guys. I like Aaron Kwok [a Hong Kong artist], he’s very good-looking.

In this account, Kitty shows how she uses concepts of Chineseness and Englishness in a way that only partially informs biological elements in terms of kinship and physicality, but emphasises a sense of feeling or emotional connectedness. On the one hand, Kitty employs the term English to describe a friend who is ‘half Irish and lots of other stuff’ but to her, he is English. On the other hand, Kitty’s boyfriend who is ‘really half English, a quarter Chinese and a quarter Portuguese’ is Chinese to Kitty. The perceived Chineseness as assigned by Kitty to her boyfriend is in relation to how Kitty thinks that he ‘could look Chinese’ but he is indeed ‘better-looking than normal Chinese’. Moreover, in spite of the fact that Kitty’s boyfriend does not have what may be seen as the relevant cultural knowledge of Chinese language and festivals, he is perceived by Kitty as Chinese. Kitty’s claim that ‘I feel comfortable with him, it’s like I feel that we’ve known each other for a very long time’ seems to suggest that a major part of her boyfriend’s Chineseness is to do with the perceived and felt connection between them; Kitty feels a strong sense of emotional connection with her boyfriend. This also corresponds to Kitty’s self-
assigned 'BBC', British-born-Chinese identity, which according to Kitty means 'a hundred percent Chinese', presumably biologically. Kitty’s account embeds a range of meanings of Chineseness, just as in the diverse definitions of Englishness presented in the children’s narratives in this chapter. It is this dynamic in the children’s identity construction that forms the focus of the analysis presented in the next chapter.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the children’s articulations about their experiences and perceptions of their own and others’ physicality. It has drawn attention to some of the ways that the children generated a sense of who they are through ideas and experiences of physicality and appearance. The children have shown their awareness of their physicality as being read by others which is sometimes in relation to racial and ethnic issues, and is something that the children have to work with. Yet it has been seen that the boys’ experiences of the body are closely linked to their masculine identities as well as their familial positions. For the girls, their discourses of physical attractiveness and desirability of boys, with themes of heterosexual relationships, dating and marriage, have specified their gender and sexual identities. Also, through accounts of how the children negotiate with their parents about what they could do with their bodies, their position and status of being a child was evident.

In the children’s embodiment of identities and differences, the notions of Chineseness and Englishness are therefore only partially significant. In this, the children’s construction of flexible and ambiguous meanings of Chineseness and Englishness has been evident. Instead of drawing on a fixation with skin as in conventional racial discourses, in many of the children’s discourses, it found a naturalised framework of elements such as hair colour and type, eye colour and shape, facial features or physique of Chineseness, Englishness, Indianness and blackness for example, which is defined in relation to one another. In this, the body is being talked about as a fragmented object, which appears to allow more liberating discourses of embodied identities. An oversimplified example would be that some
children may think of their eyes in terms of Chineseness, but they could dye their hair brown or diet for skinny leg to forge their identification with their English peers. In short, the children may experience their particular bodily traits in relation to Chineseness, which can at times generate a sense of who they are. Yet looking like the others, just as looking healthy, normal and attractive, is also important to the children, which does not necessarily imply a racialised standard but is open to negotiation. The dynamic ways in which the children work with and around the body, and talk about the body, suggest a degree of flexibility and multiplicity in their own senses of identity.
'My favourites' by Hannah aged 10
Deconstructing ‘Chinese-English’ Identities

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I began to explore the children’s use of language in addressing their own identities as well as those of the others. This chapter examines this in more detail with specific focus on the children’s senses of ethnic identification. It intends to develop an understanding of some of the processes and practices through which the children have come to appreciate their ethnic identities, the elements that constitute these identities, and the meanings of them. Drawing upon the children’s reflective articulation of their experiences, the chapter presents a typologies approach of the children’s constructions and presentations of their ethnic identities. While these typologies illustrate the differing ways in which the children can understand and formulate their ethnic identities, they also highlight the contradictions, nuances and overlaps among the children.

In reflecting upon the children’s accounts, it becomes apparent that the children’s definitions of Chineseness and Englishness are often relational or specifically oppositional to one another. Yet most of the children’s sense of identity is formulated through both. How it is possible to be both Chinese and English with the two often embedding contradictory elements according to the children’s subject experiences of these identities and their diverse strategic ways to construct these identities. Besides, it is also evident that the children’s portrayals of what it means to be Chinese and English may not always echo those found in popular discourses. This calls into question the often unchallenged adulthood embedded in the common understandings of ethnic identifications, and also a negligence of the roles that children play in these constructions of social meanings.
7.2 ‘Where Do You Come From?’

One question that I would always try to raise during the fieldwork was whether the children had ever been asked where they came from. Driven by my own experience, I was curious to know how the children would suggest handling such questioning which would require a conscious reflection and strategic articulation of their identities. The children’s responses largely echo with the idea that the question is often articulated with racial, ethnic and national discourses and as is often understood by the recipients. Although the question could also be about someone’s locality, that is the area of which one lives, many of the children would understand it in the former terms. According to these children, the question ultimately implies assigning them with an outsider position. This sense of being different – in which it would be reasonable to assume that their physicality plays an important part – leaves the children feeling frustrated and even offended. Moreover, within the everyday contexts of the children’s experiences, such a sense of being different and as an outsider is often specifically referring to the belief of them being not English. Here, the complexity of the concept of Englishness in the children’s experiences is only beginning to unfold. The following discussion took place while Lorraine A (11) was carrying out the ‘Hello Alien’ activity and ranking the range of identity labels including one states ‘I am British/Chinese/English/Others’. I asked her if she has ever been asked where she comes from:

Daisy: Have people ever asked you where you come from?
Lorraine: Yeah, a lot, but I just bored them a lot. I said my grandparents are from China, my parents are from Hong Kong and I was born in England and I’m English.
Daisy: How did you feel when people asked you that?
Lorraine: Um, kind of annoyed ‘cause not everybody thinks the way I feel, they think where your mum and dad came from, what you look like is what you are kind of thing. But um, it doesn’t really matter, I don’t really care what they think.

From this dialogue, it is apparent that the ways that the children may respond to the question have to be located within the common understandings of what makes
people who they are. According to Lorraine, such framework is based on the idea that 'where your mum and dad came from, what you look like is what you are'. In this, Lorraine would be considered to be Chinese, just as her parents who did in fact come to England from another country. Therefore, Lorraine is not English but the others. Moreover, because of her appearance, Lorraine felt that only her Chineseness would be acknowledged or rather assumed by others, leaving her Englishness unappreciated. From this, it can be seen that ideas of ethnicities cannot be separated from racialised notions of physical type. Thus an element of whiteness is embedded in the concept of being English. However, Lorraine showed how she would work against such a framework with a determination to challenge this superficial, simplistic and inaccurate reading of who she is. Accordingly, Lorraine suggested responding tactically by offering a detailed genealogical background of her family in order to 'bore' the person who asks the question. In this, Lorraine signified her Chinese and English identifications. While the former derives from the fact that her 'grandparents are from China' and her 'parents are from Hong Kong', the latter is from the fact that she was 'born in England'. In spite this dual sense of identification, Lorraine simply claimed a singular identity of being English. This perhaps partly stems from Lorraine's sense of annoyance that how she feels is not being understood and agreed with by other people. This feeling of one's own identity not being acknowledged by others seems to be shared by Jerry C (12), as can be seen in the following account:

_Daisy:_ Have people ever asked you where you come from?  
_Jerry:_ Yeah.  
_Daisy:_ How would you answer them?  
_Jerry:_ I'd tell them to mind their own business. They're nosy. It's none of their business where I come from.  
_Daisy:_ You don't like people asking you that?  
_Jerry:_ No, 'cause they don't know anything about me.

Unlike Lorraine, Jerry stated that he would adopt a more withdrawn approach if he found himself in the situation suggested. Jerry's response to tell the people to 'mind their own business' would mostly lead to an end to the conversation. Jerry felt that his background was a private issue, something he would rather protect from
intrusion. Similar to the Lorraine feels about the same issue, Jerry thought that other people may not always appreciate and agree with the way he felt about himself; people simply ‘don’t know anything about him’. Unlike the other children in the study, Christy D (12) is the only child in this study who was not born in England. Therefore, it can be argued that in theory she would be able to take the question about where she comes from and answer it in a literal sense. Christy was born in China and so she could claim that she came from China comfortably and unproblematically. During the alien activity, Christy wrote ‘Nanjing’, a province of China, on the label of ‘I was born in’. This, according to Christy is something rather important to her sense of who she is. The following exchange took place while Christy was carrying on the task:

*Daisy:* Do you get the question where you come from a lot?

*Christy:* Yeah, sometimes.

*Daisy:* How would you answer that?

*Christy:* I’d say I’m from China because that’s where I was born.

*Daisy:* Do you mind people asking you that?

*Christy:* Um, not really, because they don’t know that there’s a difference between Japanese people and Chinese, Korean. They think it’s all the same.

*Daisy:* People think that you’re Japanese or Korean?

*Christy:* Yeah, they say “are you Japanese or Korean, or something”. They just keep on guessing until I say I’m Chinese.

From this, it appeared that Christy would take on a more relaxed approach when facing people’s query about her background. Although Christy understood that the question could entail the idea that she was not English but the others, she would not be too bothered about it. Rather, Christy acknowledged the ignorance among some people who may not be able to differentiate ‘Japanese’, ‘Chinese’ and ‘Korean’ people. What this would be likely to prompt is Christy’s assertion of a singular identity of being Chinese. The differences in these children’s reported responses to an extent relate to the ways in which the children feel about their identities. Yet they also reflect how the children understand the intentions and assumptions made behind the questioning, along with other factors such as the perceived identity of the person who asks the question, the context in which it takes place and so on. The following
dialogue between Michael A (6) and me shows that Michael not only welcomed my question about where he is from, he also responded it with enthusiasm and creativity. Michael decided that for the alien task, I would write down the answers for the identity labels for him. I therefore took the opportunity to ask him what he comes from:

_Daisy:_ Where do you come from?
_Michael:_ I come from Japanese! [laughs]
_Daisy:_ Ok, where were you born?
_Michael:_ I come from mummy's tummy! [laughs]
_Daisy:_ Ok, you were born in/
_Michael:_ /in a stable! [laughs]
_Daisy:_ Where's mummy from?
_Michael:_ He's from Japanese. [giggles]
_Daisy:_ Where's daddy from?
_Michael:_ From Hong Kong.
_Daisy:_ So are you Chinese, Japanese or something else?
_Michael:_ Chinese and English.

There was no doubt that Michael understood what the question generally intends to ask. Yet he refused to comply with my prompts for a readily expected and fixed discourse of ethnic identities. Michael's playful manner was exhibited in his answers which were surely carefully planned. He suggested that he came from 'Japanese' and 'mummy's tummy', he was born in a 'stable' and his mother is 'from Japanese'. Michael displayed his range of knowledge about human biology of birth, nations and geography; his responses also reflected the fact that at the time of the interview we were approaching the religious and cultural festival of Christmas. In employing these resources the way he did, Michael chose to engage in the conversation addressing his identities in a fun, dynamic and creative way. However, towards the end of the exchange, Michael claimed that he was 'Chinese and English' which appeared to be a more direct answer to the question. This assertion of identity did not actually follow if Michael's parental backgrounds were taken into account, especially when he purposely altered the information regarding where his mother comes from to Japanese instead of China or Hong Kong. What Michael
demonstrated is an approach to ethnic identity which may be unusual to those often found in adult discourses.

7.3 Children’s Discourses of Ethnic Identification

A number of themes can be identified from the above discussions. First, many of the children have multiple senses of ethnic identification and a number of ethnic identities which are contextual and ready to be asserted in their everyday interactions. Second, the children’s ethnic identities can be articulated partly to be reactive or defensive to their interpretations of the situations. Finally, the children’s experiences of ethnic identification can be linked to the personal and private domains of their lives and that these identities can be strongly invested emotionally by the children. As already highlighted, notions of Chineseness and Englishness are crucial to many of the children’s senses of who they are. This section explores the variety of meanings of these identities to the children.

7.3.1 Ambivalent Chinese-English Identities

In the labelling task of the alien activity, there was a label stating ‘I am British/Chinese/English/Others’. With no specific instruction given to the children about whether they should choose one or more answers, all the children selected only ‘Chinese’ as their answers. The common discourse of ethnic identity of singularity can be a possible reason for this response among the children, and other factors in relation to the children’s subjective experiences will unfold themselves in the course of the chapter. Although the children only asserted the identity of being just Chinese initially, sisters and brothers John C (6), Hannah C (10), Jennifer C (11) and Jerry C (12) actually shared a rather strong sense of being both Chinese and English. Yet more specifically, they talked about their experiences of Chineseness and Englishness as if they are two separate entities; they feel proud to be Chinese but more ambivalent about their affiliations with Englishness. The following exchange took place after the label ranking task:
Daisy: So you are Chinese?
Jennifer: Yes.
Hannah: Yeah.
Daisy: Just Chinese?
Jerry: Are you English?
Jennifer: Um, a part of it.
Hannah: Yeah, half of it. We are half Chinese and English.
Jerry: You’re fifty-fifty?
Jennifer: Yes.
Daisy: Why are you Chinese?
Hannah: We’re half China.
Jennifer: We’re half Chinese because/
Hannah: /because mum is Chinese, so she was born as Chinese, and because when I
was very, very, young, I was born in China.
Jerry: No, you’re not born in China! You were born here stupid.
Hannah: No, I have, I have, um, I have, I have six cousins, I have three over there
and I don’t know how many here. I have two grandparents in China, and
two grandparents in Hong Kong, and a great-grandparent. I have many,
many uncles and aunts over there.
Daisy: Then why are you English?
Jennifer: No! We’re not English! [laughs]
Hannah: We’re half English!
Jennifer: Yeah!
Daisy: Sorry, sorry, my mistake. [smile] So, you’re half English because?
Jennifer: Because I was born here. Because you’re born in English.
Jerry: You mean people who were born in England are English, not “you’re born
in English”. You’re like people who can’t speak English.

This discussion reflected the sense of ambivalence embedded not only in the ways
that these children talked about their identities, but also in their actual experiences of
them. In a rather straightforward manner, the children explained their Englishness as
largely drawn from the fact that they were born in England. As Jerry put it ‘people
who were born in England are English’. The great significance the children assigned
to the place of birth in defining their identities might have partly contributed to the
mistake that Hannah made regarding where she was born. Seemingly in a slip of the
tongue, she claimed that she was born in China but she was in fact born in England.
What she meant perhaps was that when she was ‘very young’, referring to first three years of her childhood life, she had lived with her grandparents in China. After failing to explain her Chineseness in terms of her place of birth, Hannah quickly shifted the focus to their affiliations with their family both in England and China. It is these local and trans-national ties that set the basis of the children’s Chineseness. Yet this genealogy does not necessary imply the common discourse of notions of ‘blood’ or genes. The family members that Hannah suggested having a strong connection with included those who are both biologically and non-biologically related to her.

Furthermore, a strong sense of ambivalence seemed to have emerged in relation to how their Chinese-English identities might be quantified and presented. The general consensus was that they are ‘half Chinese and English’ or ‘fifty-fifty’. Yet it was apparent that while the children accepted to be identified as being ‘wholly’ or just Chinese, they strongly objected being referred to as simply English. On the first occasion, the children stressed that they are only ‘part of’ or ‘half of’ English, and on the second, they protested, ‘No, we’re not English! We’re half English!’ The children’s expression of being ‘half Chinese and half English’ echoes the style of the common discourses of ‘mixed-race’ identities, though in this case, it does not refer to a biologically mixed parentage. As the conversation went on, Hannah C (10) and Jennifer C (11) extended their construction and reflection on the constituents of Chineseness in relation to Englishness.

Daisy: What can you tell me about being Chinese?

Hannah: Chinese people have lots of food to make you healthy, go to places like goon yum leung leung [Goddess of Mercy], bai son [worship gods]. Some of them wear glasses [the gods], some of them are like goon yum leung leung [Goddess of Mercy]. They have these things in those places [pointing at the ‘Three Immortals’ statues of Fok, Lok and Sau representing luck, wealth and long life], have these [pointing at the Chinese paintings on the wall].

Jennifer: All the things in the cupboard [referring to the Chinese crafts, statues, etc.]

Daisy: Only Chinese people have these?

Hannah: Yeah, English people only have God.
Jennifer: Um, English people don’t really believe in God.

Hannah: That’s why Chinese people are *cheung maan bak sui* [lit. long life, one hundred years old], like my *kung kung*’s [maternal grandfather] mum, she’s a hundred years old. She’s in old people’s home in China.

With themes of faith and health, Hannah and Jennifer identified what they consider to be the Chinese ways of beliefs and values. They certainly think that Chinese people have a distinctively richer and stronger belief system as opposed to the English who ‘only have God’ but ‘don’t really believe in God’. It was evident that while Hannah and Jennifer were expressing their ideas about things that are Chinese, they frequently made references to the particular artefacts in their living room. In their home, I noticed that there were two types of Chinese artefacts. The first involved objects such as statues and paintings, which are largely for decorative purposes. The others were faith related items, for example, for worshipping ancestors, the God of Earth, the God of Kitchen and *goon yum*, that is the Goddess of Mercy.

All the siblings are very knowledgeable about these artefacts and their meanings and the practices involved. For instance, in one visit to the children, their mother was putting some fresh flowers for the Goddess of Mercy statue. Upon seeing this, the youngest of the siblings, John initiated an explanation of his mother’s action for me. In John’s words, the Goddess of Mercy would eat the fruits and flowers and drink the wine presented to her, and in return she would offer protection for the family. Just as on this occasion, the children often displayed their confidence and interests in sharing or introducing their knowledge of these Chinese objects and practices to the guests including me. For example, in one of the early visits, the oldest child of the family Jerry pointed at the God of Earth worship utensils and said to me ‘I bet you have that at home’. In this interaction, this particular ritual was essentialised and naturalised as central to the Chineseness that Jerry and I presumably shared. In response, I told Jerry that my family did in fact have those items in our old house in Hong Kong, but not in England. In another situation, John’s homework tutor – who is white English – met the family in their house for the first time. John asked his tutor, ‘can you speak Chinese?’ After the tutor replied ‘no’, John pointed at the
'Happy Buddha' statue on top of the cupboard and said to her, 'we have this Chinese thing'. I was rather surprised that John wanted to know if his tutor could speak Chinese, given her perceivably non-Chinese physicality. After establishing his tutor's non-Chinese identity, seemingly on the basis on language, John acted as a cultural ambassador and introduced a bit of what he thought of as Chinese culture to the non-Chinese audience.

Perhaps it would be too easy to dismiss the credibility of the children's efforts in these examples as somehow a superficial manifestation of the Chinese culture. However, I would argue that these cases in fact show the complexity of the ways in which the children could deploy various resources - both of a material and representative nature - to construct their own versions of Chineseness. Considering the discussion of Hannah and Jennifer, the interplay of representation and materiality, and how they may reinforce and reproduce one another was evident. For instance, the children have a belief that Chinese people have 'lots of food to make you healthy' and also their unique and strong faith help them to have a 'long life'. In order to explain this, the children used the artefacts at home to support their claims. Moreover, the children have proof for this; their great grandmother is 'a hundred years old' living in an 'old people's home in China'. Therefore, while the children are constructing Chineseness through the discourses, these discourses are in fact materialised and solidified by objects and people within different familial contexts. However, it would be over-simplistic to suggest that these children's homes are something that can be called Chinese orientated and that the children would automatically feel a sense of Chineseness when they are at home. The following abstract of an interview with Jerry C (12) based on alien activity can throw some light on the issue:

Daisy: Do you think that you feel more Chinese or English in certain situations?
Jerry: Um, I feel more Chinese at Chinese school, when I talk to Chinese people, in Chinese. I feel more English at school, in English school, and when I talk to my friends in English, and when I'm with my brother and sisters at home.
From this, it could be seen that the home does not necessarily always generate a sense of Chineseness among the children. According to Jerry’s reflection, it would appear that how Jerry feels about himself in generalised terms is inclined to be contextual, depending on the place, people and language involved. Yet it seemed that language may have a more determining role. Despite that Jerry clearly signified his sense of being Chinese and English here, as the interview went on, he described the kind of Chineseness and Englishness that he is rather distant from:

Daisy: Do you think there’s any difference between Chinese and English people?
Jerry: Um, yeah, English people are nuts! Um, those *gwai lo* [lit. devil/ghost men, white men], they’re *chi sin* [mad]! They finish drinking, right, they get so drunk, then they get into big fights, and police come and sort them out, but some police get beaten.

Daisy: How do you know that?
Jerry: TV.

Daisy: Chinese people don’t do that?
Jerry: No, Chinese people are nicer but some Chinese men, they smoke, drugs and *hak se wu* [lit. black society, triad].

Daisy: And how do you know that?
Jerry: TV as well.

Daisy: Is there anything else?
Jerry: Um, English are more generous because they buy this and that for their kids, and they work here and there, so that they can afford these things. They have more time to buy things as well. Chinese parents only buy stuff when they have to.

The images that Jerry presented regarding the English drink culture and Chinese gang behaviour in Britain are perhaps among the most longstanding common representations in the society. By deploying the debatably insulting term *gwai lo* to describe English males, Jerry seemed to be able to emphasise more strongly the sense of dissociation and otherness. What Jerry was detaching himself from was the image that English men are ‘nuts’ who go out and ‘get so drunk’, ‘get into big flights’ and get involved with the police. At the same time, Jerry also seemed not to be attaching to the impression of the Chinese men involving in ‘smoking’, ‘drugs’ and the ‘triad’. Hampered by lack of resources in this study, the relationship
between popular images and the children’s gender identity construction has not been fully investigated. Further investigation into these issues can certainly contribute to the limited knowledge in the area.

It is rather interesting to see how Jerry only drew on adult centred themes of Chineseness and Englishness. I used the term Chinese and English ‘people’ in the initial question, and Jerry thought about this along the lines of what would commonly to be regarded as adult behaviour. It would fair to believe that these discourses do not inform Jerry’s and perhaps more generally children’s senses of identification. Despite this, Jerry’s beliefs about the difference between Chinese and English adults, specifically parents could have much relevance to his everyday experiences. According to Jerry, Chinese parents are more practical, they ‘only buy stuff when they have to’ whereas English parents are ‘more generous’ and ‘hardworking’ in providing their children with material goods and ‘have more time’ to do so. If this generalised notion of Chinese child-parent relationships has its root in Jerry’s personal experiences, one may suspect that Jerry would think of being English could be more privileged that being Chinese. However, this did not seem to be the case. On the contrary, Jerry as well as his sisters Hannah C (10) and Jennifer C (11) all exhibited a rather strong sense of pride of being Chinese throughout their accounts, just as the following abstract from the alien task-based interview shows:

*Daisy:* Is it good or bad being Chinese?

*Jennifer:* It’s good because/

*Hannah:* /it’s good because when you go to school you can learn English, you can learn French, and we also know Mandarin, Chinese, and Hakka [*a Chinese dialect*] as well.

*Jennifer:* It’s good because when you go to school, you get to meet most of your, some, other English friends, you can have English and Chinese friends.

*Daisy:* But many people can speak different languages too, like Japanese people may speak Japanese, English and others maybe.

*Jerry:* Yeah, but Japanese. We can speak Chinese.

*Hannah:* The thing is we’re half English, so we can speak English. You can learn more languages, but if you’re only English, they can’t speak many languages.
Jennifer: When they say “ngau” [cow] like this, they probably say “kau” [dog]!
[everyone laughs]
Daisy: So anything bad about being Chinese?
Jennifer: No.
Hannah: No.
Daisy: Is it good or bad to be half English?
Hannah: I don’t really like to be English.
Daisy: Why not?
Hannah: ‘Cause it’s horrible.
Jennifer: English people are horrible because there’s a builder next door, and he said like, he said he’d give us back our ball, tennis ball, and stuff. He said he’d give it back to us in one week, but he actually like took three months or two months to give it back to us.
Hannah: Yeah, they’re horrible and they make fun of us.
Jennifer: I think Chinese people are nicer. Chinese people don’t cheat Chinese people, only English people would cheat us, Chinese people don’t. We think we’re more honest to each other.

In this discussion, the complexity and ambivalence embedded in the children’s experiences of their Chinese and English identification was evident. Following our conservational style, my questions appeared to treat the children’s Chinese-English identities as constituted by two separate sets of experiences. However, the initial responses from the children cast doubt on it. Simply put, the children thought that it is good to be Chinese-English because they can speak more languages and have both Chinese and English friends. These are some of the advantages over being just Chinese or just English. This seems to give an impression that the children have a rather complete and unified sense of identity. But it was soon evident that the children are proud of their Chinese identity but a bit unsure about their English identity. One reason for their ambivalent sense of Englishness can be put down to their relationships with people who the children called English. According to the children, being English means that they have different kinds of associations with English people. Yet ironically, it is sometimes within these interactions that the children’s sense of Chineseness is made apparent. In other words, the children’s sense of Chineseness is at times driven by their own affiliation to Englishness; the two separate senses of identification which are simultaneously experienced.
These negative experiences seemed to have created some interconnected consequences. The children 'don't really like to be English' because it is 'horrible'. Perhaps partly as a reactive response to this, the children have come to engineer a kind of Chinese ethnocentrism. For example, when I suggested that other people for instance, Japanese people could be multilingual just as the children themselves are, Jerry said, 'yeah, but Japanese. We can speak Chinese'. The Chinese language apparently represented something special to Jerry and he surely felt proud to be able to speak it. Moreover, it would be reasonable to believe that the way Jennifer described how English people cannot pronounce certain Chinese words properly involved a degree of belittling. In the discussion, it is not difficult to notice the children's use of the term 'us' to refer to Chinese and 'them' implying English. This sentiment was made clearer by Jennifer towards the end of the abstract. She argued that 'Chinese people don't cheat Chinese people, only English people would cheat us'. Yet when Jennifer claimed that 'we think we're more honest to each other', it illustrates that a collective sense of Chineseness of mutual trust and honesty is indeed a constructed discourse. The way that the children can promote a united Chinese identity among themselves is illustrated in the following exchange. For the alien activity, Hannah C (10) volunteered to help her younger brother John C (6) with the labelling task:

_Hannah:_ You are Chinese?
_John:_ Yes.
_Hannah:_ Do you like to be Chinese?
_John:_ No.
_Hannah:_ Why?
_John:_ Um, because it's horrible.
_Hannah:_ Why is it horrible?
_John:_ Um...
_Hannah:_ Because no one plays with you?
_John:_ No.
_Hannah:_ It is, isn't it?
_John:_ Ah ha.
_Jerry:_ Because you get bullied.
_Hannah:_ 'Cause no one plays with you, you say it.
_John:_ No one plays with me.
Hannah: Are you English?
John: No, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.
Hannah: You like to speak Chinese or English?
John: Chinese.
Hannah: Then why did you say that you don’t like to be Chinese? You said it wrong, didn’t you?
John: No, I don’t know.

Perhaps not so much can be learnt about John’s experiences of his Chinese-English identity from this exchange. Although he stated that being Chinese is ‘horrible’, he did not have the opportunity to further elaborate on it. Instead, it was evident that ideas and beliefs were being imposed onto John by his elder sister Hannah and brother Jerry. Through this, something about how Hannah and Jerry themselves thought about being Chinese was revealed. While Hannah suggested that one reason why being Chinese could be horrible is because ‘no one plays with you’, Jerry proposed that it is because you would ‘get bullied’.

Moreover, it seemed that Hannah was not completely satisfied with John’s claim that he does not like to be Chinese. After John admitted that he likes to speak Chinese rather than English, Hannah suggested that he had made a mistake in claiming that being Chinese is horrible, persuading John that he may actually like to be Chinese. It was interesting to see how Hannah was trying to guide John towards her own way of thinking, to have a sense of pride in their Chinese identities. For John, Hannah, Jennifer and Jerry, their Chinese-English identities are certainly complex, ambivalent and ambiguous. I would use the following exchange with Jerry – which took place towards the end of the alien activity interviews – to end the discussion of the children of this family:

Daisy: Would you consider yourself as Chinese, English or something else?
Jerry: Chinese and English.
[later in the interview]
Daisy: Is being Chinese important to you?
Jerry: Yeah, because that’s who I am.
Daisy: How about being English?
Jerry: Um, it's not as important because I'm not all English.
Daisy: What is it like to be both Chinese and English?
Jerry: Well, it's hard, sometimes I want to be just Chinese and speak only Chinese, or just being English can be better.

Jerry’s description highlights some of the important characteristics of his and the other siblings’ senses of an Chinese-English identity. It has shown how the children portray assured and positive identities of being Chinese but experience their English identities with a degree of uncertainty. It has also shown how the children explain their Chinese and English identifications in terms of separate sets of elements. For example, their Chinese identities are defined in relation to their family relationships and discourses of belief and faith while their English sense of identities is experienced and understood in terms of language, place of birth and relationships with other English people. However, a closer look at the ways in which the children talk about these identities could indicate that their sense of being Chinese often embraces a sense of being English, and vice versa.

However, what have also been found to be significant are the beliefs and experiences of racism among the children. More specifically, it is through these somewhat negative interactions and experiences with particular English people that the children felt connected with being English but at the same time, a distinctive sense of being Chinese. From these, the children’s ethnocentric sense of being Chineseness is being reinforced and reproduced; a defensive means actively deployed and reinvested by the children. These children’s Chinese-English identities are certainly complex and ambivalent. Therefore, it would not be too surprising that they may feel that being Chinese-English can sometimes be hard and troubling. Yet what cannot be denied, as has been shown, is the children’s dynamic effort in constructing and enjoying the positive side of their identities.

7.3.2 Chinese-English Identity with the Othered Chineseness

Just as with the children from the previous family, Lorraine A (11) also expressed what can be called a Chinese-English identity. However, as will be shown, this involves not quite the same meanings and experiences. In the alien task of labelling,
just like the other children, Lorraine selected only ‘Chinese’ as her identity from the number of options presented to her. From this, I prompted for more about how Lorraine feels about the Chinese identity which she asserted.

*Daisy:* So you feel only Chinese?
*Lorraine:* I’m Chinese and English.

*Daisy:* Would you say that you feel more Chinese or English or not?
*Lorraine:* I think I’m more English than Chinese because I was born in England, and I speak English, and I go to English school. I only go to Chinese school once a week.

*Daisy:* What is being Chinese and English like?
*Lorraine:* Being Chinese means you know more languages, you have a Chinese mum, and being English means you speak more English and you were born in England.

*Daisy:* Do you feel differently in different situations?
*Lorraine:* Um, well, if sometimes, you’re with English people you, I kind of feel like I’m more English, but then when you’re with Chinese people, sometimes you feel more Chinese ‘cause you have to talk Chinese and all that. I think it’s the people make you feel differently.

*Daisy:* Are you happy about being the/
*Lorraine:* /the way I am, yeah.

In contrast to the children in the previous case, Lorraine seemed to be expressing a stronger and more positive sense of identification with Englishness. Again, Lorraine described Englishness, both her own and in general, largely in terms of language and place of birth, but also in relation to notions of schooling. The notion of born and bred therefore justified Lorraine’s sense of being more English than Chinese. This involves a sense of attachment to the place, people, and the way of life. Quite the reverse, Lorraine’s identification with Chinese-ness is comparatively limited. She puts it down to the fact that she ‘only goes to Chinese school once a week’. Supposedly, Chinese school is one of the main channels through which Lorraine can interact with Chinese people or can speak Chinese. It is evident that Lorraine also talked about her Chinese-English identity as if it is segregated.
However, I would suggest that the notion of ‘being Chinese means you know more languages’ — which is shared by Lorraine and many of the children — reveals something important about this. It can be seen that what is embedded in this Chineseness is the normalised conception that ‘everyone is able to speak English’. This reflects how the children’s sense of Chineseness is specifically located within the British context. Furthermore, in Lorraine’s account, she suggested that being Chinese means that ‘you have a Chinese mum’. This seems to reflect Lorraine’s family situation and the fact that Lorraine does not live with her father. More importantly, it directs the focus of Lorraine’s Chinese-English identification towards her experiences of family relationships. Specifically, interviews of the boardgame and alien activities provide powerful examples of how Lorraine builds her vision of Chineseness through resources within the context of family relationships. The following exchange took place during the alien task:

**Daisy**: Do you think that Chinese and English are different?

**Lorraine**: Yeah, um, English people, um, probably don’t exactly think much about other cultures, and sometimes Chinese people always care too much about money, but it’s probably formal for every culture. Um, Chinese people kind of know they are different to English people, and don’t want to really have much to do with English people.

According to Lorraine, a main feature characterising the relationship between Chinese and English people is restricted interaction and lack of understanding for one another. Lorraine believes that both Chinese and English people think that they are different from one another, and have no interest in developing contacts with each other. It seems that Lorraine has developed this insight and was talking about it from her unique position. Although she has the insider insight from within both groups, the elements which she identified as Chinese and English do not necessarily inform either her own sense of being Chinese and English. Moreover, in relation to Chineseness, Lorraine suggested that Chinese people ‘care too much about money’. Yet she was also cautious about the fact that this tendency may have a more universal implication to ‘every culture’. It was found that these themes of the particular constituents of Chineseness are corresponding to the way that Lorraine talked about her grandmother in another interview. The following abstract is from an
interview based on the boardgame task in which Lorraine reflected on her experiences with her family:

*Daisy:* How are you getting along with your grandparents?
*Lorraine:* Well, I definitely hate my grandma. Her attitude is a bit *piu faat* [shifting], and a bit bossy, and Chinese behaviour.

*Daisy:* What do you mean by Chinese behaviour?
*Lorraine:* She’s just, um, bit bossy, greedy, *taam chin* [greedy for money], um, always thinks that those *gwai lo* [lit. devil/ghost men, white men] probably a bit very different from her.

It can be seen that a two-way process is at work in the construction of what Chinese is like. Lorraine explained her grandmother’s attitudes as being ‘Chinese behaviour’, but at the same time, she was drawing on her grandmother’s character in defining what Chineseness is. Therefore, the two support but are also produced by one another. This circulation process would certainly have a reinforcing effect on Lorraine’s conceptions of both her grandmother and Chineseness. Moreover, it is apparent that Lorraine is rather critical about the way that she believes her grandmother is thinking and behaving. Particularly, Lorraine showed a sense of disagreement, if not disapproval about her grandmother’s beliefs that ‘those *gwai lo* [lit. devil/ghost men, white men] probably a bit very different from her’. Since I had never come across Lorraine using the reference of ‘*gwai lo*’ to English people, I believe that Lorraine was quoting her grandmother’s actual use of language. This could strengthen the kind of negative feelings that she thinks her grandmother has towards English people. From this, it would be reasonable to assume that Lorraine does not identify herself at all with what she would regard as Chinese characteristics. In other interviews, similar processes and practices were observed in relation to how Lorraine’s perception of her mother’s behaviour and beliefs define and are defined by Chineseness. The following dialogue is from an interview of the alien task, taking place after Lorraine talked about her own Chinese-English identity:

*Daisy:* How about your mum? Is she Chinese or Chinese and English like you?
*Lorraine:* As I see her?
*Daisy:* Yeah.
**Lorraine:** Yes, she’s Chinese.

**Daisy:** But she has been living here for a long time and she can speak English.

**Lorraine:** Yeah, but it’s kind of like Chinese attitudes.

**Daisy:** What do you mean by Chinese attitudes?

**Lorraine:** Well, she always says um, well kind of, she always says um, Chinese people are always so bossy, um, *koo hon* [stingy] kind of thing, um, kind of what you say is what you are, and she’s kind of like that too. I think she thinks she’s English ‘cause she talks more English, doesn’t really want to go to Hong Kong, and she doesn’t really like Hong Kong or Chinese people.

**Daisy:** Do you think that there is any difference between Chinese and English parents?

**Lorraine:** Um, Chinese and English parents, they’re different in one way. Um, English parents not really believe in too much stuff ‘cause they are basically just Christians, or otherwise they don’t really believe in anything. But Chinese people they believe in all the bad luck things and have loads of faiths. My mum wants me to be a doctor ‘cause that’s what the fortune teller told her, I’ll become a doctor.

**Daisy:** Is that what you want to be?

**Lorraine:** I prefer to be a vet or a vet nurse. [...]
possesses particular 'Chinese attitudes', including being 'bossy' and 'stingy'. As it could be seen, Lorraine proposed a rather philosophical argument about this. According to her, her mother's effort to distance herself from all the things and people that are Chinese actually reflects her mother's own Chineseness. In Lorraine's words, 'what you say is what you are'. Therefore, all the so-called Chinese characteristics that Lorraine's mother identified and criticised were turned round and used by Lorraine in defining her mother's own Chinese identity. In fact, it was apparent that Lorraine's mother, Ms A, was attempting to detach herself from being Chinese. The following quote can be seen as an example of effort of this kind. Ms A and I were discussing our experiences about migration and she talked about how living in England for over twenty years had changed her:

It has definitely changed me. I'm closer to the English culture than Chinese culture. I think like English people. Chinese people are so money-orientated and superstitious, and they gossip a lot. I hate that. I'm family-orientated like Chinese, I think that's the only Chinese characteristic in me, other than that, I'm just like English people. [T]

Parental discourses of this kind are always potential resources that Lorraine could utilise in constructing her version of Chineseness. One feature which has been seen to characterise Lorraine's accounts of Chineseness is the embedded element of adulthood. It is the version of Chineseness that is constructed in relation to adults' characteristics, in particular those in Lorraine's family, such as her mother and grandmother. Yet the way that Chineseness may embrace a degree of childness is illuminated by the following exchange in which Lorraine explained what is expected from her as a child. The discussion was part of the boardgame activity which addressed Lorraine's experiences of being a child at home. Towards the end of our conversation, I asked Lorraine:

Daisy: Generally speaking, what do you think your mum wants from you?
Lorraine: Hau shun [filial piety\textsuperscript{22}], tang wah [lit. listen to what is said, compliant], be good, don't lose temper on her, do all the house chores and work hard

\textsuperscript{22} [T] indicates a translated transcription from either Cantonese Chinese or Mandarin Chinese.
\textsuperscript{23} The term 'filial piety' is an intellectual translation widely accepted in literature. It refers to respect that Chinese children are supposed to show their parents. It involves many aspects including taking care of the parents, burying them properly after death, bringing honour to the family, and having a
at school, um, make lots of money. Um, I think I’ll look after the house if she’s um, not movable kind of thing, um, give her money, and she can go out and *mai sung* [lit. buy food for meal], if she bothers to cook.

*Daisy:* What do you have to do to be *hau shun* [filial piety]?

*Lorraine:* I don’t know really, but as a tutor [of a Chinese school], mum sometimes has to talk to her students about their family matters ‘cause it’s affecting them. So, she always says to them “you have to *hau shun* [filial piety] your mum” kind of thing.

From this, it can be seen how Lorraine makes use of the discourse of ‘good Chinese children’ vis-à-vis parents in understanding her own relationship with her mother. Within this, the concept of *hau shun*, generally translated as filial piety is of great significance. In a more conventional manner, filial piety could involve practices such as burying parents properly after death and producing a male heir to carry on the family name. However, these elements are not found in Lorraine’s account. Rather, she draws on the aspects that seem to either have a wider implication to children of many modern industrial countries, such as ‘work hard at school’, or those specifically within her own family context, for example, ‘make lots of money’.

What this highlights is the constructed and shifting nature of these discourses of child-adult relationships with a reference to Chineseness. More importantly, it shows how the children may live with these discourses and their input and contribution to them. The next description provides a more practical example of this kind of discourse. In the boardgame activity, Lorraine wrote ‘drink soup’ as a good behaviour within the home and I asked her to tell me more about it:

*Lorraine:* It’s like I kicked my brother last Wednesday but I had soup on Tuesday. My grandma always says soup kind of like, cools you down, and like you wouldn’t be hot kind of thing. But it didn’t really work ‘cause I had a big bowl on Tuesday. Sometimes I didn’t ask for it but my grandparents would have it ready for me and shouted and asked me to go down stairs and have it. I don’t always want it but I know it’s kind of rude, like not to have it. So, I just have it. They would say things like “you drink it, then you won’t da sai lo [hit younger brother]”.

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I will use this account to draw an end to the discussion of Lorraine’s Chinese-English identity, as it points to some major focuses. Like the children of the family discussed before, Lorraine also spoke about her sense of Chineseness in terms of her family relationships. Yet it is unlike the other children who expressed a strong sense of being proud of their Chinese identities; their active forging of affiliations through discourses of Chinese beliefs and relationships with family members in both the immediate and extended contexts, both local and overseas. In one respect, Lorraine’s sense of Chineseness is more to do with having to trade with family members, for example her mother and grandmother, whom she regards as nothing but Chinese. From Lorraine’s point of view, Chineseness explains her mother’s and grandparents’ beliefs and behaviour, which in turn reinforce Lorraine’s conception of Chineseness. Although Lorraine does not identify with this Chineseness in a direct manner, it is the framework within which Lorraine negotiates her way through how she should behave as a child, daughter and granddaughter in the family, which in turn redefines her perception and experience of what it means to be Chinese. It can only be assumed that the stronger sense of Englishness as claimed by Lorraine in relation to her Chinese-English identity also has something to do with this sense of Chineseness, which is fundamentally about the othered Chinese.

7.3.3 Chinese-English Identity under Construction

In the two cases addressed before, it has been seen that place of birth is constantly being used by the children in arguing for their senses of English identification. With the same principle, Christy D (12) – who was born in China – asserted her Chinese identity in an interview around the alien activity. However, when prompted, Christy started reflecting on her personal experiences, building a complex version of her sense of identity which involves both Chineseness and Englishness.

*Daisy:* So you think of yourself as being Chinese?
*Christy:* Yeah.
*Daisy:* Because?
*Christy:* Because I am Chinese!
*Daisy:* How about being English?
Christy: Not really. Yeah, I suppose I’m a little bit English because I speak English a lot to my friends, and I’ve been living here more than I’ve been living in China.

Daisy: Does it mean that you feel more Chinese than English?

Christy: Um, I’m about sixty percent here, no, seventy per cent here, no, sixty percent here and forty percent. That’s how much I’ve been living in these countries. But I still speak Chinese at home. I still feel that I’m Chinese. So, I’m sixty per cent lived in England, but I don’t know if I feel sixty percent English. It’s about how long I’ve lived everywhere.

Daisy: But you still feel that you’re Chinese?

Christy: Yes, but not a hundred percent really, seventy percent maybe.

Daisy: Do you think the way you feel will change?

Christy: I don’t know if I’ll change, and how, but I’ve changed. I’m being more English and like things more Englishly, like I started to like English food better now, well, not English, Italian, like pizza and pasta. Chinese people don’t like pasta. And like the way I dress, I like more English fashion. I don’t like jumpers, you know woolly stuff, really old-fashioned Chinese stuff. I think the longer I live here, the less Chinese I would be. That’s why I have to keep going to Mandarin classes and keep going back to China.

A number of points can be taken from this conversation. First of all, as Christy showed, to say accurately how long she had lived in China and England is a relatively easy task. However, it is not always possible to quantify her sense of being Chinese and English into solid terms. One reason for this is because her Chinese-English identity is not something fixed but changing. In explaining how she has changed into being more English, she gave some examples of ‘Englishly’ things that she now likes more, including food and fashion. It is interesting to see that Christy was cautious that what she suggested and loosely regarded as English food, such as pizza and pasta, is not really English but Italian. This is certainly the case that in British and many modern societies, there are lots of influences from across the globe. This reflects Christy’s awareness of the fact that what constitutes a particular culture is negotiable, fluid and changing over time. Yet what is also evident is how discourses of, in this case Englishness and Chineseness, often embed a degree of fixing and generalising certain elements as essential to that culture.
In spite of Christy's belief that she had become more English, she showed great determination to sustain her Chinese identity. According to Christy, although she 'speaks English a lot to her friends' and has been living in England longer than she had been living in China, she 'still speaks Chinese' and she 'still feels that she's Chinese'. Certainly, Christy does not think that being Chinese and being English are mutually exclusive. However, the two senses of identification seem to occupy a fixed vacuum, meaning that if one increases, the other decreases. Therefore, the longer Christy lives in England, the more English she thinks she would become, and the less Chinese she would turn out to be. In order to ensure that her Englishness would not 'take over' her identity of being Chinese, Christy suggested that the way to maintain her Chineseness is through language, in her case, Mandarin, and to 'keep going back to China'. As the interview progressed, more was revealed regarding the significance of language along with other elements in Christy's construction of her sense of Chinese identity:

Daisy: Is being Chinese important to you?
Christy: Yeah, it is important. I wouldn't want to be English. I'd feel very un-Chinese, if I was born in England but still a Chinese person.

Daisy: Is that how you feel now?
Christy: Um a bit, I'd feel very un-Chinese, if I didn't speak Chinese to my parents and stuff. And I would want to talk to my children in Chinese. I should, if I'm good. I want to get better Mandarin, I should be. I want to be as good as my mum is right now, but she grew up in China. Um, I want to be as good as that, so I can help my children learn Chinese and stuff. But I don't know if that's going to happen, I hope it is. I don't want them to feel un-Chinese, especially if they were born in here, so they'll have to talk to me in Chinese.

Daisy: How good are you now?
Christy: If mum's ten, I'm one, no, not one. I'm probably a nine-year-old from China, but not like a clever nine-year-old, just an average nine-year-old from China. I'm better in talking and understanding than you know, reading, writings, I'm not very good at writing.

In this account, it can be seen that Christy was articulating her version of Chineseness specifically in relation to the theme of child-mother relationship with a
focus on language. According to Christy, children and parents presumably of a similar background of herself should talk to each other in Chinese to promote a sense of Chineseness. Therefore, from her current position of being a child, she would feel 'very un-Chinese' if she ‘didn’t speak Chinese to her parents.’ Besides, there is another reason why Christy ‘wants to get better Mandarin’, which is related to her idea about her future role of being a mother. Christy wants her Chinese language ability to be as good as her mother so that she will be able to help her children in learning Chinese. This brings the attention back to Christy’s belief that a person would feel ‘un-Chinese’ if being ‘born in England but still a Chinese person’. Christy clearly does not want her children to feel un-Chinese, especially if they were born in England, therefore they will have to communicate with their mother, which would mean Christy herself, in Chinese. It is apparent that Christy’s belief that children should talk to their parents in Chinese is from a concern of their Chinese identity, rather than of practical issues in relation to communication. This is supported by the fact that both Christy’s parents speak fluent English, although Chinese is their mother tongue.

There is no doubt that Christy considers her mother as setting an example of how she should be as a mother in the future. In particular, her mother’s competence in the Chinese language is the standard which Christy aims to achieve. However, when commenting on her own Chinese language ability, Christy realised that at the present moment, the disparity between her own and her mother’s Mandarin proficiency is simply too great and any comparison would be unrealistic. Therefore, Christy created a more reasonable framework to judge her level of fluency, taking into account factors of age, intelligence and background. In this, Christy put forward the idea that her Mandarin skill is probably similar to ‘a nine-year-old from China’, but not ‘a clever nine-year-old’ and just an ‘average’ one. This is a rather interesting and useful presentation of one particular aspect of sense of self identity by Christy, comparing herself with other Chinese children from a different background. To me, an adult and someone who came from a Chinese-speaking society, such a framework works well in providing me with a good idea about Christy’s proficiency in Chinese. As the interview proceeded, Christy revealed more about the nature of her Chinese identity in relation to notions of Englishness and un-Chineseness.
Daisy: Would you feel more Chinese sometimes?

Christy: Sometimes, when my Chinese friends aren’t feeling very Chinese, I feel extra Chinese. When they feel very English, I suddenly feel very Chinese.

Daisy: What do you mean when they feel very English?

Christy: They feel, when they do something very English, like say, “I don’t care who I’m marrying. I’m going to get divorce anyway”.

As shown before, the other children explained their shifting sense of being Chinese and English largely in terms of the context, the perceived identities of the people and the language involved in the interaction. However, as Christy proposed here, how she feels about herself can be determined by the ways that the others act out their identities. Specifically, in relation to the example given by Christy, her sense of being Chinese is reinforced and strengthened by her perceivably Chinese peers displaying attitudes, values or behaviour which Christy regards as non-Chinese, which is more or less equating to English. Therefore, for instance, when Christy’s Chinese friends express their un-Chineseness by claiming that ‘I don’t care who I’m marrying. I’m going to get divorce anyway’, she would feel ‘extra Chinese’. The reason why Christy believes that someone who does not take marriage seriously and may divorce lightly is associated with Englishness can lie in the popular discourse of the strong values attaching to the family within the Chinese culture. This understanding is confirmed and demonstrated in the following dialogue. In the self-description that Christy produced for the alien activity, Christy talked about how her family, that is her parents, are very important to her:

Daisy: Why do you think family is important to you?

Christy: I think family is more important to Chinese than to English people. English people say “oh they’re my family”, but they just, they always hate their sisters or brothers. They just hate their families, we love our families.

Daisy: How about parents, do you think that Chinese and English parents are different?

Christy: English parents are too loose. They don’t care where their children go.

Daisy: You mean Chinese parents are more strict?

Christy: Yeah.

Daisy: Is that good or bad?
Christy: It’s good, sometimes. You have Chinese parents, you have to revise a lot for every test. I work very hard in school.

Daisy: Would you say that your parents are quite Chinese then?

Christy: Yes, they’re quite Chinese. They make sure that I study, and my dad’s very strict and serious. He doesn’t have a sense of humour, not much.

It is apparent that the discourse of the significance of family is utilised by Christy in formulating her self identity, and also a collective sense of being Chinese which is defined in relation to Englishness. According to Christy, ‘family is more important to Chinese than to English people’. Whereas the English ‘hate their families’, Chinese people, including Christy herself, ‘love their families’. Moreover, when prompted, Christy also addressed this particular construction of Chineseness with regard to child-parent relationships, again in oppositional terms to Englishness. While English parents are ‘too loose’ and ‘don’t care where their children go’, Chinese parents are stricter. From Christy’s point of view, having Chinese parents means that ‘you have to revise a lot for every test’. The fact that Christy claimed that she indeed ‘works very hard at school’ seems to suggest that she was investing in this discourse on the value of education to highlight her sense of being Chinese. Moreover, in addressing her father’s Chineseness, Christy drew on a number of personality traits including being ‘strict’ and ‘serious’ and ‘not having a sense of humour’. These alleged characteristics were also found in another interview with Christy, which is based on the alien activity in which the children were invited to talk about themselves. The following dialogue can provide more details about Christy’s construction of Chineseness in relation to Englishness through discourses of personal characteristics.

Daisy: How would you describe yourself, your personality?

Christy: I try to be funny, but I’m not very funny. We have this girl in our class, she’s very funny. Everything she says is funny, even though she doesn’t mean to be funny, but she’s just really cute. It’s just natural for her and most of the English people. I’m not very talkative. Everyone else is more talkative than me. I don’t like to talk on the phone. You know how English people just like to pick up their phones, and just start talking. I don’t like to do that. I do like talking to my friends but I wouldn’t just talk to them
because I’m bored. I would do something else, draw a picture or watch TV. If they phone me, then it’s alright to talk, but I wouldn’t phone them first.

Daisy: You think being talkative is good?

Christy: Um, yeah. I’d want to be more outgoing and less nervous when I talk, like in an audience or something. When I meet, when I make a new friend, I’m bit shy. I don’t like to talk, like try to meet new people. If I’m with some friends, then it’s ok, I don’t mind to approach people and make friends, but not on my own. Yeah, so, I want to change my personality, so, not just outgoing. I want to change my whole personality, so I’m just perfect, really friendly, really outgoing. Um, you know all the good personality things, like friendly, sensitive. Well, sensitive for other people, not sensitive when people, um, tell you something and you just cry. But like sensitive when somebody else’s crying so you go and hug them, or something. But not sensitive when somebody says some rude comment or something.

Daisy: You don’t think you have these qualities?

Christy: Um, some of it, sometimes. It’s like I’m friendly but I can be more friendly. Everyone could be more friendly.

In this critical account of her own individuality, it can be seen that Christy associates certain personality traits with being English. According to Christy, English people are largely ‘funny’ and ‘talkative’, as conceived in relation to what Chinese people, including her, are not. Being talkative is certainly being naturalised and essentialised here. In Christy’s view, it is ‘natural’ for her English friends and ‘most of the English people’ to be talkative, and ‘everyone else is more talkative than her’. Therefore, Christy’s belief that she is ‘not very talkative’ can be seen as reinforcing and being partly produced by her sense of being Chinese. The example given by Christy is how English people could just pick up the phone and start talking but she ‘does not like to do that’ and would rather draw a picture or watch TV when she is bored. What this reveals is the way that Christy is assessing what is considered to be the norm and valuable qualities to have in relation to her own personality.

Furthermore, within this discourse of rigid definition of what Chineseness and Englishness is, it would appear that there is not much room for change. Yet Christy
certainly hopes and believes that this is not the case. As the discussion moved on, it can be seen the focus is no longer so much about what Chinese or English characters are; the personality assigning to be Chinese and English became more implicit and ambiguous. As Christy stated, she ‘wants to change her whole personality’, so that she would be ‘just perfect’. Accordingly, she wants to be ‘really friendly, really outgoing’ and ‘sensitive’ and simply ‘all the good personality things’. Therefore, what matters to Christy is whether she can be a better person with decency and confidence. This is not to deny the various ways that elements of particular personality traits are used in the construction of Chinese and English identities. In fact, as recalled from what we have seen with the other children discussed in this chapter, Christy is so far the only child who identifies the most elements of what constitutes Chineseness and Englishness and how these discourses relate to her own sense of self identity, as well as being Chinese-English in a more direct manner. All the processes and practices involved indicate that Christy’s construction of her identity is continuous, and as she progresses in life, she will most like to carry on the effort in formulating her unique version of being Chinese-English as part of the more general sense of who she is.

7.3.4 Unassertive Chinese-English Identification

So far, some of the diverse ways in which the children reflect on their experiences and perceptions of their Chinese-English identities have been shown. Although many of the children were being particularly articulate about these issues in the interviews, I did not generate as much detail with a few of them. This is the case with the sibling pair Acton B (6) and Rachel B (7). In the alien task, Acton had circled ‘Chinese’ from the options ‘British/Chinese/English/Others’ as something significant to her sense of self identity. However, when I asked her about this later, she dismissed the idea that she is Chinese.

Daisy: So you’re Chinese?
Acton: No, English.
Daisy: You’re only English?
Acton: Yeah, I speak English most of the time.
Daisy: How about when you speak Chinese, are you Chinese then?
Acton: No, English.
Daisy: You don’t want to be Chinese?
Acton: I don’t like to speak Chinese.
Daisy: Why not?
Acton: I like English more.
Daisy: Are Chinese and English people different?
Acton: Chinese people speak Chinese, English people speak English.
Daisy: Do you like Chinese or English people more?
Acton: Um, they’re the same.

It is evident that in this conversation, Acton actively rejected the Chinese identity that I prompted. Against this, Acton asserted her identity of being English. Perhaps an important but unanswered question is why Acton would have claimed a Chinese identity in the earlier task. I did not ask this as I was cautious that Acton might think that I meant she had made a mistake and had given a wrong answer. Nonetheless, like many of the other children, language is crucial in Acton’s formulation of her version of what makes someone Chinese and Englishness. The English language was therefore employed by Acton to explain her English identification and her dissociation with Chineseness. According to Acton, she ‘speaks English most of the time’, she ‘likes English more, and she ‘dislikes speaking Chinese’. More generally, language is considered by Acton as a main factor that sets Chinese and English people apart from one another.

From my observations, Acton can speak Chinese well and she often talks to her mother in Chinese. However, according to Acton’s mother, Acton faked a stomach ache in order to avoid Chinese school on more than one occasion. Yet there is simply no sufficient or conclusive evidence to support the idea that Acton does not like to learn Chinese because of negative experiences at Chinese school, or to explain more about how she feels in relation to her identity. Parallels are noted between the discourses of Acton and her sister Rachel B (7) in relation to what differentiates Chineseness and Englishness. However, unlike Acton who claims to be only English, Rachel asserts the identity of being both Chinese and English. The following shows the dialogue that Rachel and I had while we were doing the alien task which involved filling in and ranking identity labels:
Daisy: Are you Chinese or English or British?
Rachel: Chinese and English.
Daisy: Why are you Chinese and English?
Rachel: Because... I don’t know.
Daisy: Is your mum Chinese or English or Chinese and English?
Rachel: Chinese.
Daisy: Your dad?
Rachel: Chinese.
Daisy: Why are you not just Chinese?
Rachel: Um, I don’t know.
Daisy: Can you tell me what Chinese people are like?
Rachel: They are people. Sort of good, sort of bad. They help me with my work, at school, everyone. Bad people, bad is when people do bad stuff to me.
Daisy: Are Chinese and English people different?
Rachel: Yeah. People speak Chinese and speak English. Chinese people write Chinese and English people write English words, and people draw differently.
Daisy: How do they draw differently?
Rachel: Chinese people draw angels, English people draw toys.

Unlike some of the other children, it is evident that Rachel did not have a readily available justification for her Chinese-English identity, at least at the time of the discussion. Although Rachel suggested that what sets Chinese and English people apart is the language they speak and the kind of things that they draw, it is not clear how these relate to Rachel’s own sense of identity. I would suspect that the issues of language and drawing could be close to Rachel’s experiences and observation, and is certainly something meaningful to Rachel. Moreover, Rachel’s response to my enquiry about what Chinese people are like seems to point to the idea that Rachel does not always employ concepts of Chineseness and Englishness to make sense of people and her relationships with these individuals. Instead, what appears to concern Rachel is whether the people are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ people, that is whether they are someone who would help her with her work at school or do ‘bad stuff’ to her. I would use the following story to draw a close to this discussion. The story is created by the siblings using the finger puppets provided, with Acton playing the role of the mother and Rachel was the daughter.
Daughter: Mummy, mummy, what are you cooking?
Mother: Chau choi [lit. fry vegetables].
Daughter: I don't like vegetables.
Mother: I have bo tong [lit. cook soup] too. It's very nice.
Daughter: Can I have some crisps mummy?
Mother: No, because you can't finish your rice.

It may not be difficult for anyone to identify what would be seen as explicit Chinese and English references in this story. From their accounts discussed earlier, it can be seen that they do have particular versions of Chineseness and Englishness, yet these seem not to be as detailed as those provided by the other children. Moreover, although these notions of what it means to be Chinese and English are present in their everyday experiences, Acton and Rachel do not always draw on these resources to construct their own and others’ identities or to make sense of individuals and relationships. Similarly, while Acton and Rachel do have specific ideas about their Chinese-English identities, they are not as enthusiastic to discuss these to the same extent as the other children.

7.4 National Identities and Connections with Places

As has been seen, many of the children speak about part of their Chinese-English identities through the concept of place of birth, but not often in terms of where they have lived their lives. It has also just touched upon some ways in which the children talk about their sense of Chineseness partly through their family relationships which often have a connection with China or Hong Kong. In this final section of the chapter, these issues regarding how children formulate their sense of relatedness to countries and geographic locations will be further explored.

7.4.1 Devolution of Britishness to Englishness?

Before moving on to discuss issues regarding the children’s national identities, some information regarding the concepts of Britain and England would be useful and may need to be taken into account when reading the children’s discourses. In a formal
term, the United Kingdom consists of three constituent countries of England, Wales and Scotland, the home nations on Great Britain, and the province of Northern Ireland on the island of Ireland, with complex legal, administrative and political relationships. Perhaps partly because of the complexity involved, in Chinese language, applying to both Mandarin and Cantonese, the translated term for United Kingdom is seldom used in the context of everyday life. Rather, the equivalent Chinese term for Britain is commonly used to refer to just England, while the translations for Wales, Scotland and North Ireland would be used specifically. Yet even within the British context, the ways that these terms are utilised may vary from person to person, depending on personal perspectives and preferences and sometimes political stands. In popular discourses, national identity tends to be seen as referring to Britishness which generally appears to be a more inclusive and politically correct term, while Englishness is often regarded as signifying a specific kind of whiteness. For a couple of the children in the study, the ideas of English and British are more or less interchangeable, as Christy D (12) shows:

*Daisy:* Is there any difference between English and British?

*Christy:* What's the difference? I don't know what the difference is. They're all the same.

*Daisy:* You said you're a little bit English, would you say that you're a bit British?

*Christy:* I guess so, why not.

The notion that 'they are all the same' often seems to be articulated with a sense of otherness in racial and ethnic discourses. Yet it is clearly not the case here. To Christy, the terms English and British are similar and both expressions are acceptable in describing her partial identification. However, in the following discussion, it can be seen that although Lorraine A (11) shares the view that English and British bear similar meanings, Britishness can be understood as entailing an element of otherness which makes it a less preferable term to use in describing herself.
Daisy: You said you were born in England, would you say that you were born in Britain?
Lorraine: I think Britain includes all the other islands, um, Scotland and, um, I don’t know. It’s the same.
Daisy: So, would you say that you’re Chinese-British or just Chinese-English?
Lorraine: Um, I think I prefer English, I’d never say I’m British. It’s just weird kind of, but I guess it’s the same kind of thing.

Lorraine is right about the idea that ‘Britain includes all the other islands’ such as Scotland. This is the precise element that contributes to the slight sense of detachment that the children may feel about being British, while not feeling completely alienated from it. Conversely, some children believe that Britishness refers to something specific and does not describe who they are accurately. These issues are discussed among siblings Hannah C (8), Jennifer C (11) and Jerry C (12) during an interview based on the alien task-based:

Daisy: Are you British?
Jennifer: No. [together with Hannah]
Daisy: Why not?
Jennifer: They speak different language.
Hannah: I think my dad is kind of British. He’s born in Hong Kong.
Daisy: So, who’s British?
Hannah: I don’t know who is, but just dad.
Jennifer: Yeah.
Jerry: Are you sure? Where were you born? You’re British as well, aren’t you?
Hannah: But I don’t want to be British.
Jerry: Yeah, well, then why do you speak English?
Hannah: I’m half English.
Jennifer: Mum’s part of um, Chinese because she can’t talk English that much really.
Hannah: She’s Britnese! [everyone laughs]
Jennifer: You’re Chinese and part of British, kind of, a little bit. [to the researcher]
Daisy: Oh yes?
Hannah: Because you come here to study, but you were born in Hong Kong, but you go to school here, so you have to learn English.
Jerry: Anyone who has a British passport is English.
Once again, it can be seen that the children’s understanding of Britishness involves a degree of otherness. The reason why Hannah and Jennifer do not identify with what they regard as being British is because they believe that British people ‘speak different language’. Even when their elder bother Jerry tried to prompt them to see that they could be British in terms of birthplace and language, Hannah and Jennifer were not convinced. At the most, Hannah considers herself to be ‘half-English’. As it became clearer, Hannah and Jennifer were building their own definition of British identity drawing upon a person’s background of birthplace, migration and language skills. From the children’s reading of the identities of me and their father, it seems that being ‘part of British’ means someone who was not born in England, in this case Hong Kong, but has a reasonable amount of knowledge in English language. Perhaps one may wonder if the fact that Hong Kong had been a British colony until recently can play a part in these children’s construction of Britishness. Yet there simply is no ready answer for that. However, since what sets the children’s mother’s identity apart, which Hannah calls ‘Britnese’, is the idea that ‘she can’t talk English that much’, I believe that language plays a far more crucial role in this construction. Nonetheless, the concept of being British appears to be used by the children as a more inclusive notion than that of being English. This in turn reinforces the distinctiveness of the children’s own partial English identities, specifically their identification with England; they were born and bred in England. Finally, to settle the matter, Jerry suggested that ‘anyone who has a British passport is English’. This understanding of English and British identity in relation to discourses of citizenship and the legal framework is echoed by what is found in Kitty’s narrative.

7.4.2 The ‘British-born-Chinese’ Identity

Kitty E (12) is the only child in the study who uses the term ‘British-born-Chinese’ or in short ‘BBC’ to describe herself. Kitty has been using this particular expression of her identity with consistency throughout our discussions. However, just like all the other children, she fashioned a singular Chinese identity in the alien activity in which she was presented with the options of being ‘British/Chinese/English/Others’. In the follow-up interview, we had this discussion of about terminology and other issues, and how Kitty felt about her British-born-Chinese identity:
Daisy: You consider yourself to be Chinese?


Daisy: Is there any difference between British and English?

Kitty: English are from English isle, and British include people from Ireland and Scotland. England is part of Britain.

Daisy: So, you’re British-born-Chinese, would you say that you’re British or English as well?

Kitty: I’m sort of English. I’m a British citizen. I’m English, British, Chinese, depends how you want to say it.

Daisy: What about your parents?

Kitty: They’re Chinese and always will be, but they’re British citizens.

Daisy: Why won’t they change?

Kitty: No, they’ll just always be who they are.

Daisy: So, is it good or bad to be BBC?

Kitty: Yeah, I like to be BBC because I have black hair, and others don’t have it. I can speak English and Chinese. I can annoy them by speaking Chinese with my Chinese friends.

In this conversation, Kitty talked about the notion of being a ‘British citizen’ in relation to her own identity as well as her parents’ identities. A piece of information regarding Kitty’s family situation can help to contextualise this. When I first met the family, Kitty’s father told me that the family had gone through a prolonged process in order to try to gain their British citizen status. This process started just before Kitty was born, that is over twelve years ago and they were granted British citizenship only recently. It seems that Kitty’s first-hand experience of the formality and legality involved in a British citizenship could have an effect on how she perceives the meanings of being British. It was the firm and confident tone in Kitty’s claim of her and her parents being British citizens that made me believe that being British in legal terms is something significant to Kitty.

In spite of this shared identity of being British, there is indeed a disparity between the way that Kitty feels about herself and her parents. From Kitty’s point of view, her parents ‘are Chinese and always will be’; this is just ‘who they are’. For Kitty herself, she is British-born-Chinese, but also English, British and Chinese. This is the kind of flexibility in relation to identity that Kitty believes she can enjoy which
is not available to her parents. In spite of this, it can be seen that Kitty's description of her British-born-Chinese identity is indeed fixed in certain constituents of her Chineseness and is defined against 'them' or 'the others'. According to Kitty, it is good to be British-born-Chinese because she has 'black hair' which 'others don't have'. Similarly, the fact that she is Chinese and English bilingual means that she 'can annoy them', presumably the English, by speaking Chinese with her Chinese friends. However, it should be stressed that Kitty regards her first language as English, and to my knowledge, she speaks to her Chinese friends in English for the great majority of the time. Therefore, I believe that this particular claim has much to do with presenting her group identity. What this seems to point to is how Kitty is building her Chineseness through affiliations to her peers, within which Chinese language is a significant attribute of the friendship group membership. The centrality of friendship to the meanings of Kitty's identification with Chineseness and Englishness is further illustrated in the following exchange. In an interview based on the photographs that Kitty had produced for the research, Kitty talked about issues of friendship:

_Daisy:_ What do you do with your friends?
_Kitty:_ My English friends, they always go to that park. I don't like going there. It's too far away and too boring. [...] With my Chinese friends, we always go to town, I like the town.

_Daisy:_ Do you see your Chinese friends often?
_Kitty:_ If I'm bored and I phone someone, I'd phone my Chinese friends, because we can talk about things like Aaron Kwok [a Hong Kong pop singer/actor]. British are boring. I mostly go to the cinema with my Chinese friends from Chinese school. They're BBC, same as me. Oh, we go bowling as well.

[Later in the interview]

_Daisy:_ Do you like going to Chinese school?
_Kitty:_ If my friends weren't there, I wouldn't want to go. The teachers are mean. They expect you to know everything because you're Chinese. My class teacher expects a lot from us because she's from Hong Kong.
What is evident here is the way that Kitty utilises concept of Chineseness, Englishness and Britishness to explain her experiences and relationships with her friends, which in turns reinforces and creates her particular version of these identities. In Kitty’s description, it seems that notions of British and English are interchangeable. On the one hand, from the activities that Kitty claimed doing with her English friends, such as going to the park, Kitty puts forward the idea that ‘British are boring’. On the other hand, the Chinese, specifically Kitty’s fellow British-born-Chinese friends from Chinese school, are believed to be comparatively more interesting. Kitty would go to the town, go to the cinema and go bowling with them. What is more significant in all of this is the sense of collectivity embedding the British-born-Chinese identity; Kitty’s friends are ‘BBC’, ‘same as her’. An example that Kitty gives for this constructed sense of group belonging is in relation to knowledge of Hong Kong pop culture sharing by Kitty and her British-born-Chinese friends. On this basis, along with issues such as lack of interest and difficulties with access and language, English people are likely to be excluded from this friendship group. At the same time, Kitty also shows how her British-born-Chinese identity is defined in relation to other groups of Chinese people: for instance, Chinese teachers from Chinese schools, who ‘expect you to know everything’ because ‘you’re Chinese’ and because the teachers themselves are from Hong Kong. Kitty’s experiences of Chinese school, with other Chinese from a different background, such as those from Hong Kong, seems to have helped her to formulate a more multifaceted version of Chineseness or perhaps different kinds of Chineseness. Kitty is indeed questioning the simplistic and universal standard way of what it means to be Chinese, at least linguistically and culturally. The way that Kitty understands her British-born-Chinese identity and its nature is clearly reflected in the following account. Just before the alien task-based interview ended, I asked Kitty:

*Daisy:* Do you think that the way you feel about yourself will change in the future?

*Kitty:* No, I’ll remain the same, BBC [British-born-Chinese].

*Daisy:* So, you won’t feel more Chinese or British?
Kitty: If you compare me with someone who just came from Hong Kong, I’m more British, if you compare me with English, I’m more Chinese.

We have seen how some other children respond to the prompt about whether they feel more Chinese and English in different situations. Most of the children suggest that it can be contextual, depending on the identity of the people or the language involved, and it can also vary across time so that the longer they live in England, the more English and less Chinese they would feel. Yet what Kitty does here, instead of thinking of it as a sense of subjective feeling, she argues that whether she is more Chinese or English depends on who she is being compared with. Comparatively, she is more ‘British’ than someone who ‘just came from Hong Kong’. Similarly, she would be more Chinese compared to ‘English’. In this sense, Kitty believes that her identity not only is relational but also intersubjective. Finally, while many children suppose that how they feel about themselves and their identification with Chineseness and Englishness will change over time, largely in terms of becoming more English, Kitty has a rather strict view that her British-born-Chinese identity will remain unchanged. It seems that this is a well-established personal and group identity but which nonetheless will require Kitty’s effort to invest in and maintain it.

7.4.3 Connecting with Geographical Locations

What is self-evident in Kitty’s British-born-Chinese identity is the statement of the fact that she was born in Britain; the same way that the other children use England, their birthplace to justify their Englishness. Yet it has also been seen that Hong Kong and China are also rather frequently appearing in the children’s talks. The ways in which the children are formulating their relationships with these geographic locations are complex. Apart from Acton B (6) and Rachel B (7), all the children have different forms of personal and direct experiences with either Hong Kong or China, but in a few cases both. To many children, these are more than just the place where their parents were born and came from before settling in Britain. This following account is about Lorraine A’s (11) experience of different places. In this interview, I was attempting to gather some background information about Lorraine’s family situation:
Daisy: So, have you been to Hong Kong?
Lorraine: I have been there once when I was a baby, but I haven’t been when like now.
Daisy: Have you ever thought of working there in the future?
Lorraine: Not necessarily, but if you like to stay in Hong Kong, you got to work there as well, to get money for bills and tax, that kind of things.
Daisy: Would you want to stay there?
Lorraine: Well, I lived in England for all my life and I don’t really much go to Hong Kong.
Daisy: So, you would prefer to stay here?
Lorraine: Yeah, well, but they said they’re going to start a war or something. I don’t really feel really prepared to just go back to China or anything, if, I don’t know. I just keep on thinking that um, once England is going to have a war with probably China and that, we’ll probably have to go back to China or Hong Kong.
Daisy: But you don’t want to go there?
Lorraine: Not really. My great-grandma and my grandma are there. That’s all, I think. That’s all the people I know, my relatives I know there. But I do want to go back to Hong Kong, go shopping. [giggles]
Daisy: How did you hear about the war you just mentioned?
Lorraine: I don’t know. People have been just, like saying it.

It must be clarified that this discussion took place quite a while before the invasion of Iraq in 2002, and therefore Lorraine’s description should be understood as independent of that event. It is unclear about precisely how Lorraine has come to form the idea about a possible war and that she and her family will probably have to leave England. However, this certainly is something that bears a degree of significance to Lorraine and reveals much about how she thinks about her position in relation to England, China and Hong Kong. Upon reflecting the scenario of a war between England and China, Lorraine undoubtedly signals a strong sense of belongingness and affiliation to England. In contrast, China and Hong Kong are both a distant place to her. This is understandable. As Lorraine explains, she has lived in England for ‘all her life’ but has only been to Hong Kong once ‘when she was a baby’. In addition, Lorraine only has two relatives in Hong Kong, therefore, she does not ‘feel really prepared to just go back to China’. I believe that the fact Lorraine uses the terms Hong Kong and China almost interchangeably is also a sign
of how little difference the two places mean for her. Lorraine's suggestion that she would however want to go to Hong Kong for shopping seems to indicate that Hong Kong is more like a holiday destination to her. Yet throughout the dialogue, Lorraine is consistent in her use of the concept of 'to go back to' either China or Hong Kong, rather than, for example, just 'to go to'. This appears to be contradictory to her English identification and the fact that she was born and bred in England. This narrative about having to go back to the country which she did not come from can be produced by, but also reinforce, discourses of her position of being a child of a migrant family history. Apart from Lorraine, Christy D (12) is also found to have a feeling of affection for England, perhaps what can be called a sense of homeliness. However, unlike Lorraine, Christy was born in China. She came to England at the age of four and therefore has been living in England for eight years. In Christy's self-description created for the alien task, there is an emphasis on the importance of family. I therefore asked her about the potentially related concept of home:

_Daisy:_ Where would you say your home is?

_Christy:_ What do you mean? Like China or England? Or where my house is? I think of home as where my house is, where I have my house, and where my bed is. So, at this moment, England is my home. […]

_Daisy:_ Do you want to live in China for good?

_Christy:_ I could, but I have to catch up. I'm not very good at Chinese. I wouldn't mind doing it.

_Daisy:_ But then you'll have to leave to your friends behind.

_Christy:_ I can still email them. Did everyone else say no?

_Daisy:_ No, I'm just thinking about myself. I thought you'd be more used to living here. That's how I feel sometimes.

_Christy:_ Yeah, it'd be very different but I could live with my aunty and uncle, my cousin. They have an apartment and it's quite modern. It's quite like England.

_Daisy:_ If you have to choose now, where would you choose?

_Christy:_ I probably stay here, but if I have to go back, I wouldn't not want to go back.

_Daisy:_ So, you like England more?
Christy: Um, some things. It’s just that I’m more used to everything here. I think it has its good and bad points. England is more, like, clean, got more space. You can live with a garden. But then there’re lots of racist people here, everywhere. You don’t get that in China ‘cause everyone’s Chinese. But I can only remember a little about Nanjing [the Chinese province where Christy was born], not a lot. I can remember eating ice-cream, and played with my cousins. Since I came to England, I’ve always been like a tourist kind of person when I went back to Nanjing. Not a tourist, but I didn’t do anything normal. I just went out and bought stuff with my grandma, and saw stuff, went to people’s houses for dinner. That’s all we did. Not a normal life, just seeing friends, parties and stuff.

According to Christy, the idea of home can either refer to a country – which in her case would be either China or England – or ‘where one’s house is’. From her point of view, the notion of home would be ‘where her house is, where she has her house, and where her bed is’. Therefore, at the present moment, England happens to be Christy’s home. When prompted about whether she would want to live in China, where she had spent the first four years of her childhood, her response was that she would prefer to stay in England but if she has to go back, she ‘wouldn’t not want to go back’. In the space of the interview, Christy reflected on her experiences and sentiments of China and England, and generated a discourse on the good and bad points of these countries. To Christy, the idea that she can live with her relatives in China is certainly a welcoming compliment. What is also significant here is Christy’s belief that her relatives in China have a ‘quite modern’ apartment and it is ‘quite like England’. This clearly reinforces Christy’s affiliation to England, or at least the way how she is used to things in England. However, although England is comparatively ‘cleaner’, ‘got more space’ and so ‘you can live with a garden’, the negative point for Christy is that ‘there’re lots of racist people here, everywhere’. This is unlike China since ‘everyone’s Chinese’.

Compared to Lorraine, Christy appears to be more at ease with the imagined prospect of leaving England for China. Yet the reason for this cannot be assumed to be because Christy was born and had lived in China. As Christy explains, the meaning of China, in particular her relationship with China, has changed since living
in England. In fact, Christy only has little memory of China, specifically Nanjing, the Chinese province where she was born. More importantly, Christy understands that her relationship with China has changed to more or less a ‘tourist kind of person’. As stressed by Christy, the kind of life she now has in China can no longer be considered as ‘normal’ and that she ‘didn’t do anything normal’ when she visited China for a holiday. In this sense, Christy believes that she is no longer like other ordinary Chinese people living in China while she is there. Despite this, perhaps what sets Christy apart from Lorraine is the fact that Christy has been renewing her bond with China from time to time, and this includes the family relationships that Christy values. The next account provides an example of how familial ties which link the children with a place can sometimes be somewhat physically distant yet still powerful in constructing a link with the place. The following is a general conversation I had with Kitty’s mother, Mrs E, and which Kitty E (12) joined in:

_Daisy:_ Are you planning to go back to Hong Kong for Christmas? [T]

_Mrs E:_ No, when we save enough money, maybe in the summer. [T]

_Kitty:_ Next year, dad promised me that I’d go this year, so it’s next year.

_Daisy:_ You want to go to Hong Kong?

_Kitty:_ Yeah, if he, look, put it this way, I haven’t been for five years, and last time I saw my cousin was when she’s in my auntie’s tummy, but that makes, and she’s five now. So, it’s weird.

_Mrs E:_ How long is Christmas holiday? [T]

_Kitty:_ Two weeks but I want to go in the summer.

_Daisy:_ You like Hong Kong then?

_Kitty:_ Ah ha, it’s ‘cause I can see my cousins, aunties, uncles and the rest, and you can get cheap stuff.

_Daisy:_ Do you want to live there?

_Kitty:_ I don’t know. I haven’t been living in Hong Kong, but living in thirty-storey buildings is scary. When you look down, it’s scary.

Clearly, the main reason why Kitty is insisting on wanting to go to Hong Kong is to see the family members that she has over there. This includes a cousin who Kitty has never met in person before as last time Kitty went to Hong Kong, this cousin was still in Kitty’s ‘auntie’s tummy’. In fact, Kitty keeps a photo of this cousin in her wallet, which she rather proudly showed me once. Moreover, Kitty does not know
whether she would want to live in Hong Kong because she simply has never lived there before. Therefore, it can be seen that Kitty’s attachment to Hong Kong itself is perhaps minimal but is derived from family relationships which require ongoing acts of maintenance and renewal.

The cases discussed so far all involve children whose strongest sense of affiliation is to found to be with England. The final discussions of this chapter show otherwise. Sister and brother Hannah C (8) and Jerry C (12) both spent the first few years of their childhoods living in China and Hong Kong respectively with their grandparents. Although this fact seems to form part of the reason why they suggested that they would like to live in these countries, it seems not to be the primary factor. The following dialogue with Hannah is from one of the interviews based on the alien task about her identities.

_Daisy:_ Do you want to live in England or China?

_Hannah:_ I want to go back and live in China because my happiest moment is when I was with my _kung kung, po po_ [maternal grandfather and grandmother] in China. It was very, very, happy. No one ever told me off, but now mum always tells me off. I tell you something, if you study in China, the most disgusting thing, you have that toilet with a long, long, drain. Boys and girls go there together.

_Daisy:_ But you still want to live there?

_Hannah:_ Yeah, ‘cause my _kung kung, po po_ [maternal grandfather and grandmother] are the nicest people in the whole entire world. My favourite food is the fish my _po po_ [maternal grandmother] makes.

From this account, it can be seen that Hannah’s sense of affiliation with China and that with her grandparents are interlinked and indistinguishable. The meaning of China to Hannah is constructed through her memory of the extraordinary relationships and experiences that she had with her grandparents in China. When prompted, Hannah claimed that she would ‘want to go back and live in China’ because the ‘happiest moment’ in her life was when she was living with her grandparents in China. This is despite certain negative aspects of Hannah’s experiences of China as a place, including the fact that the toilets were found to be
rather ‘disgusting’. Moreover, what is also significant is the relational nature of Hannah’s understanding and feeling between her relationship with her grandparents in China and that with her mother in England. Whereas in China, Hannah’s grandparents were experienced as the ‘nicest people in the whole entire world’ and ‘no one ever told her off’, in England, her mother ‘always tells her off’. In this sense, Hannah’s desire to live China is not merely because of the good memory of her experience associated with the place. This memory is fundamentally understood and constructed in relation to her present life situation in England. Similarly, the final extract presented in this chapter shows how a discourse of wanting to leave England for another country can be closely related to the children’s experiences of relationships within the context of the home, but also the more general sense of affiliation, or rather specifically the lack of it, with England. The following exchange emerged after the alien task-based discussions about Jerry’s Chinese-English identity in which Jerry was reflecting on the meanings of England and Hong Kong to him:

*Daisy:* Do you think the way you feel will change in the future?
*Jerry:* I suppose I will. I think I’ll be more and more English ‘cause I’ll stay here for longer.
*Daisy:* How do you feel about that?
*Jerry:* I want to stay like Chinese ‘cause I’ll have to be able to speak Chinese, like if, when I go back to Hong Kong and I speak English, people don’t know what I’m saying.
*Daisy:* You want to go back to Hong Kong?
*Jerry:* Yeah.
*Daisy:* For holiday or to actually live there?
*Jerry:* I want to live there.
*Daisy:* Wouldn’t you miss England?
*Jerry:* No, it’s just a place.
*Daisy:* Why do you want to live in Hong Kong?
*Jerry:* Um, I like Hong Kong better ‘cause there’re lots of people. I like to be with Chinese people. When I was small, I stayed in Hong Kong with my grandparents for four years. I came back here when I was five. *Ngo gan yeh yeh, ma ma hui haan san, chun leung, wang “luk fu paai”* [I followed paternal grandfather and grandmother to go hiking, shower, play a kind of
card game]. I can still remember it clearly. When I first came back here, I couldn’t remember which room was which in the house. I couldn’t speak one word of English, and I was so bored of being alone at school.

Daisy: But thing’s are different now and you’re doing alright at school and everything.

Jerry: I suppose so, but England is England and I just want to go back to Hong Kong.

This dialogue is better to be understood in a reverse order. When Jerry was ‘small’, he stayed in Hong Kong with his grandparents for four years and then came back to England at the age of five. The way Jerry remembered it was that he had a wonderful time in Hong Kong with his grandparents doing all sorts of things such as hiking, which Jerry ‘can still remember clearly’. On the contrary, Jerry remembered that when he first moved back to England, he felt alienated from the whole environment. The sense of unfamiliarity was derived from, inter alia, not knowing his way in his own home and being ‘so bored of being alone at school’, and also his lack of English language skills. From these early experiences of strong bonding to Hong Kong on the one hand, and on the other, the unsettling, isolation and loneliness in England, it seems that Jerry has yet to fully build up a meaningful connection to England.

Through the telling of these lived stories, Jerry is reinventing the meanings of these actual experiences. In fact, Jerry’s conscious effort in constructing his identification with the relationally defined Chineseness and Englishness is apparent. Jerry believes that he will be ‘more and more English’ as he will be living in England for longer. However, Jerry maintains that he would want to ‘stay like Chinese’ because for example when he goes back to Hong Kong, he will have to be able to communicate with people in Chinese. This consciousness of ‘staying Chinese’ may hamper Jerry’s attempt to form a connection with England. Yet Jerry also claims to like Hong Kong more because there are lots of Chinese people and he likes being with Chinese people. This brings to mind the incidents of racism and problems at school that Jerry experienced and talked about in the interviews. All of these could also have negative impacts on how Jerry feels that he may not be able to relate to English people and England to a fuller extent. Finally, as will be addressed in the next chapter, Jerry has
also been experiencing rather difficult times at home with problems regarding his parents. Therefore, all in all, it seems Jerry is happy to construct Hong Kong as representing a possible refuge of a stable and secure environment for him, supplementing and existing alongside his understandings of how he is living in England.

### 7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with deconstructing the children’s sense of ethnic and national identities. It has shown that the majority of the children in this study have an assured view of their ethnic identities which they are able to articulate. Many of the children have a number of ethnic identity options ready to be asserted depending on their interpretation of the situation. Their identities are not endlessly open but largely created from different aspects of notions of Chineseness and Englishness. What has also been evident is that if the children are not provided with the space or even prompt, it is most likely that they would only signify a singular Chinese identity.

From the discussions with the children, different types of Chinese-English identities can be identified, each with its own specific nature, constituents and meanings. The fact that all the children asserted a Chinese-English identity (and in one case, a British-born-Chinese identity) has helped to highlight the diversity of the seemingly unified categories. However, the overlaps among the children’s identities have also been addressed. Above all, the children’s sense of being English has largely been seen as constructing through the notion of born and bred. This fabrication of Englishness is therefore rather limited and only fixed and naturalised in terms of mainly birthplace and language.

One narrative form found among the children is the ambivalence towards being Chinese and English. These children often understand their everyday interactions with others as characterised by Chineseness and Englishness. Whilst believing themselves to be positioned as the others and discriminated against, artefacts at
home and family relationships can be turned into resources of Chineseness. They gain strength from a pride in being Chinese and sometimes in relation to the downplayed English others. Sometimes China or Hong Kong is constructed as a refuge from unpleasant aspects of their lives in England.

Another type of Chinese-English identity also has a sense of pride in a Chinese identity but with a strong and clear consciousness of wanting to continually uphold this Chineseness. Although one aim of this is to avoid Englishness taking over, it does not prevent learning what is considered to be good Englishness. The narrative form is one of naturalised views of Chinese and English values and characteristics, but which can be learned and changed. One’s own strength of being Chinese can be enhanced by positioning other Chinese as un-Chinese or English.

By contrast, there is an identity formulation which involves an inevitable sense of being English and a strong sense of attachment to England, but having to work with and through Chineseness in everyday life within the family. The engagement and construction of Chineseness is therefore mainly in relation to close family members, rather than a direct subjective sense of identity. This position, when being questioned and perceived as the others, specifically as Chinese and not English, may assert an English identity in combination with details of family history involving migration from a Chinese country.

While there are those who are less assertive about their Chinese-English identities, there is the well-rehearsed perspective of the well-established British-born-Chinese identity. This identity involves heavy investment in friendships with shared knowledge of Hong Kong popular culture and language, but also other activities favoured by many young people irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. This position is a unique form of collective group identity which is different from other group identities drawing upon a singular sense of being only English or Chinese. Accompanying this perspective is a firm belief in the legal status and right to belong in Britain.
All the identity formulations seem segmented with discrete Chineseness and Englishness. However, they are best perceived as the two faces of the same coin, which together contribute to the children's senses of who they are. Also, these identifications are best understood as a specific form of Chineseness constructed within the English context, and a distinctive kind of Englishness created from the children’s position of being Chinese. Finally, the children's discourses of Chinese and English identifications with a centrality of their personal and familial experiences raise questions about the adultness in common discourses of ethnic identities, and the way that children’s contribution to these social meanings are not always recognised. The next chapter, rather unconventionally, will introduce the children’s families and addresses some of the ethnic issues within a childhood framework.
‘My family’ by Christy aged 12
The Families: Relationships and Identities

8.1 Introduction

This chapter is the final part of the analysis of the research findings, introducing the children and their families as individual cases. It considers the children's accounts of their experiences within the familial context, supplemented with other information gathered from observations and parental interviews. This additional information is only used for the purpose of assisting the contextualisation of what the children have to say. The main focus lies in the exploration of the ways in which the children understand their familial identities and their relationships with other members of the family.

The chapter also draws attention to the similarities and differences between the ways that the children experience their families. It demonstrates the complexity and diversity among the children and also their strategies in managing their familial roles and positions, whilst also highlighting some of the restrictions that they may face. Considering the evidence presented, it would appear that the children only employ references to Chineseness or Englishness to a limited extent. However, with the empirical evidence discussed previously in the thesis, the chapter concludes with the proposal for a reconsideration of the meanings of racial and ethnic matters among children and in relation to the context of family.

8.2 Michael A (6) and Lorraine A (11)

Hello Mr Alien. I'm an earthling. You can call me Lorraine. [Alien: Hi Lorraine. I am Bobbie. I live in Jupiter.] I would like to tell you about my love. I live with my mum and my parents are divorced. I have one brother and no sisters. I live in England. [...]
The centrality of the family to the children’s sense of who they are is highlighted in many of the children’s self-descriptions produced for the alien activity, as they had to imagine introducing themselves to a new acquaintance over the telephone. Through her choice of word, Lorraine cannot make it clearer about what family means to her; she refers to her family as ‘my love’. It should be noted that at the time of the fieldwork, Lorraine was actually living with her maternal grandparents and aunt in the accommodation above the family fish and chips shop. However, these members of family were not included in Lorraine’s definition of family, but only her mother and younger brother. To define the notion of family in terms of only immediate family members is a common feature of the children’s narratives.

8.2.1 Negotiating Family Positions

Lorraine’s account also raises the point that her parents are divorced. I could only suspect that this may involve a degree of reflective consciousness in relation to the normative notion of what constitutes a ‘standard’ family, that is the conventional nuclear family form. In fact, in one of the earliest meetings, Lorraine’s mother Ms A had drawn my attention to the fact that she was divorced. However, it was only when Lorraine initiated a discussion about the topic that I felt appropriate and necessary to pursue it further. I was then more confident that Lorraine would be likely to feel comfortable and be willing to talk about issues about her parents’ divorce, and I would also be able to adopt her use of language. This happened during a conversation that Lorraine and I had about her Chinese-English identity later on in the alien task. From this, Lorraine shifted the focus to issues about the particular family situation:

_Daisy:_ So, you’re happy with being both Chinese and English?
_Lorraine:_ Yes, but not exactly my parents. I don’t know. They just, um my dad never sees me, and they always have to go to court, and blah, blah.
_Daisy:_ How do you feel about that?
_Lorraine:_ I don’t find it upsetting or something, but then it’s a bit hard. My mum always talks about my dad, says “oh, he’s bad, he’s like this and that”.
_Daisy:_ You mean you find that hard?
Lorraine: I don’t really think much about the past. I don’t mind he doesn’t see me but then, um, I don’t exactly want to see him but then he doesn’t pay much *sin yeung fai* [alimony] um, like, five pounds and probably less than fifty pence for both of us [presumably Lorraine and her younger brother].

Daisy: What do you think your dad should do?

Lorraine: Yeah well, I think he’s not being responsible. I don’t mind him like, not seeing me but he should pay. I don’t get much pocket money. I only have it like once nearly like three weeks unless they remember. My mum sometimes gives me pocket money but it’s always like my grandparents and my aunt and that give me bit more. So, I just have to keep asking my mum for things. My friend, her father’s Chinese and her mum and dad are divorced, but her dad gives all the money for piano and whatever lessons she does. I used to when I did, um, piano, violin about forty pounds a month kind of thing. Um, he didn’t really pay anything. So, I think that’s not very responsible either. Yeah, ‘cause like the judge should like really do something and make him pay.

According to what Lorraine told me on other occasions, she had not seen her father since she was about five years old, that is over six years, and she does not have much memory of him. In spite of the fact that Lorraine’s father has been absent in most of her life, he is still a part of it. In this conversation, Lorraine expresses her frustration over the way things are in relation to her parents’ divorce. On the one hand, Lorraine has to manage the burden of her mother’s unpleasant emotions and resentments towards Lorraine’s father; on the other hand, Lorraine has to comprehend her own relationship with her father in terms of the lack of personal contact and financial support received from him. While Lorraine argues that she does not mind that she and her father are not seeing each other, she is particularly angry that her father is not being ‘responsible’, and simply ‘he should pay’.

Lorraine’s discourse of responsible fatherhood is further exemplified when Lorraine contrasts herself with her friend ‘whose father is Chinese and her mum and dad are divorced’. According to Lorraine her friend’s father ‘gives all the money for piano and whatever lessons she does’. Conversely, Lorraine’s father paid only a little when Lorraine used to have piano and violin lessons, and generally, he ‘doesn’t pay much *sin yeung fai* [alimony]’. Within this framework, a responsible father is someone...
who would take care of his family financially and provide financial resources for the children to pursue their personal interests. Moreover, it is interesting to see how Lorraine stresses the fact that her friend’s father is also Chinese. As recalled from last chapter, money is a crucial element in Lorraine’s construction of Chineseness, specifically how Chinese people are perceived to place great emphasis on money. Therefore, what Lorraine seems to do is to dismiss a cultural explanation for the differences found in the behaviour between her friend’s and her own father; being Chinese is no justification for her own father’s irresponsible acts.

Lorraine’s insistence on her father carrying out his duty to support the family financially seems to reflect a more conventional perception of adult gender roles within the family context, and of what child-parent relationships should be like. More importantly, Lorraine’s father’s acts of his parental duty have direct impacts on Lorraine, in particular in relation to how much pocket money she would get. Although Lorraine’s mother was then working in the family fish and chips shop six evenings a week, Lorraine argues that she only gets little pocket money from her mother sometimes, with the occasional subsidy from her grandparents and aunt. What this means is that Lorraine ‘has to keep asking her mum for things’. This feeling of having to be reliant because of financial restraints is indeed a repeated theme among some of the children’s narratives. Having their own pocket money can therefore be a crucial step in the route to the children’s sense of being more independent and in charge of their own life. The following account provides a useful illustration of Lorraine’s annoyance about being treated like a ‘baby’ by her mother. This exchange emerged from the boardgame task which addresses the children’s experiences at home.

Daisy: What do you think of your mother?
Lorraine: My mum’s embarrassing, nasty and moans a lot, and overprotective.
Daisy: How’s she embarrassing?
Lorraine: Like she always insists on picking me up from my friend’s place and dropping me off and that. I’m not a baby. I prefer to walk ‘cause it’s just embarrassing.
Daisy: Why do you think your mum insists on giving you a lift?
Lorraine: It’s just the way she is, so that I wouldn’t *hok wai* [lit. learn to be bad], kind of thing.

From the particular example, it can be seen that Lorraine often finds the ways in which her mother cares for her ‘embarrassing’ and ‘overprotective’. This is despite the fact that Lorraine can understand her mother’s behaviour as to protect her from ‘bad influences’ and ‘becoming bad’. It seems that Lorraine may enjoy a degree of autonomy from her mother. In fact, partly because of the particularities of the home situation, Lorraine is often found having to be independent and self-disciplined, providing care for herself and her younger brother while their mother is not at home. The following account throws some light on some key aspects of the daily arrangements of Lorraine’s family. In the boardgame task, Lorraine suggested some ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour of children within the home context, some of which involved the use of specific Chinese terms. I therefore tried to promote for a clarification:

*Daisy:* Do you think that Chinese and English families are different?

*Lorraine:* Um not really. I have some friends who’re half English, half Chinese. They go to Chinese school too. Um, it’s not about being Chinese really. It depends what their parents do. Some friends ‘cause their parents work at night and weekends as well, so they don’t get to see their parents a lot either.

*Daisy:* You mean you don’t get to see your mum a lot?

*Lorraine:* Well, we kind of see each other a lot but we don’t really spend that much time together ‘cause she works in the shop *[fish and chips shop]*, um, six days a week except for Sundays, from um, five o’clock to, if my aunt’s gone, she works up to ten thirty. If, when it’s not too busy, she can go home at nine. I’d just stay home, watch TV, keep an eye on my brother, go to sleep, like that. She also goes to college like, three or four times a week, and sometimes she has to go to the library, or she’d come home and do her assignments in the office, or she’d just rest in her room. So, she’s kind of always busy and tired.

What Lorraine believes to be characterising her family is that she and her mother do not have much time to be together. Lorraine points out that this is not a unique
situation of her family and may be shared other children and their families; this, as Lorraine believes, comes down to parental occupation. For her and other children whose parents work at nights and at weekends, they simply ‘don’t get to see their parents a lot’. From Lorraine’s description, it is apparent that she spends much time ‘alone’ at home after school and in the evening. The idea of being alone can have different meanings here. First, Lorraine’s mother could be at home and occupied with her own tasks such as her college assignments or resting in her room. From what I have observed, this tends to be the case in the afternoon after Lorraine gets home from school and before Lorraine’s mother goes to work in the evening. Lorraine’s mother does not always act as company or provide direct supervision to the children, in spite of the fact that they share the same domestic space. In addition, in the evening, Lorraine could be alone at home with her younger brother without the actual presence of their mother. Yet to my knowledge, the whole family would sometimes go to the family fish and chip shop in the evening, where the mother would be working downstairs while the children entertain themselves upstairs. In all of these cases, Lorraine not only takes care of herself, but also ‘keeps an eye on’ her younger brother.

Lorraine is no doubt spending much time with her younger brother and taking on and performing the role of taking care of him. However, it seems that Lorraine is adopting a somewhat reactive approach to her relationship with her brother. From my observation, much of the inter-sibling interactions are led by Lorraine’s younger brother, in that Lorraine seldom initiates activities or conversations but rather responds to her younger brother’s needs and requests, such as those for food or entertainment. It is apparent that Lorraine’s contributions are clearly a help to her mother who Lorraine understands as ‘always busy and tired’, and also important to the common good of the family. The degree of responsibility and trust assumed in Lorraine’s position of an elder sister and perhaps a daughter is undeniable. Yet as the following dialogue reveals, these identities of being an elder sister and a daughter can sometimes be experienced as contradictory and require much negotiating between Lorraine and her mother. This again emerged in the interview based on the boardgame task:
Daisy: What’s your relationship with your mum like?

Lorraine: Sometimes, I just lose temper with her. She sometimes gets a bit stressy. Like, she, um, my brother had to watch TV, we kind of argued ‘cause it was at night time and she kind of like, let him watch TV in the night. It’s like I felt that she chung yung [spoil] him, so I kind of really wanted to shout and I was really angry, but of course she wouldn’t listen to me.

Daisy: How are you getting on with your mum in general?

Lorraine: Um, she kind of expects me to tidy up the mess, even the mess he makes ‘cause I’m older and I’m a girl. People always expect girls to be tidier. But I think ‘yat yan jo si yat yan dong’ [one is responsible for own actions]!

Daisy: You mean you’re being treated differently because you’re older and you’re a girl?

Lorraine: Not exactly of um, sex, gender thing but it’s about he’s younger and I’m older. So, mum’s more strict with me and a bit nicer with him. He gets all the attention ‘cause he’s small and he never gets told off. She always says to me like “sang gwau char siu ho gwou sang ni” [lit. to give birth to a piece of barbeque pork is better than giving birth to you]24. She has this favouritism with him. She likes him more and she only tells me off.

Daisy: How’s your mum being nicer to him?

Lorraine: It’s like I’d just be a bit sarcastic or bit babyish when he gets a kiss from my mum, and say “oh how about me”, and then she goes “I’d give you one”, and then I go “no, no, no”.

Daisy: So, he gets more kisses from your mum?

Lorraine: Um, I think so.

Daisy: Because he’s younger?

Lorraine: No, when I was that young, I never really got many, any kisses, um, mum got a bit of time with him now, um, but I don’t really want my mum’s kisses ‘cause I’m older now, it’s bit embarrassing. [giggles]

It is apparent that Lorraine has strong beliefs regarding how to raise her younger brother and that she has a right to have a say in the matter. As in the example given by Lorraine, she believes that letting her brother watch television at night is bad discipline and her mother allowing him to do so is ‘spoiling’ him. Yet Lorraine also understands that her mother is the one who has the final say in settling the matter,

24 There is no documented reference available about this expression. Other sources suggest that it is originated in Hong Kong where barbeque pork has been a relatively cheap and common kind of food. Therefore, the specific cultural understanding of the expression tends to be that it harshly implies a child is worthless and useless.
and who simply would not listen to Lorraine. It is interesting to see that Lorraine is actually appropriating and adapting the language of her mother, or perhaps other adults in the family, as reflected in the notion of *chung yung*, meaning spoil. More importantly, this would appear that Lorraine is positioning herself, as an elder sister, in line with her mother in terms of being responsible for childcare within the family. However, this is somehow in conflict with Lorraine’s status of being a daughter, a child vis-à-vis a parent; she does not possess the same kind of power and authority as her mother.

There is also another way in which Lorraine’s younger brother plays an important part in Lorraine’s experience of her relationship with her mother. That is, Lorraine understands her relationship with her mother as relational to how she perceives the relationship between her brother and her mother. Lorraine is using a series of factors to try to explain why she thinks that her mother treats her and her brother differently. Lorraine believes that it is unfair for her mother to expect her to tidy up including ‘the mess that her brother makes’; this should be her brother’s own responsibility. Lorraine understands her mother’s expectations as deriving from the fact that she is older and she is a girl, also ‘people always expect girls to be tidier’. Moreover, it becomes clear that Lorraine also believes that age has much to do with how her mother has different kinds of interactions with her and her brother. In Lorraine’s words, ‘it’s about he’s younger and I’m older’. What this means to Lorraine is that she is being more strictly disciplined and getting told off more whereas her brother is being more nicely treated, getting all the attention and ‘kisses’ from their mother.

Moreover, Lorraine also explained that there was a change in the family situation that her mother has ‘a bit of time now’, and therefore her brother gets more attention than Lorraine used to when she was young. Besides, as stated by Lorraine, ‘I don’t really want my mum’s kisses ‘cause I’m older now’. Yet these thoughts do not eliminate Lorraine’s belief that her mother shows favouritism towards Lorraine’s brother. According to Lorraine, her mother always reminds her of her position of being the less favoured child in the family by saying to her the Chinese expression which literally means ‘to give birth to a piece of barbeque pork is better than giving birth to you’. What is more, Lorraine’s experience and understanding of favouritism
is found to be present in the context of child-adult relationships of the extended family. Later in the same interview, Lorraine talked about how she ‘hates’ her grandmother and this is the dialogue that followed:

*Daisy:* So, you don’t really get along too well with your grandparents?

*Lorraine:* Um... not too bad. I don’t really care about them. There’s always too much favouritism with my grandparents, especially my grandma, she thinks my cousin is like ‘yu jie yu ho’ [lit. like pearl like treasure] ‘cause his father’s the oldest son in the family, and he’s his oldest son. So, my grandma likes him the most. Then my grandparents, especially my granddad, he kind of likes my brother more ‘cause he’s like, always running around and making noises.

*Daisy:* You mean your grandma likes your cousin more because he’s the oldest grandson?

*Lorraine:* Yes.

*Daisy:* And why’s that?

*Lorraine:* It’s just a family thing, because my cousin will have sons, and his sons will have more sons, and so on. All the lands, like properties, and money, basically everything will go to him. Many years ago, his parents and my mum’s other brothers and sisters, they were angry with my grandparents. They wouldn’t talk to them. Recently, I think it’s year 2000, they thought they’d be ‘RIP’, you know ‘rest in peace’, dead soon, so they started talking to them again ‘cause they wanted a share of their wai chaan [inheritance].

According to Lorraine, while her grandmother shows favouritism towards Lorraine’s cousin, Lorraine’s grandfather likes her brother more. In relation to the latter, Lorraine explains in detail why her grandmother thinks of him to be precious, as expressed in the Chinese saying ‘like pearl like treasure’. Simply, Lorraine’s cousin is the eldest son of the eldest son in the family. Therefore, he represents the male heir to carry on the family and the family name; ‘he will have sons, and his sons will have more sons, and so on’. At the same time, this status comes with his right to the family’s inheritance, that is ‘all the lands, properties, and money, basically everything will go to him’. From this, Lorraine goes on to talk about how some members of her family tried to secure their share of the potential inheritance from Lorraine’s grandparents. While these are often assumed to be adult issues in the
family, they clearly do not escape Lorraine’s attention and in fact are having an impact on her life, something that she has to make sense of and deal with in her own terms.

In one sense, Lorraine’s narrative seems to echo the longstanding popular idea in relation to how boys are more desirable than girls in Chinese societies. Yet the key here is that Lorraine did not draw any link between the favouritism to boys in the family and notions of Chineseness. Rather, she understands it as simply how her family is organised; ‘it’s just a family thing’. Moreover, Lorraine’s explanation of why her grandfather favours her brother further shows that favouritism may have little to do with gender and the fact that he is a boy. Instead, it is because he is lively and active, who in Lorraine’s words, ‘is always running around and making noises’. Nonetheless, Lorraine’s account of the inheritance matters in the family seems to remind us how she uses the theme of money in constructing her definition of what Chineseness is about and also how she uses Chineseness in addressing some people’s, including her grandmother’s greed for money, as discussed in the previous chapter.

8.2.2 Constructing Familial Relationships

The way that Lorraine’s younger brother Michael addresses his experiences of family relationships is rather different from that of Lorraine’s. An example of this is in relation to their different approaches to their parents’ divorce and their relationship with their father. While Lorraine and I were discussing issues around her parents’ divorce, Michael was present. I later took the opportunity to ask Michael about his perception of his father:

_Daisy:_ Can you talk to me about your dad?
_Michael:_ Yeah, I miss daddy.
_Daisy:_ Do you want to see daddy?
_Michael:_ Yeah, I surprise him.
_Daisy:_ How are you going to surprise him?
Michael: Well, a long time ago, he was, when he’s little, he had a birthday. When I was five and six, I had a birthday into my assembly in my school, people were singing.

Daisy: You had a birthday party at school just like your daddy?

Michael: Yeah, and daddy had a, um, daddy’s day. I make a card for daddy’s day in school.

Daisy: That’s nice.

Michael: A little bit.

Daisy: A little bit?

Michael: Daddy’s a little bit nice.

Daisy: You like daddy?

Michael: Um, I don’t know. If daddy not coming, we can pick apples in the garden. If he’s coming, we can’t, daddy says “you can’t”, but he’s not.

Daisy: We’re going to pick lots of apples then!

Given that Michael had not seen his father since he was about one year old, it would be fair to assume that Michael might not have much memory of his father. Therefore, the ‘daddy’ whom Michael talked about in this conversation perhaps could best be understood as a father figure in a more general sense, and which Michael has been constructing. A father certainly has a significant and distinctive meaning to Michael. It would appear that Michael was trying to identify himself with his father through the fact that he would also have once been a little boy who had a birthday party in school, just like Michael himself. Moreover, although his father has been absent for most of his life, Michael makes an effort and manages to fashion a meaningful relationship with his father. The pretended scenario of apple picking is an example which can demonstrate the way that Michael can incorporate a father figure in his everyday life.

This is in marked contrast to Michael’s sister Lorraine who may not have shown much interest in having a relationship with her father, but rather a sense of antagonism towards her father’s failure to support the family. There could be a series of reasons and different ways to understand why Michael feels that he is ‘missing daddy’. An incident that I once observed at the Chinese school which Michael attends may shed some light on it. Michael was having a conversation with his friend, a boy of the same age from Michael’s class. Michael’s friend claimed that
his mother has a 'boyfriend' who is indeed his biological father. Michael enthusiastically replied that his mother too has a 'boyfriend' who 'snores loudly'. Both of the boys seemed to have enjoyed the conversation which was filled with laughter. Although I did not quite grasp the significance of the notion of 'boyfriend' between the boys, I believe that Michael was rather pleased with the fact that he too has a male figure in his life, matching up with his friend. Just as how Michael talked about how he made a card for daddy's day at school, this shows that perhaps for children like Michael whose fathers may not play an active role in their lives, they sometimes have to deal with the assumptions about children being with two parents as the norm. As the interview went on, Michael and I discussed his relationship with his mother:

Daisy: Can you tell me something about your mum?
Michael: Mummy, um, hating me. I think she hating me.
Daisy: Why do you think mummy hates you?
Lorraine: Because you're annoying! [laughs]
Michael: No, no, no! Mummy don't like children, and she gets angry, then she shouted. She, um, be very loud, shouting at the whole house! [laughs]
Daisy: You think mummy doesn't like children?
Michael: No, she just love, she love herself.
Daisy: Does mummy love you?
Michael: A little bit.
Daisy: You like mummy?
Michael: Yeah.
Daisy: Do you want to change anything about mummy?
Michael: Change her into a monkey! [laughs]
Daisy: Anything you don't like about mummy?
Michael: Mummy, um, don't like, um, spiders. Mummy don't like, um, chicken hack. They always catch chicken. Chicken, chicken, chicken! Ian always swears. He calls his mum a 'chicken fuck'. That's really ain't nice.
Daisy: Oh, I think it's really not nice to swear.
Michael: Yes, but Ian did. Mum said she couldn't do anything, so he said "I can do anything I want to". So, that's not very nice, but I just play.

Some fairly strong emotional words were used by Michael in this dialogue. In talking about how his mother is, Michael argues that he thinks his mother 'hates'
him. Rather than having something to do with him personally, as suggested by his sister Lorraine, Michael believes that this is because his mother ‘does not like children’ and she ‘just loves herself’. It appears that Michael may not feel particularly loved when his mother is ‘angry’, ‘shouts’ and is ‘very loud’. Yet what I think is also significant is Michael’s idea that some adults do not like children. This is an opinion that a few children also expressed in our discussions, highlighting the general power relationship of children and adult. Interestingly, Michael then provides an example of how children may get the better of adults in different ways. According to Michael, his friend ‘always swears’ which is not ‘nice’ but his mother ‘couldn’t do anything’ about it. Moreover, while Michael clearly thinks that swearing is unacceptable by children to adults, by ‘innocently’ repeating what his friend said, Michael is granted himself the permission to say the swear word without breaking any rules.

8.2.3 Same Family, Different Experiences

As Michael maintains, unlike his friend who is naughty, he ‘just plays’, which must be considered as good behaviour in children. Michael’s playful and energetic way to engage with people manifests itself in this exchange. As shown earlier, Lorraine believes that these characteristics of Michael’s earn him a more favourable relationship with some members of the family. This is an opinion shared by their mother Ms A. In closing the discussion, I would use the following conversation with Ms A, which highlights some key aspects regarding Michael’s and Lorraine’s experiences within the family context:

*Daisy:* How’s your relationship with Lorraine? [T]

*Ms A:* Um, she thinks that I favour Michael but it’s not true. Lorraine just doesn’t like to be told off. She’s really messy. I don’t like my children to be messy. Michael’s much better in this sense. He’d do his bed after he gets up, and when I’m, say, doing the lawn, he’d offer to help. [T]

*Daisy:* Do you think that you expect more from Lorraine because she’s older? [T]

*Ms A:* No, it’s the way she is. She’s really lazy and messy. She never likes to do her homework, and she’s always too lazy to learn new things. Lorraine’s

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25 [T] indicates a translated transcription from either Cantonese or Mandarin.
just like my ex-husband, very lazy. He never works in his whole life, so that he doesn’t have to pay for the kids. [...] My parents favour Michael, that’s true. That’s because Michael knows how to be sweet and make people laugh. But then, my parents are very conservative, you know how Chinese people favour boys over girls, and they think Lorraine looks like her dad. It’s like she reminds them of him, you know what I mean. But I don’t think like that. Well, a fortune-teller told me Lorraine will be better when she becomes twelve. So, I’d just have to wait and see. [T]

The comparative nature of the way that Ms A talked about her relationships with Michael and Lorraine reveals itself in this exchange. In this, Ms A’s perception of her relationship with Lorraine is largely defined in relation to that with Michael. Similarly, it has been shown that how Lorraine experiences her different familial identity is inseparable from her own relationship with Michael, but more important, from what Lorraine thinks of Michael’s relationships with other adult members of the family. This points to some of the roles that siblings can play in some, but not all aspects of children’s experiences of familial identities.

Both Lorraine’s and Michael’s accounts stress how important family relationships are to them and how they are engaging with these relationships in active and diverse ways. Through the process of talking about their family relationships, Lorraine, Michael and Ms A are indeed formulating a family chronicle with their different identification of the family collectivity and their positions within it. As has been discussed, Lorraine’s identity of being the older sister and the daughter sometimes involves conflicting expectations and interests. More significantly, Lorraine and Ms A are consistently negotiating the meanings of Lorraine’s performance of these identities, and her responsibility and contribution to the family. For instance, Lorraine feels that sometimes unjust expectations are assigned to her such as in relation to how she is being asked to tidy up her brother’s mess on the basis of age and gender. This partly reinforces Lorraine’s idea of her brother being favoured by their mother. While Ms A is aware of how Lorraine feels about this, she blames it on Lorraine’s personality. According to Ms A, Lorraine inherits her laziness from her father. Ms A also argues that Lorraine’s grandparents go further to suggest that Lorraine ‘looks like her dad’ and therefore is a reminder of him, perhaps more
precisely the bad memory of him. The negative image of the father of Lorraine and Michael as failing to support the family, especially the children is an established fact constructed in the family discourses. Therefore, these assigned biological connections between Lorraine and her father would most certainly position Lorraine as amongst the unfavourable others, creating a degree of distance between her and the rest of the family.

Ms A acknowledged her parents' favouritism towards Michael and boys generally in the family with the notion of 'conservative Chineseness', something that she is distancing herself from. On the contrary, while Lorraine apprehends how she is the less favoured child both in the immediate and extended family contexts with a series of complex reasoning, she never uses ideas of Chineseness to explain it. However, Lorraine's and Ms A's accounts can further contextualise what has been discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the way that Lorraine uses family to formulate her version of Chineseness, which in turn defines the adult members of her family. What are particularly evident here are, for example, the themes of money and superstition which are significant in Lorraine's discourses of what Chineseness is. It is through these elements that Lorraine signifies her identification with her family, but also her dissociation with them with regard to the Chinese otherness. Conversely, Michael does not have these kinds of obstacles which could make it difficult to formulate more positive relationships with the family. Perhaps in spite of the time when his mum is shouting, Michael seems to be cared for and shown to be loved to by many people in the family. This could in part allow him to develop himself as person with confidence, which in turn will enable him to invest more of his energy in constructing family relationships in the positive ways that he does. In the next case, a different kind of brother-sister and child-parent relationships will be addressed.
8.3 David E (8) and Kitty E (12)

My name’s Kitty. I’m not telling you my Chinese name, but my nick name’s ‘k girl’ [changed to initial of pseudonym]. The most important things in my life are chocolate, my friends and my family. I live in a rented three-bedroom terraced house with my parents and a crazy little monkey who’s eight years old. That’s my little brother. I swear he’s adopted! No, he’s reasonably nice but he annoys me sometimes.

Kitty’s introduction of herself to the imaginary acquaintance presented in the research task raises many of the crucial elements characterising her experiences of family. As Kitty specifies, she lives with her younger brother, mother and father. The situation is, Kitty’s mother’s younger brother, that is Kitty’s uncle, has also been living with the family, but Kitty decided not to include him in her account. Kitty’s mother works as a fashion sales advisor in a department store during the day, a waitress in a Chinese restaurant in the evening, and a Cantonese teacher on Saturday. Kitty’s father is, in Kitty’s younger brother David’s words, ‘an unemployed ex-chef’. From the information provided by Kitty, one thing that catches my attention is the emphasis on the kind of accommodation the family lives in, ‘a rented three-bedroom terraced house’. In fact, on other occasions, Kitty has also hinted at how she wishes the present situation of their home could be changed. In one interview, after Kitty talked about her friendships, I tried to end the conversation with a general question of whether she felt happy:

Daisy: Generally speaking, are you happy?
Kitty: I want to get a permanent home with internet and a phone line. So, we don’t have to keep moving, and we can just stay in one place. We moved into this house about three months ago. We used to live nearby, it’s just down the road in a flat. But my parents are going to buy a takeaway shop with accommodation on top of it, so that we can live there as well. I’ll then get free food and a bedroom of my own, ‘cause at the moment, I have to share with my brother. I need a phone ‘cause everyone’s saying it’s too expensive to phone me, ‘cause they have to phone me on my mobile, ‘cause we don’t have a landline.
Rather simply, Kitty wished that her family could eventually stop having to move houses and settle in a ‘permanent home’. A sense of stability which can only derive from an enduring physical space that can be called home seems to be a key aspect in Kitty’s view of family and home. Yet not only that it has to be a permanent home, and Kitty specifically argued for one that is with internet and telephone connection. It is interesting to see that a landline telephone as opposed to mobile phone is in a sense analogous to Kitty’s belief about what a home should be like as opposed to her experience of the present situation. More importantly, these communication devices are means and necessities within the domestic environment which would enable Kitty to be in touch with her friends and therefore develop and maintain her social relationships with her peers. Therefore, Kitty certainly welcomed the prospect of her family moving into a property combining business and home with Kitty having her own bedroom.

8.3.1 Negotiating Child-Parent Relationships

As Kitty declared in her self-narrative, friends and family are amongst the most important things that tells who she is. Yet how Kitty believed that the family can either enhance or hamper her social relationships has also begun to emerge. The following discussion involving Kitty, her younger brother David and mother Mrs E reveals in more detail Kitty’s experiences of her relationships with her parents as well as her expectations of her parents. The interview was planned to address issues about Kitty’s experiences at home raised by the boardgame activity worksheets that she had completed. After explaining the purpose of the interview to Kitty, she decided to have the interview in the living room with her mother and younger brother:

Daisy: What can you tell me about your parents?
Kitty: They’re nice but strict. My dad’s more strict than my mum.
Daisy: Would you want to change the way they are?
Kitty: Let me go out and see my friends. When I left my old school, I don’t see my old friends anymore.
Daisy: Why do you think that they’re being strict with you?
Kitty: It’s just they have their own way of parenting. They wouldn’t let me sleep over. I can only stay until ten-thirty p.m. They don’t let me go out, often. They don’t let me go out, they don’t let me, um, you know, have a sleep over. They don’t buy me new trainers, they’re broken! I need new trainers. I’ve seen trainers that I want but mum won’t buy me, ‘cause they’re fifty pounds, and the trousers that I want is about twenty-five. My friends got the trousers that I want that my mum won’t buy me. Oh, but I bought lots of Christmas presents already.

Mrs E: You haven’t got any jeans that are worn out or don’t fit. Just wear your old ones for now. How do I have the money to buy it for you right now? [T]

Daisy: Do you get pocket money?

Kitty: I’m not getting any now ‘cause mum, she said that I’m not allowed pocket money because dad hasn’t got any, got a job yet. So, we can’t have pocket money. My dad hasn’t been working for two or three months. My mum gives me money when I go out, but she won’t let me um, buy some, go shopping again ‘cause I need to buy lots of more presents. I haven’t bought my Christmas cards yet. Well, last time I spent thirty pounds but none of them is on me. So, it’s all Christmas presents. I need something for myself and I still haven’t finished my Christmas shopping.

Mrs E: You can help me type up my work and earn some pocket money! [T]

Kitty: Pocket money is given not earned. Dad needs to give me back my twenty pounds.

David: No, not yours, it’s mine.

Kitty: Yeah, he did, he took it from me. He goes, “pay for piano lesson, pay for piano lesson!”

Mrs E.: Twenty pounds won’t be enough for all the things you want to buy anyway. [T]

David: But dad still needs to give us back.

Kitty: The thing is dad owes me twenty pounds, and you haven’t given me pocket money for the last four weeks, so that makes another twenty.

Mrs E: How many CDs do you have? [T]

Kitty: Don’t make me count.

Mrs E: You can sell the ones you don’t want, ask if your friends want them, and then you can use the money to buy Christmas presents. [T]

Kitty: No. You see, I buy them for a reason. I don’t buy them to throw away. I buy them to listen to. [sighs] My friends are not gonna buy old CDs. They’re not that sad.
I have quoted this section of the transcription at length because I believe that it highlights many of the characteristics featuring the relationship between Kitty and her mother. While it captures the actual negotiation between Kitty and her mother at work, it is also largely representative of many of the other research discussions that I had with Kitty. I believe Kitty's choice to have this interview with her mother and brother is partly strategic and it also reflects something significant about her personality and her approach to issues with regard to familial relationships, which will be soon evident. Kitty is certainly confident about speaking her mind, expressing her own views and debating with her mother. In this discussion, as much as Kitty was telling me about her experiences, she also seemed to be trying to put across certain messages and even complaints and demands to her mother.

An issue that is at the heart of Kitty's account is in relation to the sense of restriction that she feels herself experiencing. According to Kitty, she is not allowed to have a sleep over, to stay out after ten-thirty at night, to go out as often as she would like and to see her friends, to have the new trainers and trousers that she wants, and regular pocket money. All of these were pinned down to two reasons: first, in Kitty's words, her parents' own way of parenting, second, the fact that Kitty's father has been unemployed. With regard to the latter, rather understandably, since Kitty's father had been out of work for quite some time, the financial situation of the family may have been difficult, creating some tension between Kitty and her mother. Kitty makes it clear about how she thinks that it is her parents' responsibility to fulfil her material needs and to give her pocket money. This is in spite of the fact pointed out by Kitty that her mother gives her money when Kitty goes out. While Mrs E tries to propose some ways in which Kitty may be able to 'earn' her pocket money, such as by helping Mrs E with some work, Kitty bluntly rejects it. The reason for this is that, for Kitty, pocket money should be something 'given' by parents to children rather than children having to 'earn' it. Kitty's belief of pocket money as children's own possession is also reflected in the way that she insists on her father having to pay her back the money that he took from her, even though it was for Kitty's piano lesson.

Just as has been seen previously with Lorraine, Kitty feels strongly about the issue of pocket money, which she considered to be a main part of the father's duty. It
appears that the money matter can be particularly tough at times like Christmas, as Kitty shows, a time to spend on cards and presents for friends. What this hints at is the fact that in order for Kitty to maintain her social relationships, she needs to have financial support from her family and hence the material necessities. Kitty’s argument that ‘my friends got the trousers that I want that my mum won’t buy me’ provides another useful example of this. This is about Kitty’s identification with friends and her participation and membership of the particular peer group. In spite of Kitty’s knowledge of her family’s financial situation, she is struggling with working at her identities outside the home context. The fact that Mrs E may not always understand fully the organisation of Kitty’s peer world is revealed after Mrs E suggests that Kitty could sell her CDs to make some money. According to Kitty, selling and buying second-hand CDs simply is not something that she and her friends would do; ‘they are not that sad’.

8.3.2 Intersecting Child-Parent and Sibling Relationships

In Kitty’s self introduction quoted at the beginning of the discussion, she describes her younger brother David as ‘a crazy little monkey’, who is ‘reasonably nice’ but sometimes ‘annoys’ Kitty. The below exchange also touches on how Kitty and David can enjoy challenging one another on occasion. During one fieldwork visit, the family had a spare mobile phone, and Kitty and David were arguing about who should have it. Upon seeing this, Mrs E started talking about the differences between the personality of Kitty and David. This then led to a debate about a dispute that Kitty and David once had:

Mrs E: This daughter has really bad temper. Her brother just cries. She’s impatient, a bit like me when I was young. Her brother just takes it as it comes, more tolerant and he always makes me smile. But she wouldn’t tolerate her little brother, never backs down. You wouldn’t, would you, like last time. [T]

Kitty: But he’s wrong, so.

Mrs E: Then you have to explain to him. You shouldn’t make him cry. [T]

Kitty: I didn’t make him cry. He just cried.

Mrs E: You grabbed his remote control. [T]
Kitty: He’s wrong.
David: You were wrong.
Kitty: I’m not going to let him have it, ‘cause he’s wrong.
David: But she’s wrong, she’s wrong.
Kitty: You were, ‘cause you couldn’t wait two minutes.

Daisy: [to Mrs E] What is your belief, like, would you ask Kitty not to fight with David because she’s older? [T]

Mrs E: No, it depends on the situation, depends who’s right and who’s wrong. I have to analyse the matter for them, explain to them and make them understand. [T]
Kitty: ‘Cause last time he took, he wouldn’t let me listen to the song. He was looking at the teletext, and he could have waited two minutes, but he didn’t wait.

Mrs E: He didn’t know he could have it back after two minutes, did he? [T]
Kitty: Yeah, he could. I told him and he said “no, I want to see it now”.
Mrs E: He needed to know urgently, so, you should have let him find out first. [T]
Kitty: Oh well, you always take his side, who cares.
Mrs E: Because you always listen to that song. [T]
Kitty: It’s the first time I heard it.
Mrs E: But you always buy singles anyway, right.
Kitty: Yeah, but I don’t have any money now, do I.

In spite of Mrs E’s rather calm tone and her effort in keeping the situation under control, I certainly felt that the atmosphere was not particularly pleasant. The way that Kitty would not give up arguing for her case may seem to validate what Mrs E says about Kitty; how she is ‘bad tempered’, ‘impatient’ and ‘intolerant’ and ‘never backs down’. Once again, the practice among parents of defining one sibling in relation to another can be seen. Therefore, in comparative and in some way oppositional terms, Mrs E describes David as ‘taking it as it comes’, ‘more tolerant’ and ‘always making her smile’. Not disputing this, all Kitty seems to be concerned about is to make her voice heard and to defend what she believes is right. The question of who was right or wrong in the incident at issue is not to be judged here. Rather, more important matters are revealed about the complex way that the child-parent relationships and sibling relations of the family are interconnected with one another.
When prompted, Mrs E dismisses the idea that when Kitty and David have a dispute, she would expect Kitty to back down merely on the basis that Kitty is the older sister. Instead, Mrs E argues that the approach she adopts is to analyse the matter for David and Kitty, explain to them and judge according to who is right and who is wrong. It would appear that this is what Mrs E is trying to do during the exchange. However, from Kitty’s point of view, Mrs E is far from being fair but biased towards David; her mother always takes her brother’s side. In fact, the effort of Mrs E in approaching this conversation which appears to be defending David, would seem to reinforce Kitty’s idea that Mrs E is being prejudiced in favour of David. This may also partly explain David’s minimal involvement in this dialogue, even though the incident in question was ultimately about him and Kitty. It is interesting to see that when Mrs E and Kitty talk about how he cries, David does not refute that. Conventionally, crying can be seen as associated with immaturity and weakness, especially for boys. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that this is how David feels about crying, rather it could be a strategy to get his mother on his case at times of dispute with Kitty. While David’s position in the family appears to be characterised by protection and care, in particular from his mother, a rather different character has been observed outside the home. For example, in Saturday Chinese school, David is known by many children, parents and teachers as a leader of his friendship trio. I have witnessed David and his friends taking part in a few ‘adventurous’ and sometimes even rule-breaking activities such as sneaking into a classroom at break time and drawing all over on the whiteboard. What this seems to suggest is that David has multiple identities which he chooses to act out in different settings but no apparent contradiction is evident.

Some valuable evaluation can be drawn from the children’s experiences of familial relationships in the two families discussed so far. What has been the most significant is the ways in which the children understand their identities of being an elder sister. While Lorraine is involved in the more direct caring tasks for her young brother on a daily basis, this is not the case with Kitty. However, one feature that Lorraine and Kitty share is that their elder sister identities are inseparable from their child positions vis-à-vis parents. It has been shown that the parents attempt to influence how the siblings relate to each other, and the parents’ understandings of one sibling
is often constructed relationally to their understandings of another sibling. The partial effect of this on Lorraine and Kitty is that they often feel a sense of being unfairly treated by their mothers who allegedly show favouritism and bias support towards the younger sibling. However, as has been discussed, Lorraine and Kitty have different approaches to manage the unjust situations. While Lorraine is likely to act in a reactive manner, trying to adjust to fulfilling the expectations and needs of the family, Kitty is more upfront about her own opinions and would challenge her mother more openly. What has not been apparent with these sibling relationships is the kind of partnership that is found to be characterising the sisterhood of Acton and Rachel, the sibling pair to be addressed next.

8.4 Acton B (6) and Rachel B (7)

Acton and Rachel live with their mother and father. Mr B is a bus driver and works on shift. During the time of the research, Mr B has been working on evening shifts and is away from home from late afternoon. Mrs B is a bank nurse who works on a non-regular basis. Mrs B considers her primary role to be a mother and a housewife, being responsible for the everyday running of the home and the people in the family. Therefore, as would be expected, Mrs B is heavily involved in the daily lives of Acton and Rachel on a practical level. This is reflected in Rachel’s discourse about her everyday schedule. In one of the earliest meetings, I tried to develop a general picture of Rachel’s everyday routines:

*Daisy*: Can you tell me what you do everyday? You get up, and then?
*Rachel*: Wash our face, and then get dressed. We have breakfast, and then mum takes us to school, and we learn, and then we finish school, and mum picks us up.
*Daisy*: And what do you do after school?
*Rachel*: Sometimes we go shopping with mum, um, Tuesday, we go swimming, Wednesday, we have piano lesson, and Thursday, we learn the violin.
*Daisy*: What do you do after you get home?
*Rachel*: We do homework, and then we have dinner. We practise instruments and we play.
Daisy: How about Saturday and Sunday?
Rachel: Saturday, we go to Chinese school, and then we go to po po’s [maternal grandmother] house. Sunday, we go to Chinese church.
Daisy: What is Chinese church like?
Rachel: You go inside the church, there is a book. You put your name and address down, and then you get a headphone. You can listen to Chinese or English.

It is extraordinary that Rachel exclusively uses the term ‘we’ rather than ‘I’ in describing the activities that she is involved in on a day to day basis. The term ‘we’ here has a number of meanings, including referring to just Rachel herself and her younger sister Acton as in ‘we learn’ in school; or Rachel and Acton together with their mother, such as when ‘we go to grandmother’s house’; or the whole family as in the case of ‘we go to Chinese church’. However, for the majority of the time, Rachel is talking about how she takes part in almost all the activities together with her sister Acton, but with their mother ‘in the background’ and not being directly involved. The relatively small age gap of only one year between Rachel and Acton could be one of the factors which encourage and enable this arrangement. This in turn significantly contributes to the particular form of the relationship that Rachel and Acton built. The specific way that Rachel experiences her position of being an elder sister in relation to her other identities is revealed in the boardgame activity. Rachel identified a number of behaviours that she considers to be good and would be somehow rewarded at home. These actions are exclusively of a ‘self-care’ nature, such as ‘to get dressed’ or ‘to go to bed early’; nothing is with reference to her relationship with Acton. In one respect, this seems to suggest that Rachel perceives her identities within the home context largely in terms of being a child vis-à-vis parents. In the interview that followed, I intended to find out more about her experiences of being a sister:

Daisy: What is it like to be an elder sister?
Rachel: I play with my sister. I draw with her. I help her to do her homework.
Daisy: Do you like to be the elder sister?
Rachel: Yeah.
Daisy: What’s nice about it?
Rachel: I like it because, um, I don’t know.
Daisy: Do you want to be the younger sister?
Rachel: No, because babies scribble on a piece of paper but I draw properly. Babies can’t talk properly but I can.

There is no doubt that Rachel does identify with being an elder sister, experiencing and performing this position in her own manner. This is despite the fact that she may not appear to be as assertive on the topic as the other elder siblings in the earlier discussions. Besides, what also differentiates Rachel’s account from those of these children is that there is no suggestion of active parental involvement in the sibling interaction between Rachel and Acton. Therefore, Rachel does not appear to express the sense of frustration that has been seen with the other two elder sisters, which is deriving from their sense of being treated differently and at times unfairly in relation to their younger brothers irrespective of the reasons. Instead of talking about how parents may give explicit orders about her responsibility towards her sister, Rachel talks about how she does things with Acton, including ‘to play with her’ and ‘to draw with her’. Rachel certainly presents a much more positive perception of her sisterly relationship, which appears to involve interactions that both siblings can enjoy.

Moreover, how Rachel and Acton formulate their relationship with the elements of companionship and teamwork is revealed in the specific way that they chose to carry out the research task that involves taking photographs. Although each was given their own camera, Rachel and Acton initiated and exchanged ideas about the kind of photos that they should produce together. They in turn performed in the same poses and took pictures of and for one another. In a similar manner, they also both gave the same instructions to their grandmother and mother, such as to sit on the piano chair, and took a photo each. This cooperative nature clearly shows up in the finished products with Rachel and Acton having the largest number of almost identical photos, as well as photos depicting siblings. However, this does not obscure the individuality of Rachel and Acton, which is reflected in the kind of photos which capture their own different personal and favourite objects.
Despite this partnership, Rachel’s narrative clearly shows that she also understands her relationship with Acton with an awareness of their difference in age and in the perceived ability and duty. As Rachel claims, she ‘helps’ Acton with her homework. In fact, I have observed the different ways in which Rachel acts out this identity of someone older and more capable, supporting Acton both within and outside the home context. For example, on one occasion, Acton was having difficulty in reaching a box of games on the shelf and without any prompt or delay, Rachel immediately helped Acton to get it. Similarly, at Saturday Chinese school where Rachel and Acton are in the same class, Rachel is always there to offer Acton help. This included once when Acton accidentally tore her exercise book and right away Rachel raised her hand and asked the teacher for sticking tape.

Furthermore, the way that Rachel experiences her identity of being an elder sister with the dual components of partnership and responsibility is illustrated in her response to my question about whether she would like to be the younger sibling. Rachel shows her belief that sisterhood is characterised by age-related responsibilities with the older sibling watching over the younger one, but she does not overplay it. Instead, it involves more general meanings of being an older or younger child with varied standards of abilities and skills. Therefore, in Rachel’s account, she does not associate the notion of being the younger sister with what Acton is, but rather what a younger child is in general. In Rachel’s words, being a younger sister would mean being ‘babies’ who ‘scribble on a piece of paper’ and ‘can’t talk properly’. This is precisely why Rachel claims not to want to be the younger sister; she enjoys being the mature and able child that she is. This can be regarded as Rachel’s normative discourse of childhood intersecting with her experiential account of sisterhood, which together inform her sense of identification of being an elder sister.

8.4.1 Child-Parent Relationships

As already hinted, the role that parents seem to play in the relationship between Rachel and Acton is different from those of the other sibling relationships addressed. One major difference is that Mrs B, the mother of Rachel and Acton provides direct
and intense care for both Rachel and Acton, partly due to the fact that Mrs B is mostly a full-time mother whereas the mothers of the other children have various engagements, such as education and employment. This means that for much of the time, Rachel and Acton are likely to be with their mother, when they can choose to take up their positions of being a daughter and a child. Yet this identity of being a daughter is better understood as coexisting with their identities of being a sister to one another, which may or may not be activated by Rachel and Acton. An incident that I had observed can provide a useful demonstration of this. Once in the children’s play room at the Chinese church which the family go to every Sunday, Acton was playing with a doll. A boy of the same age as Acton went up to her and tried to take the doll off her. Acton immediately turned to her mother and said, ‘mum, he’s taken my toy!’ Mrs B demanded the boy give the doll back to Acton. However, the boy and Acton were holding one end of the doll each and still fighting over it. Acton then said to the boy ‘go away, go away, you stupid old boy’ while she was pushing him away and grabbing the doll. All this time, I could see that Rachel was aware of what was happening and was keeping an eye on the situation while she was drawing a picture with me. Apparently, Rachel did not feel the need to interfere or to offer her help to Acton.

On this occasion, although Acton’s own strategy proved to be more effective than her mother’s effort, her initial reaction to call for her mother’s interference is significant. Yet this should not be thought of merely in terms of Acton’s dependency on her mother but rather part of the intersubjectivity that features in Acton’s relationship with her mother. The reason why Mrs B was in the children’s room at the church is that she had volunteered to look after the children, including Rachel and Acton, while the service was in progress. Once the service was over, Mrs B and the children would rejoin the rest of the group of adults for tea. As Mrs B puts it, she would rather ‘sacrifice’ the opportunity to socialise with other Chinese people and to keep an eye on Rachel and Acton. The commitment of Mrs B to care for Rachel and Acton is apparent and she tries to be there for them whenever possible. This is also backed by observations made at home. What has caught my attention includes the number of occasions on which Mrs B would feed Rachel and Acton at dinner time. Mrs B sometimes has to keep calling Rachel and Acton, but mostly Acton, back to
the dinner table and to feed them spoon by spoon. From the actions of Acton and Rachel, it seems that at times, they are taking advantage of their mother’s patience and affection. Nonetheless, according to Mrs B, Rachel and Acton are too ‘thin’, and therefore she has to make sure that they eat properly.

Moreover, apart from looking after Rachel and Acton, it is apparent that Mrs B’s role as a mother also involves providing guidance for them. This is to ensure that Rachel and Acton present themselves well and behave in an appropriate manner. Throughout the fieldwork, Rachel, Acton and I were somehow under the watchful eye of Mrs B; an arrangement that Rachel and Acton were aware of and had no objection to when asked and offered alternatives. In this, Mrs B was always giving direct instructions of how Rachel and Acton should behave. An example of this took place while Rachel, Acton and I were doing the boardgame task in the living room while Mrs B was cooking in the kitchen. Rachel asked me if she could use colouring pencils and immediately from the kitchen, Mrs B shouted ‘don’t argue, do as you’re told’ [T]. Rachel then said to me that she would be filling in the worksheet with colouring pencils and did so. In another incident, Acton, Rachel and I were engaging in a conversation about pets in which Acton told me about how she once stepped on a mouse in the house. Mrs B, who happened to be walking pass the living room, heard this and said, ‘nonsense, kids shouldn’t tell lies’ [T] which Acton seemed to find amusing and she giggled. As can be seen, both Rachel and Acton are both rather at ease and have their own ways to work with their mother’s constant supervision and demands. This positive child-parent relationship seems to be produced by, and also reinforced by, Rachel and Acton’s warm attitude to their mother. The following account can throw some light on this matter. In one visit to the family home, after Rachel played me a piece of music on piano, I asked her:

_Daisy_: How long have you been playing the piano?
_Rachel_: Um, one year.
_Daisy_: Do you like it?
_Rachel_: Yes. Mum is piano grade seven.
_Daisy_: Really?
_Rachel_: Yes. I want to be grade ten, better than mum!
Rachel is certainly very proud of her mother’s achievement in piano and setting her own goal based on it. This, together with Mrs B’s love and care towards Rachel and Acton are at the centre of the rather harmonious child-parent relationship that they have. The following quote of Mrs B is another example of this. In response to my question about what it is like to be a mother, Mrs B said:

I don’t know how to do anything else, but a mother. We’re not rich but we try our best to provide for the kids. I just want them to be happy, healthy and have a pleasant childhood. I only try to be there for them, take care of them. To see them grow up and be a decent person, it makes everything worthwhile. [T]

The identity of being a mother is certainly of great significance to Mrs B in which she invests heavily. In this respect, Rachel and Acton provide the necessity for Mrs B to perform her identity as a mother and also to formulate her own sense of self. This points to the idea that identity formulation of any child-parent relationship is inevitably a two-way process contributed to by both the children and the parents. Before bringing the discussion to a close, I would draw the attention to one final feature of the particular daughter-mother relationships of Rachel, Acton and Mrs B in relation to Mrs B’s perception of children’s gender. On more than one occasion, Mrs B said to me that ‘your father must be devastated not to have any sons’ [T]. This is because I am one of the three daughters in my family, with no brothers. In a different situation, once in the church, Mrs B told me about how a couple there ‘have two sons’ which she felt ‘must be god’s blessing’ on them. I believe the idea of having or not having any sons in the family represents something significant to Mrs B. However, I did not attempt to investigate this matter further as I felt that the potential benefit to the research may not justify the possibility of causing distress to Mrs B. Nonetheless, Mrs B’s commitment to be a good mother to her daughters Acton and Rachel may have to take into account her sentiment of not having a son.

It has been seen that Rachel’s experience and identity of being an elder sister is very different from that of Lorraine and Kitty. Just as with Lorraine, Rachel also takes on and performs this familial role, supporting the younger sibling in various ways. However, whereas the experiences of Lorraine and Kitty are accomplished with their negotiation for fairness with parents, Rachel can enjoy her sibling identity and
relationship of companionship and team effort. A crucial reason for this difference lies in the characteristics of the child-parent relationships in these families. Unlike the other mothers who have engagements in education or employment, Mrs B provides Rachel and Acton with more ‘full-time’ undivided attention. This means that Rachel and Acton can have more opportunities to choose to adopt the position of being a child, a daughter, along with the option of activating their sibling identification. Finally, the relatively narrow age gap between Rachel and Acton and perhaps the fact that they are both girls can also encourage and at times allow them to take part in all sorts of activities and to spend much of their everyday lives together. These are some of the factors that contribute to the particular relationship that Rachel and Acton have, which is incorporated into their identities of being a child of the family. In the following discussion, there are four children in the family, and with different sub-sibling pairs and relationships, their familial experiences and identities are even more complex.

8.5 John C (6), Hannah C (10), Jennifer C (11) and Jerry C (12)

Dad asked the son, ‘have you done your homework?’ The son said lazily, ‘not yet’. Dad was lying on the sofa, watching TV, stuffing his face with crisps and getting fat. And then mum shouted at him, ‘hey, you stupid dead man!’ Then mum went to the kitchen and cooked dinner. The son watched his dad and mum shouting at each other, and he was very upset. Then he went out to play with his sisters, but mum went mad and started hitting him with a hanger. She shouted, ‘go and do your homework now!’ The family had tasty roast beef for dinner. After dinner, gor gor [elder brother] woke BB [baby] up and BB wet himself. Mum was crossed and she shouted and hit gor gor [elder brother] with a stick. Mum got more and more angry because gor gor [elder brother] stole money from po tau [the shop]. Mum then kicked him to bed. Then mum watched sai lo [younger brother] brushed his teeth, and she helped him to wash his face, and put him to bed. Everyone went to sleep.

This is a story produced by Hannah and Jennifer for the research activity using some of the finger puppets provided. The references that Hannah and Jennifer make in relation to the range of family practices and different kinds of intergeneration and sibling relationships are meaningful. As will be seen soon, the significance of the
issues raised in the story reveals itself in the children’s accounts to be central to the children’s understandings of their experiences and positions within the family. John, Hannah, Jennifer and Jerry live with their parents, and from time to time, are joined by their maternal grandparents. The home of the family and their takeaway shop are in the same building. Located at the front of the ground floor is the counter area of the shop. Moving inside, there is the kitchen, both for domestic and business use, and then there is the dining area followed by the living room. Upstairs is where the bedrooms and bathroom are. The family also has an extension which consists of a study for the children and accommodation for the takeaway workers.

In the earlier chapters, it was shown how Chinese families and children in Britain have often been depicted negatively in terms of family pathologies brought about by the particularities associated with running takeaway businesses. The following account of Jerry can shed some light on this issue and more importantly, from a child’s own point of view. This abstract is from an interview of the boardgame activity in which Jerry has identified a number of tasks that he regards as good behaviour at home including some which appear to reflect the idea that the takeaway business is part of the family home, such as ‘helping dad to carry boxes’. I therefore asked Jerry about this particular home situation:

*Daisy:* Do you think it’s good or bad to have your home and shop together?

*Jerry:* Well, if people know that my parents own a shop, I don’t want any troubles. I didn’t tell my friends my parents own a shop but once, ‘cause my friends live nearby and they came in to the shop. So, they just found out. They said nasty things to me but I just ignored them. So, I don’t really like to hang around at the shop. It’s embarrassing if your friends saw you.

*Daisy:* What would you do if your friends saw you at the shop?

*Jerry:* I’d just walk away and go inside the house.

*Daisy:* What would you say if your friends ask you what your parents do then?

*Jerry:* I tell them to mind their own business ‘cause you wouldn’t want to tell your worst enemy, but if they’re my good friends, I’d tell them the truth.

*Daisy:* So, you help at the shop?

*Jerry:* Oh, um, well, sometimes I help with mum. Mum takes phone calls and I help with the customers at the counter.

*Daisy:* Do you enjoy it?
Jerry: Yeah, because, um, this man yeah, once he wanted a bet, heads or tails. I won and he gave me two pounds. The customers are really polite, when you serve them, like “please can I have this, please can I have that and that”. When you give them the food, “thank you, blah, blah, blah”. But sometimes, some of the customers right, how do I say it, it’s like they came in the shop right, with a cigarette, um, two signs on each side saying ‘no smoking’, so mum had to say to them, “can you go outside”, um, then they were like “oh”, and they went outside.

From Jerry’s point of view, there are definitely disadvantages of being so closely connected with a Chinese takeaway business. As Jerry claims, he would rather make a secret of the fact that his family owns a takeaway shop, specifically only from his ‘worst enemy’ but not his ‘good friends’. It is best to locate Jerry’s notion that this information would cause ‘troubles’ and that people would say ‘nasty’ things to Jerry within the particular context of British society. Given the historical background in relation to the Chinese catering establishments in Britain as discussed in the earlier chapters, one might argue that Jerry is experiencing the impact of the racialised interactions and the stereotyping deriving from the takeaway business. However, the fact that Jerry is a 12-year-old and having to work at the counter ‘serving’ his friends as customers may just also be considered as ‘embarrassing’ in the young people’s world. It seems that a large part of it is related to Jerry’s concern about how he is presenting himself to, and being perceived by, his peers. All these factors may contribute to Jerry’s sentiment that he ‘doesn’t really like to hang around at the shop’.

Yet at the same time, the way that Jerry explains his experiences of working at the counter of the takeaway shop tells another story to those often described from the adult western liberal and Eurocentric child development perspectives. Instead of, for example, the much assumed and discussed long work hours into late in the evening, Jerry talks about how he enjoys helping out and how the customers were being nice to him. These include an incidence of a customer playing a game with Jerry who then won some money, and other examples of customers being ‘polite’. This is in spite of the occasional problem Jerry and his mother had with some customers smoking in the shop, who nonetheless would cooperate when requested. Therefore,
there certainly are pleasant moments in Jerry’s labour participation in the family takeaway business.

Furthermore, to Jerry, the specific shop-home structure of the family is not without its advantages. If it is inevitable for Jerry to help out in the family takeaway shop, then the home located at the back of the building can indeed provide a kind of refuge for him at times. As Jerry reveals, at times when the shop front becomes a hostile place somehow, he ‘just walks away and goes inside the house’. The shop and home can therefore be seen as corresponding to the public and private spheres of Jerry’s sense of self as well as his social and familial identities. Yet the fact is that both the shop and home are located within the same physical space, which usefully demonstrates the idea that the different aspects of Jerry’s identities are bound to and presented through the embodied self. Moreover, the shop-home arrangement also means that the domestic setting does not merely involve familial relationships as in the conventional sense. The situation that not everyone who lives within the domestic space which the children largely call home would be considered as family is reflected in the following exchange. The interview was designed to gather some background information about the children’s family:

**Daisy:** Can you tell me who lives here?

**Hannah:** Mum, dad, jei jei [elder sister], gor gor [elder brother] and sai lo [younger brother].

**Jerry:** And two workers. They help dad *chow wok jai* [lit. fry little wok].

**Jennifer:** But they’re not our family.

**Hannah:** And our *kung kung* [maternal grandfather] *po po* [maternal grandmother]. Can’t wait till my *kau mo* [mother’s brother’s wife] gives birth to her baby. When I go back to China, I hope the baby’s still small ‘cause I don’t like this baby I have [refers to her younger brother John who was six]. He’s so big, I can’t hold him. Babies are really cute when they sleep and talk.

**Jennifer:** Do you know that mammy doesn’t have any gor gor [elder brother] je je [elder sister]?  

**Hannah:** Mum’s the oldest in the family. She has a *sai mui* [little sister]. Our *kau mo* [mother’s brother’s wife] is second, no, no, no, mum has a *sai mui*
[little sister], so, mum first, her mui mui [younger sister] second, and kau fu [mother’s brother] third, and another sai kau fu [little mother’s brother].

Daisy: Are they in this country?

Hannah: Two of them are here and two over there.

Jennifer: No, three are there.

Hannah: Two.

Jennifer: You know that our kung kung [maternal grandfather] fought in the war ages and ages ago, and then he became a doctor. He’s now teaching people medicine as Mr Herbs in China.

This dialogue provides a useful example of one way in which Jerry, Jennifer and Hannah are constructing their own collective discourse of family. The references made by the children in relation to the Chinese terms of familial relationships would probably have taken some time for someone who does not have knowledge of Chinese language to grasp. What this points to is the moments at which the shared aspects of my identity and that of the children’s are signified and made relevant during the fieldwork. Each of the terms clearly spells out the specific relationship between the two particular individual members of the family. The fact that Hannah and Jennifer are calling those family members by their familial titles, rather than for example their first names, can be seen as reflecting their relatively junior position within the familial hierarchy.

Moreover, it is apparent that the construction of kinship by Hannah and Jennifer is not restricted either by notions of geography or biology. In this, relatives living in Britain and abroad and those who are not biologically connected to the children are considered to be part of the genealogy and are equally significant. Specifically, while Hannah is producing an account of her mother’s sibling relationships, she has to correct herself for including her kau mo who is indeed the mother’s brother’s wife, but not a biological sister of hers. What seems to be Hannah’s particularly strong connection with her aunt is further explained in the following narrative. Deriving from the boardgame activity touching on issues within the home, Hannah took charge of the discussion with other siblings:
Hannah: Who loves you the most?

John: Don’t know.

Hannah: It’s mummy. Who does daddy love the most? It’s je je [elder sister, Jennifer].

Jennifer: Because when I was young, I slept in daddy’s bed every night. Once I fell off, my leg was all bruised, here. I covered it with two towels and a duvet but it still hurt, then mammy put me to daddy’s bed.

Hannah: Who loves gor gor [elder brother, Jerry] the most? Ah yeh [paternal grandfather], ah ma [paternal grandmother], yi gu [second, father’s sister], fai gu gu [fat, father’s sister] the lot.

Jerry: Yeah, I think fai gu gu [fat, father’s sister] and yi gu [second, father’s sister] because they always take me out.

Daisy: Who loves you the most then?

Hannah: Kau fu [mother’s brother], kau mo [mother’s brother’s wife], kung kung [maternal grandfather], po po [maternal grandmother], there’re many. I don’t know, I don’t really know. Kung kung and po po, because when I was little, about one, I stayed in China with kung kung and po po, and then when I was about three, three and half, four years old, I came back here.

This is another example of how the repeated theme of favouritism of child-adult relationships within the family arises in children’s accounts. Unlike what has been seen with Lorraine, these children appear to experience and to be able to negotiate issues of favouritism within the family in a more positive and pleasant manner. All the children are attempting to contribute to an understanding and explanation of both their own favoured positions and those of their siblings. For example, Jennifer agrees that their father ‘loves’ her ‘the most’ which can be illustrated and explained by the close relationship that they had when Jennifer was younger. Similarly, Hannah also uses the relationship that she and her grandparents had developed in her early childhood years as the foundation for her position of being favoured by the grandparents. What is evident is that for every child, there is at least one relationship with an adult member of either the immediate or extended family which they can claim to be unique just to them. In other words, they can all enjoy the status of being someone’s favourite child, the most favourable. Therefore, the potential sense of being prejudiced against and even neglected stemming from the unfavourable child identity can be compromised or even eliminated.
8.5.1 Negotiating Family Life and Identity Roles

In spite of some of the children’s strong sense of affiliations with particular relatives of their extended family, their relationships and interactions within the immediate family context tend to have more direct relevance to their everyday lives. Understandably, a takeaway business requires a considerable amount of labour input. Even though the family takeaway shop is not open for business until late in the afternoon, during the day, the parents, Mrs and Mr C would have to make sure that everything would be ready for business in the evening. My participation in the family routines would normally start when the children got home from school. While the children and I, sometimes with their two-year-old cousin, were watching cartoons and other children’s programmes and eating in the living room, other adults would engage with some activities of their own. For instance, Mrs C, her mother, her brother and her sister-in-law often like to play the Chinese game mahjong⁴⁶ while Mr C has largely been absent from the household. After having dinner at about five o’clock, Mrs and Mr C would start working in the kitchen and the counter respectively. The children and I would chat and watch some TV programmes on the Chinese channel. Except for the time when the children went up to their own bedrooms to do their homework, we spent nearly all our time in the living room. From about nine o’clock, Mrs C would give the children signals for bed time. While Mrs C would help John, the youngest sibling to get ready for bed, others would take their time to do so. The children do in fact spend much more time with one another than with their parents or as a family as a whole, and this is something that the children talked about in the interviews. The following discussion is again from one of the early meetings with the children, aiming to get a sense of the children’s daily routines:

Daisy: What do you do during the week?
Jennifer: I do homework and play.
Daisy: Anything else?

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⁴⁶ Mahjong is a Chinese game in which four players pick up and put down small painted pieces of tiles in turns until one of them has the desired combination in order to win.
Jennifer: No, mammy doesn’t take us to the park because she only cares to play *mahjong* [a Chinese game, see note below] and daddy doesn’t like to take us out.

Daisy: How about weekends?

Jennifer: Sunday and Saturday, we can go out because we don’t have to go to school.

Daisy: Where do you go?

Jennifer: Um, shopping, but daddy doesn’t like to go out with us because daddy doesn’t like going shopping with mammy, because mum *me me mo mo* [does things slowly], and because they have a shop, and it’s a lot of hard work. They don’t have time to rest and relax. They have to work all the time.

Jerry: We don’t go shopping together. Mum goes shopping and we follow her. It’s all mum. Mum buys this, mum buys that, and, um, we’re just walking around like a bunch of losers.

Daisy: You mean shopping for clothes, that kind of things?

Jerry: Yeah, sometimes, and for the shop.

What the children are suggesting is that there is little family time in which their parents take them to do things that are focused on the children themselves. On the one hand, the children are giving details of what the problems are and where the blame might lie. Jennifer is arguing that their mother does not take them to the park because ‘she only cares to play *mahjong* [a Chinese game, see note 25]’. With their father, Jennifer believes he does not like to take them out either and he certainly does not enjoying going shopping with the children and their mother. When the children do go shopping with their mother, it does not seem that it is too much of fun for them because in Jerry’s words, ‘it’s all mum’ and they are ‘just walking around like a bunch of losers’. In spite of this, on the other hand, the children show that they are very sympathetic about their parents and their situation. As Jennifer makes clear, she understands that their parents’ having a shop is ‘hard work’ and that their hectic lives mean that ‘they don’t have time to rest and relax’. Therefore, in spite of the children’s desire for more quality family time, they empathise with their parents. From another perspective, the fact that the children have to spend much time together without direct supervision from their parents can mean that they have been advancing their skills in being cooperative and caring for one another. The
children's contributions to various household tasks is crucial for the common good of the family. This also provides significant resources for the children to formulate their identities within the family context. These issues are reflected in the following abstract, again from an introductory interview:

*Daisy:* Do you help around the shop?
*Jennifer:* Yeah, Friday and Saturday. I work at the counter with mammy and gor gor [elder brother].
*Daisy:* I used to work in a takeaway shop, it's good, it's quite fun.
*Jennifer:* No, it's not fun. It's very serious, but they don't pay me.
*Daisy:* Do you have to work every Friday and Saturday?
*Jennifer:* Yeah, 'cause no one helps mammy, and we're older.
*Hannah:* I never do. I only look after BB [baby] because I like looking after babies.
*Daisy:* Who are the babies?
*Hannah:* Sai lo [younger brother] and kau mo's [mother's brother's wife] baby [Hannah's cousin].
*Daisy:* Do you do any work at home?
*John:* Um.
*Hannah:* He doesn't know how to do anything.
*John:* I do homework.
*Hannah:* I help you with your homework, right?
*John:* Yes.

Perhaps it should be stressed that to my knowledge, none of the children actually worked in the takeaway shop throughout the fieldwork period. According to the father Mr C, the older children Jennifer and Jerry used to help out from time to time, but they had been 'naughty' and refused to do so a few months prior to the start of the fieldwork. However, in this description, Jennifer clearly suggests that she is working at the counter with her mother on Friday and Saturday. One way to interpret this is that it reveals Jennifer's belief in relation to what is expected to be her role. Evidently, this is a responsibility that Jennifer takes very seriously. Jennifer disagrees with my suggestion that working in a takeaway shop could be fun, and argues that it is something 'very serious' even though it is not a paid job. Indeed, the reason why Jennifer thinks that she is qualified for the job is because she is 'older', and therefore it is a job of seniority of age.
With Hannah, the role that she claims to perform at home is to look after ‘babies’ which she appears to enjoy a lot. Hannah frequently referred to her six-year-old brother John as a ‘baby’, along with her two-year-old cousin. According to Hannah, John ‘doesn’t know how to do anything’. What is interesting about this is that in the abstract quoted earlier, Hannah claims that she does not like ‘this baby I have’, referring to John, as he is ‘so big’ that Hannah ‘can’t hold him’. Therefore, John is like a baby not in terms of his physicality but his perceived immaturity and incapability. This positioning is an essential component in Hannah’s construction of her own identity to be an elder sister and a care provider for the younger children in the family. Certainly, John also has his responsibility at home, which according to him is homework. In fact, many of the children identified homework as a significant part of their duty within the home. This can be seen as an extension of their position of being a pupil, which is a crucial child identity in many modern societies, transcending the boundary between the domains of school and home. The following discussion provides another example of how the social and familial positions among children can be less defined. Based on Jennifer’s responses to the boardgame task, I was interested to find out more about her experiences and perceptions of her family position:

_Daisy:_ What is it like to be a younger sister as well as an older sister?

_Jennifer:_ I don’t want to be the oldest and don’t want to be the youngest ‘cause they’re annoying. I like to be, um, the second one.

_Daisy:_ So, it’s good to be the second one?

_Jennifer:_ No, third one’s better because third one’s in primary school, doesn’t have to go to secondary school.

_Daisy:_ You don’t like your school?

_Jennifer:_ I do like it but it’s just I don’t like to have to take the bus to school now, but daddy says we have to, but I’m sacred of the racist old woman. And there’re some stupid, tarty girls in school. They didn’t let me sit with them and told me to sit somewhere else. They’re the same as the old woman on the bus.

In this account, Jennifer shows how she is creating her perception of familial positions of birth order in relation to her experiences of the other siblings. Therefore, being the eldest or the youngest child in the family would not be good because
Jennifer finds her elder and younger brothers ‘annoying’. Jennifer then talks about how the family identities of birth order can actually reflect the siblings’ other positions in terms of age and the expectations attached to it. As it happens, Jennifer’s younger sister is at primary school while Jennifer has moved on to secondary school. This seems to represent a significant step, progressing to a new stage of childhood. Jennifer can no longer enjoy the security of having her father give her a lift to school and the familiarity of the school where she has been studying for years, but to go to her new school by bus with her elder brother. What this means to Jennifer is that she is now having to be more independent and to face a whole new series of experiences both inside and outside the school. These include some rather ‘scary’ and unpleasant experiences such as the incidence involving the ‘racist old woman’ on the bus and the ‘stupid’ ‘tarty’ girls at school. Conversely, Jennifer’s elder brother Jerry talks about his familial roles as both the eldest child to his parents and eldest brother to the siblings in the clear terms of the responsibilities that he takes on. As identified in the boardgame worksheet, these issues were investigated further in the interviews that followed, with an abstract shown here:

Daisy: Which of these would you say is the number one priority for you?
Jerry: To play with my sisters and brother, like Playstation. I don’t know, play in the garden, do what a big brother should do I think.

Daisy: How do you feel about being an elder brother?
Jerry: It’s not so good. It’s better to be the youngest [laughs] ‘cause, um, you don’t get told off that lot ‘cause you’re small.

Daisy: There’s nothing good about being the oldest?
Jerry: Well, um, like once my dad played mahjong [a Chinese game, see note 25] with the kung yen [workers]. You know he got two kung yen [workers] to help him in the shop, right. He lost a lot of money, one thousand pounds! And my mum just argued with my dad. My dad swore and my mum swore. My dad hit the table really hard and it just collapsed. My dad raised his hand and he was about to hit my mum yeah, and at that point, I went into the kitchen and got some water. I went just under my dad’s raised arm and went to get some water. If I haven’t gone in, he would have hit my mum.

Daisy: You’ve done a really good job then.
Jerry: Yeah, I basically saved their marriage and our family. I’m really proud.
Daisy: Did you tell your sisters and brother about this?
Jerry: No, 'cause they're too young for these things.

This narrative provides sound examples of how Jerry understands as well as performs his various familial identities. As Jerry shows, not only has he responsibility for his younger sisters and brother, but also for his parents and the family as a whole. With his identity of being an elder brother, Jerry does not directly signal the caring aspect of it in the way that has been seen with Hannah. He does not use phrases like 'to look after' his younger siblings, which may be thought of as holding connotations of 'girliness' or 'sissiness'. Instead, Jerry talks about how he should 'play' with them along with whatever 'a big brother should do'. With regard to his identity of being the eldest child and son in the family, Jerry gives an example of an incident when he prevented his father from hitting his mother. The notion of protecting other family members, in Jerry's sense of identity, has multiple meanings here. Not only that Jerry has protected his mother from being physically hurt, he has also 'saved' his parents' marriage, and hence the whole family from breaking up, which Jerry is really proud of. What is more is that, in choosing not tell his younger siblings about the particular incident, Jerry is indeed trying to protect them from getting upset by the unpleasant family adult or the more 'grown-up' issues.

8.5.2 Talking about Parents and Relationships with Parents

We have seen how Jerry can perform a vital part in ensuring that the family is in harmony, but unfortunately, in spite of his efforts, the issues in relation to their father showing aggression towards their mother clearly also has an impact on other children in the family. The way in which children are concerned about and can be affected by their parents' relationship is further illustrated in the following dialogue. While the children were filling out the boardgame worksheets together, we had a talk:

Daisy: Do you like mummy?
John: Yes, mummy's very nice to me. She gives me medicine, um, and cha yau [lit. rub oil, for eczema].
Jennifer: Um, sometimes daddy's grumpy. Mammy's grumpy sometimes, but sometimes quite nicey, and daddy's nicey too sometimes. When we were young, he's nicey. Daddy doesn't shout at us. He gong do lei [lit. talks moral; pleads the case according to principle] with us. Mammy, if daddy finished gong do lei [lit. talking moral] with us, mammy would come down and shout at us.

Daisy: Do you like daddy? [to John]

John: I don’t like daddy because he hits mummy.

Daisy: Does daddy hit you?

John: No, mummy hits me.

Hannah: Mum said Chinese kids have to be slapped to be good.

Daisy: Really?

Jerry: My parents are aggressive and nasty, and they argue a lot. Mum beats the mick out of us.

Hannah: I won’t hit my children ‘cause I like babies.

Jennifer: I won’t either. I’d gong do lei [lit. talk moral; be fair and reasonable] with them. If they don’t listen to me, then I’d make them study hard, so that they’d be a good child.

This was certainly one of the most uncomfortable moments I felt in my fieldwork experiences. My immediate concern was to find out if either of the parents have been violent towards any of the children. Despite the testimony of John and Jerry in relation to how their mother ‘hits’ them and ‘beats the mick out of them’, I decided not to take any action on this. This is in no way to suggest that I doubted the validity of the children’s accounts. Rather, I did not think that the children had been physically abused or that they were in danger. During my participation in the family for about a year, I did not witness any signs which, according to my own interpretation, suggested that the children had been physically hurt by their parents. Yet what I did witness was an incidence of the mother threatening to punish John with physical means. Once while Mrs C was feeding John some rice, John refused to eat more and Mrs C said rather angrily, ‘you don’t finish it, you want to be smacked?’ [T] John then ate more and finished the meal eventually, and Mrs C did not hit John.
Nevertheless, issues of aggression are definitely central to the children’s experiences of family life, in regard to the relationship between the parents themselves and between the children and parents. Although the children may experience a sense of powerlessness against the occasional more aggressive form of parenting, they express clearly their disapproval of it and more importantly what they believe should be the ‘correct’ way to raise children. According to the children, there is no justification for any parents to be ‘aggressive’ and ‘nasty’ to their children, despite their mother saying that ‘Chinese kids have to be slapped to be good’. Hannah and Jennifer, speaking from what they imagine they would do when they became mothers themselves, state that they would not hit their ‘babies’. Instead, Jennifer proposes that she would talk moral to them, just like what their father does to them sometimes. If this does not work, then Jennifer would ‘make them study hard, so that they’d be a good child’. In fact, the children’s accounts are echoed by those of some other parents in this study in relation to how they are against physical punishment which is often considered to be common practice among many Chinese parents.

These somewhat negative aspects of the children’s accounts of their parents can easily dominate our understandings of the child-parent relationships of the family. But this is only a part of the story and should not disregard the fact that the children also talk about how their parents are being ‘nice’ to them. As Jennifer puts it, their parents are sometimes ‘grumpy’ but they are sometimes ‘nicey’ too. More significantly, the way that John talks about his mother emphasises how his mother is being nice to him, completely disregarding the fact that she may sometimes hit him. John’s claim that he dislikes his father who is being violent to his mother further shows just how important John’s mother is to him and how much he cares for her. This is indeed a crucial element of the children’s feelings for their parents and their understandings of their relationships with their parents. The following exchange demonstrates the unique position that the children assign to their parents in relation to other adults in their lives, specifically teachers. Picking up on part of the boardgame activity featuring the theme of school, Hannah once again took charge and started interviewing John, and was joined by Jennifer:
Hannah: Anyone bullies you at school?
John: Yes, teachers.
Hannah: I'm not scared of the teachers. They can't tell us off.
Jennifer: Yes, because they're not our mammy and daddy. They can't shout at us, only mammy and daddy can.
Hannah: Because mum and dad gave birth to us. I'm not scared of the teachers because they're only human, and we're human too. We can shout back at them, but we shouldn't shout at mum.

John's idea that he is being 'bullied' by teachers is rather interesting and certainly an alternative to the common discourses of bullying at school exclusively in terms of peer relationships among children. In response to that, Hannah and Jennifer both argue that teachers have no privilege over them; teachers and pupils are equal on the basis of both being 'human'. This statement about where they stand in this particular child-adult power struggle is unlike the way they perceive the relationship between children and parents. As Hannah and Jennifer propose, for the reason that mother and father 'give birth' to their children, parents have rights over their children and occupy a higher status in child-parent relationships. Therefore, in theory children should accept and respect their parents' rights to discipline as in the form of 'telling-off' and 'shouting'. The precise extent of the significance of parents to the children is revealed in the following exchange through which will draw an end to the discussion about this family. Prompted by the boardgame activity, the children were reflecting on their positions of being a child in relation to adults:

Daisy: Is there any difference between children and adults?
Jennifer: Adults when you be, like a hundred years old, you'll have to die. That’s why I don’t like it. When you’re a child, you don’t get to die so soon. You’ll have to become an adult first, then a granny, and then you die. I don’t want my parents to die. It’s horrible. They’ll become skeletons after they died.
Jerry: Well.
Jennifer: They have to, I know that.
Jerry: That’s life.
Hannah: It’s better to be dead. I don’t really mind.
Daisy: Why is it better?
Hannah: 'Cause you have, after you died, you become skeleton. You get to go up to heaven yeah, and then you can become whatever you want, and do whatever you like. I want to be a …

Jennifer: Goon yum leung leung [Goddess of Mercy]!

Hannah: No, not goon yum leung leung [Goddess of Mercy]. There's only one, um, um, become what, what is it called, what is it called?

Daisy: Angel?

Hannah: No, those like goon yum leung leung [Goddess of Mercy].

Daisy: Son sin [lit. god fairy; mythical godly supernatural beings originated from Taoism].

Hannah: Yeah, yeah, yeah! I just want to be a son sin fairy. When your skin worn out and you go to heaven, then you can become a fairy, and then you get to come down to earth and see your family.

Jennifer: Because if the moon comes out, so you know that your parents are up in the sky watching you, like bo yau [guard].

Although the issue of death is often considered to be a sensitive research topic, what can be seen here is a constructive discussion about it; a credit to the children themselves in terms of how they approach it. With a normative framework of a chronological development of physical life, Jennifer talks about the difference between children and adults in terms of the scale of childhood, adulthood, 'grannyhood', death and then becoming 'skeletons'. As expressed by Jennifer, the prospect of their parents having to die and to leave the children behind is just 'horrible'. However, the children are then collectively creating a more comforting vision regarding ideas about having to loose their parents, drawing upon their knowledge of certain religious beliefs. In fact, Hannah’s belief in these faiths is so strong and positive that she shows how she is almost being fearless about death. Nonetheless, one of the most important and reassuring aspects in the children’s account appears to be the children’s belief that their relationships with their parents will not end with death, but will be continued after death. According to Hannah, ‘when your skin worn out and you go to heaven, then you can become a fairy, and then you get to come down to earth and see your family.’ In Jennifer’s words, the moon will represent their parents watching over and guarding them. This can only be a reflection of the children’s affection for their parents.
Discussions with the children in this family have shown the various ways that the children construct their familial identities, intersecting child-parent and sibling relationships. While Jerry and Hannah talk about their roles in explicit terms of protection and childcare to other family members, Jennifer and John address their positions in more general terms of age and responsibility. It has also been shown that the family's involvement in the takeaway business only partially informs the children's understandings of how their family life and relationships are being organised. One issue which has been particularly significant and somewhat disturbing is the violence that the children seem to have to face in their everyday lives. This includes racism and bullying, which could involve both children and adults, experienced outside the home as well as aggression exhibited between the parents and that acted towards the children by their mother. What also seems to have been expressed by the children is their desire for more quality family time together. Despite this, the children are certainly considerate and loving to their parents and treasure their relationships with their parents. In the next and final case, the family of Christy D is the focus of discussion.

8.6 Christy D (12)

This is my family, my mum and my dad. It's very important to me. They're just important to me. They're my family, and they live here, and they're always there for me.

This is an abstract of Christy's self-description produced for the alien activity, introducing herself to an imaginary alien over the telephone. Christy lives with her mother who is a software engineer, and her father who works as a research scientist. At the time of the fieldwork, Christy's aunt, her father's sister has come over from China and has been staying with the family temporarily. As can be seen, Christy is the only child of the study who does not have any sisters or brothers. Therefore, after school and before her parents come home from work, Christy tends to spend time on her own at home. According to Christy, dinner time is particularly important to the family since this is almost the only time when her and her parents get together and talk. In the evening after dinner, Christy and her parents often engage in their
own tasks, be that about work or leisure. At weekends, Christy enjoys going to the cinema with her friends and sometimes going shopping with her mother. Occasionally, Christy and her parents would host or attend a dinner party, gathering with her parents’ friends and their children. Christy makes it clear that her family, that is her parents, are ‘very important’ to her. Similarly to what has been seen with Hannah and Jennifer, the following account shows the way Christy explains how her parents are of great significance to her using a framework of comparing different kinds of child-adult relationships. In an interview deriving from the boardgame activity, Christy reflects on her identification of being a child in relation to various adults in her life:

*Daisy:* What can you tell me about your experience of being a young person?

*Christy:* Um, adults don’t think children are very important. Yeah, they don’t think we’re very important. Like, they don’t respect children that much and they never ask their opinions.

*Daisy:* So, adults should respect children more?

*Christy:* Yes, because children think adults don’t like children that much. Most adults don’t like children. Children think adults think children are too young to know anything.

*Daisy:* Do you mean all adults are like that?

*Christy:* Yes, everyone. Probably not you, and not my mum and dad, but nearly everyone else. Like, you have to do whatever the teachers tell you to do.

*Daisy:* How are your parents different?

*Christy:* I still have to listen to them, but it’s, we have respect for each other.

*Daisy:* And what about me? [with a big smile!]

*Christy:* You’re different because you’ve been coming to see me and talking to me. You respect our opinions and you want to find out about what we think of our lives.

Speaking from her position of being a child, Christy’s account highlights the underlying problem between children and adults. The conflict is considered by Christy as fundamentally stemming from adults’ perceptions of and actions against children, which are open to children’s interpretations. From Christy’s point of view, adults often belittle children, think that children are unimportant, and fail to ‘respect’ children. An example provided by Christy in relation to how children can feel that
‘adults don’t like children that much’ lies in the idea that adults never ask children for their opinions. In Christy’s words, ‘children think adults think children are too young to know anything’. Conversely, Christy talks about the kind of child-adult relationships that are different and more positive. Examples of these exceptions include her relationship with her parents and also the research relationship between Christy and me. Whereas Christy thinks that she and her parents share mutual respect, she believes I respect her and other children’s opinions and I am concerned about what they think of their lives. Despite this, Christy’s idea that she has to listen to her parents as she has to do with teachers, shows how she is aware of, and hence can reinforce the power relationship between children and adults. What this narrative shows is the complex structuring that can be embedded in different kinds of child-adult relationships; the processes of constructing meanings of adult behaviour and perception in the children’s identity formulation. As the interview progressed, Christy talked about her relationship with her parents in more detail. The following abstract addresses the relationship specifically between Christy and her mother:

Daisy: Can you tell me what your parents are like?

Christy: My mum’s really nice. No, she is really, really, nice! She’s, like, you know what an agony aunt is?

Daisy: Is it um...

Christy: You know in magazines, agony aunt. If you have a problem like, to say like, somebody, my best friend is having rows, she argues with my other best friend, and they’re saying, if I want to be their best friend, then I can’t be the other person’s best friend. What should I do? Then, they write the letter, and then they give it to the magazine, and they print it out in the magazine, and the agony aunt answers them.

Daisy: I see. So, you’d go to your mum when you have problems?

Christy: Yes, but I also like to argue with her, not argue really, debate. I only like arguing when there’s something, it only comes naturally, when I disagree with my mum, but it’s only healthy debate, discussion.

It can be seen that the relationship between Christy and her mother takes on different forms and involves different identities. In one sense, Christy thinks of her mother as representing the role of an ‘agony aunt’. Judging by Christy’s explanation, an agony
aunt occupies a rather privileged adult position in the children’s world, perhaps in particular within the girls’ peer context. What this means is that when Christy has any personal problems, she feels that she can rely on her mother to give her advice and guidance. Christy’s willingness to share her experiences with her mother can be in part produced and reinforced by a more open relationship with her mother. This is in contrast to what has been seen with Kitty as discussed earlier, which suggests that Kitty believes that her mother cannot understand how her peer groups operate. The child and agony aunt relationship appears to represent in a general sense the less experienced about life versus the more knowledgeable positions respectively of Christy and her mother. However, this does not seem to prevent Christy from expressing her own opinions and even challenging her mother’s ideas. As Christy maintains, she also enjoys ‘arguing’ with her mother in the form of ‘healthy debate and discussion’. The following account reveals the different features characterising Christy’s relationship with her father:

*Daisy:* What about your dad?

*Christy:* My dad likes to play with me, well, sometimes. He likes to play, like, *tiao qi,* Chinese chess and *wu zi qi,* like five-in-a-row thing. Before, we used to play chess but I wasn’t very good at chess.

*Daisy:* You have a pretty good relationship with your dad then?

*Christy:* Yeah, but my dad is very, very, protective, overprotective.

*Daisy:* In what way?

*Christy:* Um, he doesn’t let me go out often. It’s usually my mum. He doesn’t like me going out with boys. He wouldn’t want me to, like, date, when I’m, like, fifteen or something, like other English girls. He would want me to do that when I’m twenty-five or something.

*Daisy:* What does your mum think about that?

*Christy:* She thinks the same but she’s not as protective. My dad wants to protect me from the boys, except for some boys that he knows very well, um, some Chinese boys, the sons of some family friends. I wish my dad could be a bit more lenient, not so serious, like my mum. She’s nice. I like my mum. [*smiles*]

*Daisy:* But it’s nice that you can do things with your dad, like to play chess.
Christy: Yeah, he can be nice. But I don’t, we don’t really go out and do things together now, not anymore. When I was little, he used to take me to roller-skate, cycling and stuff.

Daisy: Why stopped?

Christy: Um, I don’t know, must be adult puberty or something.

Daisy: Sorry? Adult what?

Christy: Puberty or some kind of change. I’m getting too old too. When I was little, he could just take me out. But also, I have different interests from him now. I don’t want to go out, I want to be with my friends, not with him. But we still do stuff together sometimes, like, I planted some beans and stuff with my parents in our garden. We got lots of beans, and we planted nan gua [pumpkin] as well.

The contrast between Christy’s account of her relationship with her mother and that of her father is evident here. First of all, Christy describes the interactions between herself and her mother mainly in terms of communicating through talks, whereas that with her father is centred on what can be considered as leisure activities. In comparison with what has been discussed in relation to the other children with their specific family situations, Christy is the only child who talks in detail of all the activities that she and her father used to or still do together. With regard to this, one major point that Christy is making is about how things have changed between her and her father. The notion of ‘adult puberty’ is an interesting concept employed by Christy to explain this change. It is a concept that addresses the development in life of both Christy and her father in relation to how they both have grown ‘old’. As Christy says, when she was ‘little’, her father used to and ‘could just take her out’ such as to roller-skate or cycling. However, just as Christy’s father has changed as he aged, Christy is also ‘getting too old’ and now has different interests from her father. Therefore, Christy would prefer to be with her friends, rather than ‘going out with’ her father. Yet Christy stresses that she and her parents would still do things together sometimes as shown in for example, the family gardening activity.

The change in Christy’s use of language, from ‘being taken out by’ her father to ‘going out with him’ in no doubt signals her sense of being more ‘grown-up’ now. Yet this does mean that Christy has complete freedom over what she does. In fact, it appears that another difference between the roles of Christy’s father and mother is
that Christy’s father is ultimately the one who draws up the framework of rules for Christy, but which is largely acted out by Christy’s mother with her own adjustment. For example, as Christy says that her father ‘doesn’t let her go out often. It’s usually my mum.’ In more general terms, Christy thinks that her father presents a stricter and more authoritative figure than her mother. Christy provides an example in relation to dating as to explain how her father is being ‘overprotective’. In this, Christy draws on the concepts of age and gender, and also touches on the idea of Chineseness and Englishness. According to Christy, fundamentally her father wants to protect her from the boys with the exception of some Chinese boys of her father’s family friends whom he can trust. In particular, Christy’s father would not want Christy to date at the age of as young as fifteen, which is ‘like other English girls’, and not until she is older, perhaps in her twenties. Although Christy claims that her mother agrees with Christy’s father on this matter, Christy maintains that her father just tends to be more protective, and that Christy wishes that her father ‘could be a bit more lenient, not so serious’, that is to be like Christy’s mother.

8.6.1 Negotiating with Parents: Age and Maturity

In relation to Christy’s understanding of when her father thinks is acceptable for her to start dating, there are hints about how ideas of age, maturity and appropriate behaviour are open to negotiation between Christy and her parents. The following abstract is another example of this in relation to what age rated films Christy should be allowed to see with her friends alone. This is from an introductory interview aiming to find out about what Christy likes to do in her spare time:

*Daisy:* Can you tell me about your hobbies?

*Christy:* I like lots of things. I like drawing, designing things, I quite like table tennis, and I like basketball. I like reading, and I like going to the cinema with my friends.

*Daisy:* Do you go to the cinema with your friends a lot?

*Christy:* Yeah, well, not a lot, I haven’t been for a long time but I went a lot in the summer.

*Daisy:* What was the last movie you watched?
Christy: Um, can’t remember. Oh, not at the cinema but the last movie I saw was American Pie Two.

Daisy: You watched it at home with your parents?

Christy: No, but they don’t really mind.

Daisy: So, they’re quite open about things?

Christy: No, no, no! They do mind that but they weren’t home. My parents were at work. It’s half-term. They said I could have a ‘12’ [rated film]. I had my friends round and we decided that we wanted to watch America Pie, so I called my parents and told them that it’s a ‘15’ [rated film]. I told them that it shouldn’t be too bad, just like comedy, and they said it’s ok. So, we ordered it on our Sky thing.

The film classification supposedly sets a boundary between what is and what is not suitable for children of particular ages to view. In theory, the responsibility for allowing children under the age rated for the film to view lies with the accompanying or supervising adults. Understandably, Christy’s parents initially advised twelve-year-old Christy that she could see a ‘12’ film with her friends. Yet, the film that Christy and her friends decided that they wanted to see is classified as suitable for children over the age of fifteen. After Christy consulted with her parents and explained to them that the ‘adult’ references ‘shouldn’t be too bad’ and should be ‘just like comedy’, Christy’s parents agreed. Perhaps in the cinema, it can be expected that in the first instance children would be judged by the gatekeepers from their physical appearance; whether the children look the age that the film is rated. However, in this case, it can be confidently assumed that Christy would have been judged by her parents in terms of their understandings of Christy’s level of sensibility and maturity, that is if Christy can be trusted to make the decision about whether or not the particular movie is suitable for her to watch. What this brings to mind is the concept of ‘mutual respect’ as shown earlier which Christy proposed to be characterising her relationship with her parents. To call her parents, to inform and to try to get permission from them about viewing the film can be seen as Christy’s act of respect for her parents. Therefore, Christy’s respect for her parents paid off and in return she gains a degree of respect and trust from her parents. I would use the following exchange between Christy and her mother, Mrs D to end the
discussion of this final case of the chapter. In this, Christy was talking me through the pictures that she had taken for the photograph activity:

_Christy:_ That’s my clarinet on my piano _[in the photo]._
_Daisy:_ You play the piano and the clarinet?
_Christy:_ Yes, but I don’t play the piano anymore, just play it sometimes.
_Daisy:_ Why not?
_Christy:_ Because I started the clarinet and I like the clarinet more. _[Mrs D comes into the living room where the interview is taking place]_

_Mrs D:_ Can I see?
_Christy:_ Sure.
_Mrs D: [looking at the photo of Christy’s clarinet on her piano]_ She’s too busy to practise the piano and I don’t have time to take her to her tutor’s home, and she’s now playing clarinet. We don’t want to waste the time, if she doesn’t like doing it. If she doesn’t want to practise, there’s no point to force her. Did I tell you, she’s already on level six? The top level is level eight. She’s done the theory test and everything. But she just decided she didn’t want to play the piano anymore. She doesn’t want to practise at home. In a way, we’re too busy with our work as well.

_Christy:_ My mum’s very nice, very understanding! _[laughs]_

_Mrs D:_ Pai wo ma pi [to flatter me]. _[everyone laughs]_

This conversation highlights the key elements in what Christy considers to be the affectionate and honest relationship that she has with her parents. As seen in the case about Christy giving up learning the piano, it has been shown that Christy and her mother communicate with one another. This means that Christy can be involved in making decisions about her own everyday life matters, with the knowledge that her opinions would be respected by her parents. Although there are rules set by Christy’s parents, they are not completely inflexible and can at times be negotiated. More importantly, it has been seen that Christy develops an understanding of her parents’ reasoning which she accepts. As in the discussion with many of the other children, the importance of parents in the children’s lives that Christy feels has been evident; this involves a unique and privileged kind of child-adult relationship. What is perhaps distinctive with Christy is that it has seen a more balanced picture of
Christy’s family and social life, against a backdrop of secure and assured family relationships.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with exploring the children’s experiences and perceptions of their identities within the context of family. Through the children’s narratives, the chapter has drawn attention to the diverse ways in which the children invested in their familial positions and engaged in constructing relationships with other family members. While these are significant reminders of the children’s competence and creativity, the chapter has also highlighted the importance of particular aspects of the family situation in the formulation of the children’s familial and other personal and social identities. In this, the presentation of case studies has illustrated the diversity among these children’s families.

From the children’s own perspectives and concerns, the children’s accounts have drawn our attention to the particular circumstances of their families. These include the children’s experiences of living in a single-mother household with a close connection to the extended family; a mother whose primary role is to look after the children while the father works shifts; a household combining the family catering business and the home, which indicates a relatively high level of aggression; a family with temporary accommodation and facing temporary financial struggle due to the father’s unemployment, despite the mother working in more than one job; and finally a lone child family with both parents having a full-time professional job.

While the chapter has shown how these features were partially incorporated into the children’s accounts of their family practices and relationships, it has also stressed the ways in which the children’s positions were negotiated in relation to a range of other factors. These could be the children and adult discourses of including age, birth order, gender and individual child’s personality and character. In their own and differing ways, the examples in the chapter have illustrated the apparent prominence of family in the formulation of the children’s sense of self identities. The
significance of this chapter lies in its power to call into question the tendency to talk of Chinese families in Britain as a homogenous group and the often presumed impacts of so-called traditional Chinese family form on children’s childhood lives.
Discussion and Conclusion: New Visibilities

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has been concerned with exploring the meanings of racial and ethnic matters through a group of Chinese children between the age of six and twelve living in Britain. To do this, I analysed the ways in which children talked about their own and others' identities and their relationships with friends and family. In this concluding chapter, I will review the findings from the research and show how they raise questions for writings on childhood and on race and ethnicity, as well as for future work with Chinese children in Britain.

The thesis began with a critique of past research on Chinese children in Britain. This formed the basis for a shift to draw on the principles of childhood sociology to emphasise and value children's own perspectives, views and lived experiences in the investigation of racial and ethnic issues. The outcome of this enabled serious engagements with children's own narratives of themselves and their lives, and led to an understanding of the ways in which they actively formulate their own visions of themselves and others. Through this it has become clear that concepts related to race and ethnicity are only partial components in the children's formulation of their complex and dynamic subjective positions, and as such have to be understood within specific historical and social contexts, as well as within the context of children's worlds.

This chapter begins with an overview of the key findings in relation to three themes that have been addressed in the thesis: the embodiment of identity, racism in children's lives, and intergenerational relationships and the concept of emotional diaspora. A crucial theoretical consideration weaving through these discussions is the insight brought to the analysis by the incorporation of the sociology of childhood with race and ethnicity studies, and also how children's narratives help to challenge
the largely unmarked Britishness, or specifically in children’s language ‘Englishness’, in the theorisation of childhood. By the same token, the often unaddressed adultness in much race and ethnicity literature has been examined. The chapter then progresses to consider some methodological issues emerging from the study, specifically with regard to questions of identity. The thesis ends by considering the way forward, reflecting on what has been learnt in relation to the understandings of race, ethnicity and childhood, and what it means to be young and Chinese living in Britain.

9.2 Towards the Embodiment of Identity

The analysis opened with an exploration of the ways in which children might make sense of others. The overriding impression from the children’s accounts is the significance of visuality for the children’s perceptions and experiences of identities. This was not just a starting point of the investigation but also a major theme underpinning the children’s narratives in relation to their own sense of identity. The first two empirical chapters of the thesis have drawn attention specifically to how the range of different aspects through which children formulate identities are significantly influenced by embodiment and embodied practices.

These chapters also have the role of setting out the context locating the kind of language that the children used, the specific terminology that they utilised in describing identities. This is crucial in helping us become familiar with the children’s language, a step to getting closer to their worlds. What emerged from the children’s comments on the puppet characters was the salience of the practices of categorisation. That is, the ways in which the children were allocating categories to different people and things through various visible signs in the medium of the body.

Rather unsurprisingly, as inevitable and valuable members of the society, the children used terms and phrases which largely echoed those of the British domestic vocabulary. The most frequently introduced by the children include ‘black’, ‘Chinese’, ‘English’ and ‘Indian’ and the less regularly used such as ‘Japanese’,
‘Korean’ and ‘Muslim’. It has been seen that all these groupings include some kind of physical and biological ideas, and are at the same time cross-cut by notions relating to nation, culture and religion.

One significant finding is the complete lack of explicit reference made to the concept of ‘white’ by the children, in either the English or Chinese languages. It was then the discourses of ‘Englishness’ became an important site where other ethnicities were situated, negotiated and played out. The children’s narratives therefore forced the investigation to take a crucial direction, i.e. to deconstruct the children’s construction of ‘Englishness’, which as a category has always been seen as connoting ‘whiteness’, emphasising the significance of the biologically based idea of skin colour.

The empirical evidence elaborated on the concept of embodiment and on a recognition that how we look is important in identity construction. More importantly, it drew attention not only to the roles played by particular bodily features, but more generally how the body is the channel through which non-corporal features are materialised and used as markers of identity. This helps to address the gap in which some racial and ethnic studies take for granted the physical differences or the biology in what they called experiences and discourses of race but without specifying what they are and how they work. This is by no means to reify race, a social and political construct with no scientific basis, but rather as a way to develop a better understanding of the underlying issues in relation to concepts of race and ethnicity.

The need and attempt to bring the body back into the understanding of racial and ethnic issues has begun to be acknowledged, and is illustrated, for example, in the work of some writers’ reinterpretation of their original work (see e.g. Parker 1995, 2000). In relation to the experiences of young Chinese adults in Britain, Parker later supplemented his argument of diasporic habitus as embodied subjectivity. His recognition of distinct spatial perspectives and experiences of time is focused on and through the racialised body in routine interactions and encounters across the takeaway counter. The empirical evidence presented in this thesis extends this point
further and argues for a more general application of the children’s everyday experiences of embodied interactions and its potential effects on their sense of subjectivity.

Specifically, the notion of facialisation proposed by Parker (2000:87) is found to be particularly relevant to the children’s autobiographic accounts of their everyday embodied interactions. Facialisation describes the processes whereby facial features are fixed as signifiers of racialised difference, which is argued to be particularly relevant to Chinese people whose eye shape, hair colour and texture have always been accentuated in stereotypical representations circulating in many western societies. Some children in this study talked about how they have ‘Chinese eyes’ which at times were the targets for people making fun of them. While this may not necessarily lead to a negative feeling about their eyes or themselves, some children chose to respond in the way of attacking English people as having a ‘funny’ eye shape too. At the same time, some children, specifically girls, talked about how their hair is being praised but another talked about how she was assigned to ‘dark hair group’ in a P.E. lesson along with black and Indian children. These embodied encounters certainly do not have universal effects on the children. What the children showed is that they understand and experience their body as both somatic, an observable object, and incarnate, as a subjective experience (Christensen 2000).

More importantly, through embodiment, the children demonstrated how racial and ethnic matters are weaved through their experiences of social relations, operating in a more implicit and indirect way. The children identified different normative frameworks of appearance and physical desirability. In the discourse about having red eyes in photos, a child regarded this as a phenomenon associated with English people but never Chinese, with the exception of her brother. This discourse was then extended to construct a version that she and her brother are ‘genetically’ connected to their paternal and maternal side of the family respectively. The fact that both their mother and father are Chinese suggests that this is a discourse signifying the different relationships that the child feels that she and her brother have with their mother and other members of the family.
Moreover, many of the children expressed their ideas about how their physicality is perceived, both by themselves and others, to be different from others. The children provided examples of how they constructed ideas about contrasting bodily features of what they referred to as Chineseness and Englishness. The level of detail embedding the children’s observations and experiences of the body is reflected in the bodily traits that they identified, such as the single eyelids of Chinese people versus the double eyelids of English people, and in relation to the practicality in applying makeup. However, when looking at the children’s discussions in more detail, it soon became apparent that the underlying concern of these discourses was whether the children felt that certain bodily attributes make them visibly stand out from the majority of other children. The idea of a ‘normal’ body is certainly a highly contested concept. As has been shown, a child with eczema whose skin is filled with red patches, a photo capturing him taking medicine was an unpleasant reminder of his ‘unhealthy’ body and self. Similarly, another child talked about how she disliked the fact that her teeth needed fillings, she had unhealthy nails and hair, and an ‘abnormal’ ear shape.

This strong sense of image consciousness expressed by many of the children appears to reflect the more general societal attitude to the way we look. However, taking the historical dimension into account, it can be seen that obsession with looks has a long history in many societies and its meanings have always been evolving. It would seem that different societies are moving in a similar direction in terms of what is perceived to be desirable physically and what is acceptable to be carried out in an attempt to alter the physicality. For example, the seemingly omniscient obsession with skinniness was identified by a child as associated with Englishness. In this, English people, specifically girls, are ‘naturally’ skinny, implying that as Chinese, this child does not feel that she is skinny enough. Yet this is not something unchangeable. The children talked about the variety of interventions through which this and other perceivably desirable bodily features can be achieved, ranging from dieting to surgery with different kinds of restraints.

Although out of the scope of this research, the potential historical effects of the colonialism and cultural imperialism of the west can certainly be further investigated.
in relation to the role it may have played in people’s perceptions and experiences of physical attractiveness. Children’s discourses of physical attributes to a certain extent reflect how they are formulating connections to different individuals and groups. Although it may not always have an explicit connotation with constructing their sense of ethnic identification, the sensibility attached to the body in relation to racial and ethnic issues is often present, which is something that the children understand and have to deal with. This often includes parental views on the children’s bodies. The desire to change hair colour to match the trend with other British-born-Chinese friends being misinterpreted by parents as an act to signify an English identity is an example of this. Similarly, some boys’ various ways of performing their masculine identities in terms of being physically strong was another context where some parents assign racial and ethnic concepts, seeing these as acts of trying to be white. To an extent, this aspect of the research provides another dimension to Christensen’s (2000) argument of different attitudes towards the body between children and adults. Adults are found to perceive the body as an observable object, but the body often means subjective experiences to children. Moreover, this aspect of the research shows how adults sometimes fail to apprehend children’s concerns, and also how the status of children often means that they may not always have total control of their own bodies.

These accounts illustrate the material and discursive aspects of embodiment in the children’s experiences and construction of their identities. Children observe, compare and try to make sense of perceived bodily differences and in turn contribute to the negotiation of the meanings attached. The focus on the body took the lead from recent research which positions the body in a social context. The focus is on the children’s ‘body work’ in situating and engaging with not only the material and physical environments (see e.g. James 2000) but also the discursive contexts around them.

This aspect of my work therefore overcomes some of the fears that a focus addressing the body and embodiment is a return to biological reductionism, in terms of locating the understanding of children within the conventional developmental framework and risking the reification of race. This research has confirmed the
conception that children's bodies are 'in continuous action and connection with other features of the social world' as suggested by Christensen (2000:46). But yet constructed physical distinguishable characteristics are at times articulated as fixed, somehow natural within a group and perhaps transmissible from one generation to another. However, although the so-called biological inheritance can vary within the same family, it is no longer stabilised by a simplistic understanding of kinship and endogamous marriages. More importantly, it is open to the possibility of change. In this way, the children have shown the complexity in understanding ideas of the body as both fixed and malleable.

9.3 Playing with Racism

The exploration of the evidence of the children's embodied experiences highlighted how they often had to work with discourses around racial and ethnic matters in their understandings of who they are. The analysis has also drawn attention to the other side of the story. The children are not only on the receiving end of race and ethnicity, but are also actively contributing to the construction of these discourses. In this, I specifically argued that understandings of racial and ethnic issues among children have to be located within children's peer and social worlds. The analysis presented in this thesis has shown how this adds a valuable dimension to the conceptualisation of race and ethnicity which has largely taken effect in relation to adults.

Extended findings have been provided in relation to the practices and processes of categorisation, classifying things and people into different groupings and defining the meanings attached and the relationships among them. However, direct references to skin colour – what has been regarded as one of the most fundamental phenotypic features underlying the 'popular folk concept of race' (Ifekwunigwe 2001:42) – were found to be almost non-existent with little significance among the children. In much of the discussions of race and racism, attention has always been on 'black' and 'white', which in turn exclude those who fall outside these categories. This is not to suggest that the children are 'colour-blind' simply because they do not explicitly talk
about skin colour. Rather the children chose to focus on other visible signs in defining individuals and groups.

While many children commented on the eye and hair colour of what they referred to as English people, others stressed the importance of bindi, turban and hijab as the characteristics that make Indian people or sometimes Muslim people visually distinguishable. Whereas the former features can be seen as genetic and more directly related to the biological body, the latter involves non-corporal elements made visible through the physical body. These culturally and religiously driven features bear the potential to transcend any biological and physical limitations. A dominant theme applied by the children in differentiating these groups is around ideas of religion. Many children expressed their belief that black, Chinese, Indian people and Muslims were more religious compared with the English, for whom Christianity was perceived to the normative form of religion. With the increasing worldwide politicisation of Islam intensified in recent years, there is a pressing need for investigation of the religious dimension in children’s understandings and experiences of racial and ethnic matters, for which this research is only a starting point.

Many interesting findings have emerged from the children’s, specifically the girls’ accounts of their ideas of attractiveness and desirability in boys. This is a key site where the clues about how the children position themselves in relation to others were found, illustrating the complexity in the discourses of racial and ethnic matters. In these girls’ discourses of boyfriends and husbands, of both experiential and protected aspects, a crucial element involved the sense of otherness assigned to black and Indian boys. This was constructed partly through ideas based on physical attractiveness. While no specific physical features were identified as unattractive among individuals of these groups, the children simply argued that black and Indian boys were ‘not handsome enough’ or even ‘ugly’.

Also found in these discourses were contradicting views with regard to the positioning of black and Indian people in terms of Englishness. While some children talked about how they believed that black people and Indian people spoke a different
language to the English, or simply did not speak English ‘properly’, one child expressed her belief that only people from ‘their’ own culture, that is for example, Indian people in relation to other Indian people, would appreciate each other’s physical beauty. These perceptions drawing on both biological and cultural aspects in effect create a rather restrictive and exclusive definition of Englishness, and reinforce notions of endogamous partnership rules stabilising genetic and cultural purity.

These strategic and political practices of excluding others from the definition of being English are ways through which the children signify their own identification with Englishness. The children themselves are a part of this constructed English culture. In spite of this, many of the girls did express a preference for what they called a Chinese boyfriend or husband. It was here that the highly contested nature of Chineseness and Englishness began to emerge. Upon elaborating on why a Chinese husband was more desirable, a child talked about how a Chinese husband would offer understandings of her own position and share her knowledge of and interests in Chinese and English languages and other defined cultural aspects such as Chinese and western festivals. In additional, the emotional elements in the simplified category of Chinese was made evident in the example of how a boyfriend who was of ‘half English, a quarter Chinese and a quarter of Portuguese’ parentage and considered looking better than ‘normal Chinese’ was ‘felt’ to be simply Chinese because of the sense of intimacy of the relationship. The emotional investments in the Chinese category were apparent and can transcend the biological and physical aspects.

Although these narratives are future-orientated, they reflect how the children think about these racial and ethnic issues relating to their own identities at the present time. The more experiential based accounts were found in the stories that the children produced using the puppets and their commentaries on them. These provided some of the most valuable evidence in developing an understanding of racial and ethnic matters among children, locating them within the context of children’s peer worlds and relationships. A range of resources were identified with which children worked in producing their own versions of others, this included discourses from television,
teachers and religious education at school, and peers, siblings, parents and other family members. The children showed the different ways in which they made these discourses relevant to them in constructing their own and others’ positions.

A rather specific example of the current international political situation and also children’s position within the British context was in relation to the children’s accounts of the invasion of Iraq. A child expressed how he wanted to fight in the war along with the English against the ‘bad’ others, as he was told by teachers that there were also Chinese soldiers involved in the event. In the children’s language, these negatively defined others were living in the ‘desert with camels’, wearing specific clothes and ‘looking a bit like Indians’.

The children showed how they used categorisations which were value laden and could be understood as racist in that they drew negative associations around particular individuals and groups. With a number of writers providing useful evidence of the complexity of the many forms that racism can present in children’s lives (e.g. Troyna and Hatcher 1992; Connolly 1998; Ali 2003), this analysis devoted particular attention to the practices and processes underlying what may be seen as racial and racist abuses among children. A significant difference to what these studies have observed is the specific terms that were used in the children’s name-calling practices originating distinctively from the Chinese language, such as ‘gwai’ referring to white and ‘ah cha’ connoting Indianness. I believe these name callings were revealed to me facilitated by the shared language references between the children and myself. I cannot speculate how these terms may be used by the children with a non-Chinese speaking researcher or among their peers, but suspect that the significance of these terms could be easily missed if at all present.

However, what was also relayed to me by the children was the form of abuse that did not necessarily involve words but actions. The longstanding and common insult in relation to how ‘Indian’ smell was introduced by the children in their performing of a ‘touching game’. Without consciously claiming or denying whether it was a means of wounding with or without an intention to be racist, the children seemed to suggest that this is simply what ‘other’ children do to these particular children at
school. This 'stinky' attribute was therefore made to these visibly different children by peer groups as a way of marginalising them, which in turn strengthens the collective sense and of superiority among the members of the peer groups. One way in which discussions of the children's ideas of how Indians 'stink' turned uncomfortable for some was when the focus shifted on applying the ideas to black people. As a child had a close relationship with a friend who was black, she tried to downplay the 'stinky' attribute assigned to black people in general. From this, meaningful friendship relationships seem to be a healthy starting point for disrupting racist thinking and discourses.

In one respect, these practices echo what Corsaro (2003) identifies as the basic themes of children's peer cultures: to gain control of their lives and to share a sense of control with each other. If gaining access to a group is seen as solely determined by the stigmatised racial and ethnic aspects of an individual, it would produce a false conception of children's peer worlds as rigid entities. However, the contrary has been found in the children's descriptions of the underlying organisation of how their peer relationships work. This is where the ambiguity and complexity of racism in children's peer relationships emerged, drawing attention to the pace and instability of children's childhood worlds as well as the children's shared values and concerns (Lee 2001).

Within the specific context of boys' peer worlds, the repeated theme of being physically strong was found consistently. The ability to 'fight' others was highly valued among the boys, expressed in terms of incidents involving self defence or in protecting younger family members against racist adults. In an imaginary scenario, one child put together a hierarchy of a Chinese kung fu boy as the most physically powerful followed by black and lastly Indian males. This usefully adds the voices of Chinese people, in this case specifically that of the children's, into the discussions about the feminisation of South Asian boys and stereotyping of black boys being prone to violence. Accompanying this was the common racist abuse in the example of 'I'm going to kick your butt back to India'. At the same time, a child's narratives addressed how black boys could embody multiple identities of being aggressive, at
times bullying, but at the same time being one of the best friends who had the talent to fight off people.

This dynamic of children's peer relationships and the children's multiple and shifting positions was crucial in understanding the meanings of racial and ethnic matters in children's peer worlds. The children also identified a range of characteristics which were valued among their peers, including the ability to catch insects, drawing skills, being fun to be with and humorous. Some of features were associated with what the children referred to as Englishness, which the children believed that they could learn or improve on. The desire to acquire and having to have gained these qualities could not be linked to ideas about passing to be English. To understand this in relation to hegemonic ideals of whiteness and westernness in discourses of valuable qualities would be taking the children's accounts out of context. Rather, these were traits considered to be positive, generally shared by the children's peer groups situated within the particular British or English societal context.

Many of the children shared the view that friendships are or should be non-racist relationships. While some girls constructed a gendered view about racism as a practice exclusively among boys, there was also evidence of how within the girls' peer relationships, what may seem to be racist abuse could be at times collectively understood as otherwise. These were 'hot situations' in which the children raised abuses in both what Troyna and Hatcher (1992) would call 'strategic fashion', knowing it would hurt the person, and in a 'non-strategic fashion', when they may regret the fact that it just 'slipping out' in anger (see also Ali 2003).

The children showed that whether an abusive incidence can be seen as embedding racism was open to the subjective interpretation of the parties involved and depended on the context. Some children reflected on how discourses of racism were often about white abusers and black victims. Therefore, other forms of racism were often excluded in the relevant discussions and these children's experiences of racism could be overlooked. A scenario involving a child being picked on by other children for his ginger hair, green eyes and glasses was not immediately understood by the
children as a racist incident, but bullying. The fact is that within the children's peer worlds – but I would argue the same for the adult worlds – children can get teased and be teased for all sorts of attributes, anything that is thought of as 'out of the ordinary'. Most of the children were aware of racism in their own definitions and some explicitly criticised or challenged what they thought of as their parents' racist views. However, within their own social worlds, bullying was a concept with a more general and wider implication to their experiences, not only taking place in the relationships among children themselves, but also interactions between adults and children.

The children’s accounts are evidence in full support of the argument that biological racism and cultural differentiation or the 'new cultural racism' should be conceptualised as racism’s ‘two logics’ or ‘registers’ as proposed by Hall (2000:223). The biological, cultural and religious references are all present in the children’s discourses of othering and discrimination. Many poststructuralist theorists have argued that there were shifts in form of racism towards a fixing of the cultural rather than biological difference (e.g. Barker 1981; Bailbar 1991) or speaking of an effacing of colour racism and a reinforcing of cultural racism at a micro-level in Britain (Modood et al. 1997). Yet in this study, it has been shown how an expanded concept of racism that acknowledges the way in which, in its discursive structure, biological racism and cultural differentiatism are articulated and combined, is more fruitful.

In the children’s view, passing for such as Indian is enabled by but at the same time limited to adopting the so-called elements of Indian culture such as the ‘red dot’, bindi. This element can at times transcend the perceived biological aspects of what an Indian may look like. Yet without these constructed and defined features and/or the ‘right’ kind of biology, it can just be difficult for someone to pass as one. Being visually Chinese, but without a hijab perhaps, I felt my Muslim identity was never fully acknowledged by the children. While the complexity embedded in these processes makes a formulation of the effects of the discourses impossible, the potential opportunity for individuals to pass as and adopt an identity with a great
degree of freedom, welcomed by many poststructuralists, is subject to the same kind of drawbacks of the processes and practices of fixing.

9.4 Intergenerational Relationships and Emotional Diaspora

The final theme of the findings attends to a fundamental dimension of concept of identity in relation to notions of belongingness, which were addressed through the empirical evidence. On the one hand, it examined how the children articulated the meanings of their identification with specifically Chineseness and Englishness, but less so with Britishness. And on the other, it provided rich accounts of the profiling of the children in relation to the context of family.

The discursive presentation of the identity as Chinese-English shared by many of the children directed the analysis towards the deconstruction of the children’s Chinese-English identities. This helped to avoid portraying the children’s identities as fixed entities and drew attention to the contradiction and nuance, as well as difference and overlap. The findings of the children’s sense of identity with regard to their experiences and perceptions of their family helped to destabilise the crucial concepts of biological inheritance and kinship underlying much of the common understandings of race and ethnicity. The profiling of the children’s family also makes a specific contribution towards what is still a small area of existing literature and empirical understandings of Chinese children and families in British society.

The analysis and presentation of the children’s family profiles relied heavily on discussions with the children as well as on occasions, exchanges between the children and their parents. This is purposive, intending to break away from the tendency of explaining the families exclusively in terms of researchers’ own definitions of the so-called traditional Chinese culture as discussed in chapter 2. Also, it can avoid theorising children’s lives in terms of familialisation, the placing of children in the position of dependent family members (see e.g. Qvortrup 1994), but rather explain what the children themselves identified as important to them. The children’s accounts of the features of their families and familial relationships
illustrated the great diversity under the generalised ideas about Chinese family and also the possible overlapping between these families and those of the wider societal context.

Some of the identified characteristics among the families in this study included: single parenthood with mother juggling work and childcare; full-time mother with father working shifts; domestic violence of father against mother; father being unemployed and mother managing three jobs; and both mother and father as professional. These in some respects can be seen as adult issues yet the children talked about how these were matters that concerned them and could have direct and indirect impacts on their lives. Although some of these may seem to reflect ideas of social class, as Francis and Archer (2005) usefully discussed, the Chinese in Britain particularly in relation to their family education trajectories and the nature of takeaway ownership, bring into question the conventional British understanding and application of social class. More specifically, these Chinese families often do not fit into the model of being well-educated middle-class and in a ‘respectable’ employment.

The various kinds of involvement in the catering industry identified amongst the children and their families in this study challenges the longstanding common limited caterer image associated with Chinese in Britain. While a couple of parents owned a takeaway shop combining business with home, another couple were in the search to start up a shop and two mothers were working in a fish and chip shop and a restaurant in the evenings. Unlike some of the literature discussed in chapter 2, the children from this research had minimal direct working experiences within this kind of establishment. While a few talked about how they used to work at the counter of their parents’ takeaway shop, they also expressed how it was something they took on seriously and had some positive experiences in terms of interaction with customers.

From the children’s understandings, it was part of the arrangement of the household division of labour. The kinds of roles and responsibilities they were expected to adopt were negotiated on a combination of factors including age, gender and interests. Unlike the young Chinese adult respondents of Song’s (1999) and Parker’s
(1995) study, these children did not draw upon explicit references of Chinese and English in discussing their work experiences and contribution to the family takeaway business. Instead, a child conversed how it could prone to 'trouble' and be 'embarrassing' if his friends knew his parents owned a shop or if they were to see him working in the shop. The argument for the presence of racial and ethnic aspects in the embodied interactions between the Chinese workers and white customers in the takeaway (Parker 1995, 2000; Song, 1999) could be a valid assumption underlying these children’s experiences. However, the children have shown in different ways how they often had other concerns in relation to their peer worlds and personal lives in general.

For the children from one family, the prospect of moving into a property combining their parents’ takeaway business and accommodation was much welcomed. The reason was because it would provide the family with a 'permanent home' with private space for the children and the facilities and resources enabling the development of their social relationships, which included financial stability partly transferring as the children’s pocket money. With another family, the mother had been juggling education and working in the family fish and chip shop in the evenings. Some children expressed a sense of dissatisfaction about different aspects of their family, such as that their mother did not have much time to spend with them.

The children’s descriptions of their families and their critical accounts with regard to how their parents were performing their parental roles, or not, drive us to rethink the meanings of the particular family characteristics often understood exclusively in terms of Chineseness. Single parenthood, divorce, unemployment, work nature and so on are shared by many other families in society and affect many children of modern British families, challenging the dominant ideas of so-called ‘traditional Chinese families’. It was crucial to put this within the specific context of the family rather than presuming the simplistic stereotype of Chinese families involved in catering as having to work ‘long and unsociable hours’ and as a result neglecting their children. As one child explained in explicit terms, the situation of her mother’s work was the same as her friends whose parents worked night shifts. The child also
criticised their father’s alleged failure to support them and their mother financially after the divorce, making their family life more difficult.

The children’s narratives have also drawn attention to how children of the same family might experience familial relationships and issues differently. The children were actively contributing to family relationships and practices and negotiating their multiple roles within the family context drawing on different elements such as age, birth order, gender and personal characteristics. It was found that there was a strong link between the children’s subjective senses of self within the family, and their experiences and perceptions of sibling relationships and child-parent relationships. The children’s discussions of and exchanges with their parents also showed the features characterising the children’s child-parent relationships. These ranged from intense care provided by the mother, appreciation of two-way honesty and respect, to a wide generational gap. Within these, the elements of negotiation, cooperation and disagreement were present at times in all cases, and it was also evident that the relationships might evolve as both the children and their parents were ageing. This is important and much needed new evidence challenging the stereotypical notions of the so-called traditional Chinese family structure with authoritarian parents versus passively obedient children within the British and other diasporic contexts.

The analysis therefore focused on the variety of ways in which the children might construct a sense of Chineseness in relation to family but by no means in any straightforward sense. Some of the children enthusiastically drew upon the faith related and cultural artefacts in the home environment in introducing their Chinese connections in various interactive situations. In their accounts, they further illustrated how they constructed a sense of Chineseness through using these particular objects as signifiers of their own beliefs and that how family members living a long life was proof of their faith.

More significantly, in their discourses, the children assigned to their parents a Chinese identity of a strictly fixed nature with no room for change. This formed a partial explanation of the children’s own Chineseness readily claimed in embodied situations in which the children’s identities were questioned. However, this was also
employed strategically in defining and contrasting the children’s own specific Chinese-English identity. Therefore, in the children’s narratives, there was a large gap between the parents’ identities constructed and assigned by the children and the children’s own identities. The major differentiating element was the notion of ‘born and bred’, ideas about the fact that the children were born and had been living in England and had English as their first language. In this sense, the parents’ identities were signifiers of both affiliation and differentiation in relation to the children’s own identities.

Moreover, there was evidence that the children drew on particular characteristics of their parents and other adult family members to build their versions of Chineseness. This process then fixed and froze those features as essential constituents of what it meant to be Chinese. These elements were therefore close to the children’s own personal experiences and subjective interpretations, and ranged from stinginess, superstition, religiousness and being of multi-faith, to strictness and lack of a sense of humour. Therefore these characteristics did not necessary directly inform or constitute the children’s own senses of identities. Rather, these factors were something embedded in the particular child-adult relationships that the children were living with and having to deal with within the family context. Chineseness was in one way transferred into the meaning of having Chinese parents or family.

Ironically, many of these characteristics of Chineseness were defined in oppositional terms to Englishness. Within this framework, what were considered to be the English components did not necessarily inform children’s identification with Englishness either. However, instead of viewing this as the conventional pathological discourse of being ‘in-between’ two cultures, a more appropriate conception would be to see the children’s construction of specific kinds of Englishness and Chineseness in relation to one another within the specific British context. The children’s discourses of their Chinese-English identities were filled with ambiguity and contradiction. Their emphasis on being only ‘half’ English but comfortable with notions of being a ‘whole’ Chinese reflected to an extent their experiences of the prejudice of some English people. This was one aspect underlying their affiliation with Englishness and with English people that the
children were investing in their relatedness to the English, which included both positive and negative elements. It was also through these that the children strengthened or distanced themselves from their sense of being Chinese.

This elaborates on the notion of partial identification with multiple positions among young Chinese adults in Britain proposed by Parker (1995), illustrating the partial identification with any of the identities of the multiple positioning, and leading the investigation into the children’s sense of belonging in relation to space and place. Many theorists have focused on the ‘imagined’ nature of the connection to a ‘homeland’ among the discourses of ‘migrants’ (e.g. Ang 2001). For individuals of migrant parents, their diasporic connections have always been seen as formed through their parents, and the ‘home’ of their parents (e.g. Ang 2001; Ali 2003). For the children of this research, the notion of home had little meaning other than the physical space where they live with their family (see also Ali 2003). They also formulated discourses of family through a selection of people with biological connections and those joining through marriage.

While some children excluded biologically related family members living in the same household in their accounts of family, many directed attention to the significance of individual family members living abroad, in China, Hong Kong and sometimes both. It was through these relationships that the children were connecting with these places in meaningful ways. In some cases, these relationships were based on the children’s early childhood experiences of living with their grandparents in China or Hong Kong and renewed from sequential visits. For other children, they had to continuously work on these relationships through various means, and on a number of occasions with young family members whom they had never met in person before. What these illustrate are the ways in which the children emotionally invested in particular relationships of both constructed and experiential dimensions in creating their own version of family.

While the children had little doubt that England was their home, some stressed their right to belong and to claim England as home in terms of ideas about the legal citizenship status of a British national, reflecting what some of the family had gone
through. However, in some children's language, the discourses in relation to Hong Kong or China were often in the form of 'going back' there. This could be related to a series of factors. Apart from childhood residency and ideas about their parents or grandparents migrating from there, the discourses of otherness and experiences of racism could also contribute to this. One child talked about how she heard that if there was war, specifically between Britain and China, she and her family would have to go back to China.

In much of the theorisation of identity, the political dimensions have always been crucial. The presumption of identity politics is often that there can be no politics until the subjects have laid claim to their identities (see Bulmer and Solomos 1998). This is a particularly problematic conception when children are at issue. As Mayall (2002) discussed in detail, children along with women have been positioned within the conventional framework, an apolitical private domain as opposed to the political public sphere (Mayall 2002). Given children's generally marginalised status and position within society, it would be difficult for them to carry out any acts that would be viewed as political in the conventional sense.

Parker's (1995) proposed notion of a subjectivity of conditional belonging in relation to young Chinese adults in Britain suggests that some of the young people have partial identifications with the Chinese community and Britain; they are willing to stay in Britain on the condition that they are able to contribute to the redefinition of Britishness. Such an explicit and strong political statement was not found among the discourses of the children of this study. However, all the accounts provided by the children and all the actions recollected as carried out by them are in themselves political. The children are actively involved in the process of redefining what it means to be English, British and Chinese within the British context. This study therefore has provided the children with a channel through which their political acts can be heard and seen.

Moreover, the children's discursive construction of their Chinese-English identities also brings question into the concept of a compartmentalisation of ethnic identity among mixed race children (Wilson 1987) and young Chinese adults in Britain.
The children's identification with Chineseness and Englishness was simply not neatly coexisting in separate compartments, with Chinese identities held in the 'private domain' of home with 'enforced innerness' (Parker 1995:233) and English identities in the public spheres of school and employment. The children's accounts showed how such a concept can obscure the shifting, situated, contextual, contingent, multiple and embodied nature of their identities and the complexity of the ways they experience them.

This nature of identities and the different meanings of the children's Chinese-English identities are precisely what the analysis has attempted to show. Much of the literature addressing racial and ethnic matters among children has focused on how racist incidents affect children's sense of identities. Some, but not all children discussed their experiences of what they explicitly called racism with different levels of detail and emotional investment. In fact, the emotional involvement in the children's identification with Chineseness and English was a key dimension in understanding what these identities meant to them. In spite of the belief of a breakdown of traditional family relationships and forms in many contemporary societies, the children in this study showed the significance of notions of family and familial relationships in the construction of their sense of self identity.

Although one child did draw on notions of strong family bonding as part of the formulation of her version of Chineseness, to other children the importance of family was more related to their positioning and identity of being a child. Most of the children do live in different forms of family, a central site where a range of resources are negotiated such as emotional, financial and material resources. Through investing in familial relationships and ideas of family, the children were working towards the achievement of a sense of what Giddens called 'ontological security' (1991:114). The children have shown that belongingness and relatedness was not a taken-for-granted aspect of their familial lives or of their Chinese and English identities. They had to keep searching and investing in particular discourses in an attempt to formulate a sense of security for their self and identity.
9.5 Questions of Approach

This research used an approach developed in the sociology of childhood (James and Prout 1990; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1997) which places emphasis on the agency of children, helping to bring into focus the constructed and dynamic nature of children’s identities. The children’s identities were not considered to be simply predetermined or imposed on them, but rather actively worked at by the children themselves, constituted contextually and interactionally, and deployed to different effects. More fundamentally, this thesis has brought into question assumptions about the attribution of unambiguous significance and meanings of racial and ethnic issues to some children by adults, including those of immigrant parents.

The notion that children are competent, sophisticated social actors was a position taken up ontologically, and hence methodologically, from the onset. This provided the grounding for my choice of research methods and techniques, including the open conversations along with the innovative task-based activities designated for this study. Through these techniques, spaces and mediums were created for the children to demonstrate their ability to articulate their sophisticated and active understandings and constructions of their daily lives. However, this brings forward a question of how a research approach that attempts to explore children’s own understandings of their lives and constructions of identities fits with framing those understandings through concepts of particular ethnicities which are largely defined by the researchers and other adults. As some sort of resolution of this apparent conundrum, and in partial defence of this being the case, my focus has been on exploring and understanding some of the processes and practices involved in the formulation of individual children’s sense of identity incorporating a keen and central sense of how they see themselves. While the case studies presented in this thesis make no claims to be representative in any form, they do help to draw attention to the diversity not only within the group of children under the generalised term of Chinese, but also within an individual family.

Giving sociological credence to the social competency of children has a number of implications in relation to methodology. The thesis has demonstrated how an
ethnographic methodology of informal conversations is an effective means by which to unravel the complexities of children’s identities. The research has also drawn attention to how the use of innovative tools can assist the children to compose their self-reflective narratives. It has also shown that while these tools can help to tap into areas that are not immediately accessible to me as the researcher, they can also guide the conversations I had with the children so that they would remain in focus. Through these discussions, the children explained the concept of identity formulations in terms of their everyday worlds and relations.

However, this is not to suggest that ethnography is the only suitable approach for studies with children irrespective of the research topic, or to call for tools designed specifically for children. Nonetheless, the overall research approach enabled the children and me to build a range of relationships and work partnerships of mutual respect and trust. This would have been very unlikely to have been achieved through a research approach of survey questionnaires because of its relatively restricted nature.

At the same time, it has been important for me to critically reflect on how the identities of the researcher and the research relationships may affect the research process, and proceed with appropriate caution with respect to this in developing the analyses and interpretations of the data. It is often the case that in social studies involving adult researchers working with children, adulthood is automatically assumed have an impact on the responses of the children. While it is important not to deny children’s experiences of adults, which often involve imbalanced power relations, how this may influence the research relationships and process requires careful examination. For instance, at times, my adultness was destabilised or even eliminated by the children. An example of this is that once a child wanted to invite me to have dinner with him and his family and asked for my telephone number. He said that he would ask his parents to call my parents and ask them if I could come round for dinner some time. When issues like this came up, I was made aware of how I was connected to the children with our perceivably shared child identity of familial relationship. Conversely, I was also reminded at times that I was often
regarded by many of the children as an adult. Yet notions of adultness were always open to negotiation and could take different forms. As one child said to me:

You’re different [from adults in general] because you’ve been coming to see me and talking to me. You respect our opinions and you want to find out about what we think of our lives. (Christy D, aged 12)

It has to be noted that I did not occupy any of these positions in any rigid or deliberate manner, but rather shifting positions in relation to my adultness emerged throughout the research. The sense that I gained from most of the children in this research was that they were rather actively introducing me to things about their ‘child’ lives. That is, the children wanted me to learn about how their worlds operate which I, as an adult, might not have immediate experiences of. This is in contrast to the idea that many child respondents would introduce ‘adult’ discourses in the research process, either because the ‘forbidden topics’ of adult nature are of great interest to children (Suki 2003:17) or the children wanted to undermine and subvert the researcher’s adult authority (Connolly 1998:188). Moreover, I believe that what constitutes an adult discourse should in fact be an area to be further investigated, rather than simply assumed and defined by the researchers. As some clues were presented in this thesis, it is sometimes rather difficult to draw a definite line between child and adult discourses; the two are never entirely independent of each other.

Moreover, while ethnicity is often regarded as playing a significant role in the process of generating data, particularly in qualitative and ethnographic research, the Chinese-ness seemingly shared between the children and me provided some interesting points of reflection. Unlike the young Chinese adults in Britain interviewed by a researcher of ‘Chinese and English descent’ (Parker 1995) and another who is ‘Korean American’ (Song 1999), only one child in this research explicitly talked about my ethnicity in our discussions. Yet in keeping with these researchers’ experiences, I also found myself neither a total insider nor a complete outsider to the children in terms of ethnicity. From many of the children’s reflections of their own ethnicities, I was made aware of how I do not fit perfectly into their
definition of being Chinese-English mainly on the basis that, unlike them, I am not born and bred in England. Yet during our interactions and conversations in the field, we were collectively but also more privately among ourselves constructing our own versions of Chineseness, Englishness, Chinese-Englishness. More importantly, these identities were negotiated in relation to other aspects of our sense of who we are.

What these point to is the multiplicity and dynamic nature of any identity and the fact that the researcher and the researched can be connected and detached through various aspects of their many identities in a number of ways at any point in the fieldwork. This is what Parker refers to as the ways that 'difference and distance are in tension with closeness and empathy' characterising many research relationships (1995:244). However, this should not be seen as limited to ethnicity but extended to other identities. Above all, this is indeed a crucial way through which the conceptualisation of identity has been developed. The important question to ask is, therefore, how does the ethnographic experience affect the conceptualisation of identity? I would suggest that this has to be differentiated from a too narrow focus on how specific ethnographic moments produce particular responses.

In social research, there has been increasing interest in reflexivity and positionality. However, researcher's reflections on how her or his own identities may have influenced the respondents' reactions can sometimes mean that too much attention is diverted to the people involved, without considering anything about the topic in question. For instance, respondents' uneasiness is often understood by researchers as simply an effect of the researchers' identities, specifically a result of mismatched identities between the two parties (see e.g. Parker and Song 1995). However, for example, when the children in this study responded 'I don't know' to some of my questions, in some cases this could mean that more time was needed for the children to reflect on their own ideas, or that the children chose not to discuss the particular issue with me at the particular moment. Despite this, researchers constantly reflecting on particular ethnographic moments in broader terms, not limiting them to only one aspect during the fieldwork process, would help to avoid reinforcing a restrictive view on identity; the singularity and the essentiality of particular identities. Recognising the potential political implications of a research requires a
more transparent style of writing which then illustrates the processes of the data being produced, interpreted and understood.

In conclusion, through adopting a transparent approach to the data and indeed to the research process, as well as utilising ethnographic and other qualitative approaches, it has been possible to explore with the children in this study their conceptualisations, constructions and deployments of their identities. In doing so the salience of alternative and intersecting positions arising out of self, others, gender, age, generation, locality, and time for the play of ethnicity in the lives of these children has become visible. Hence understanding ethnicity as these children experience and live it requires embracing multi-positionality and fluidity and above all understanding the children as social actors in complex contexts.

9.6 Being the Young and ‘Chinese-English’ of Britain

This chapter has pulled together the various threads of the preceding chapters of the thesis which present the reconceptualisation of race and ethnicity in relation to children’s childhood lives. A collaboration of racial and ethnic studies with the principles of childhood sociology, enabled by an innovative methodology, has led to a destabilisation and deconstruction of adultness in understandings of race and ethnicity and the various identity categories such as Chineseness, Englishness and Britishness in childhood. This research therefore has provided valuable empirical evidence of some important aspects of the children’s ethnic identities and childhood experiences, and identified some of the processes and practices at work, among the group of children who have often been overlooked.

This research has challenged the simplistic understandings of race and ethnicity as distinguishable on the basis of discourses of biological and physical and cultural and religious differences. The empirical evidence has demonstrated how these elements are interconnectedly present in the children’s discourses of their own and others’ identities. Whether it is the rhetoric of biological racism in terms of, such as skin colour or the discourses of cultural differentiation in terms of, for instance religion,
it cannot be seen as related to the children’s perceptions and experiences of identities in any direct and simplistic manners. It has also shown how the children’s identities are heavily embodied with a widened conception of embodiment beyond physical and cultural concepts of race and ethnicity.

As I have shown above, the complexity of analyses of racial and ethnic issues among children lies in the fact that they are constituted within and by the specification of the contexts of children’s worlds, relationships and processes of social interaction. The children’s accounts are political practices that challenge the constraints to their own and others’ identities imposed by discourses. The children all manage to work with the fact that their identities are in progress and contextualising and contingent. Racism can at times play a part in their lives, be they the victim or the perpetrator.

Children are born into society, continuously contributing to different aspects of it, and are also actively engaged with society’s categorical structuring. From everyday speech, school forms and census, we cannot escape from learning about and classifying things and people into categories and groups. To be a member of society, we all possess and apply knowledge in the production and reproduction of everyday encounters and the social world, and deploy any number of resources in order to develop a satisfactory self. Notions of race and ethnicity are resources amongst many.

This research has shown that for many children, issues connected with race and ethnicity are not always the most salient factors in their lives. They are concerned about how they look, how they are getting on with friends and family but underlying this is their concern of whether to have a positive sense of self which in different ways relates to the meaningful others. The children in this study are in many ways resistant to the dominant discourses of race and ethnicity that force them to choose a singular position of simply being Chinese. More importantly, the children illustrate both the flexibility and fixity of cultural characteristics, physical attributes, sense of national belonging and non-belonging, ideas of home and away, family, parenthood, friendship, emotion, desire, all of which constitute the children’s diverse senses of
who they are, as daughter, son, sister, brother, Chinese, English, friend, child among endless possibilities. This research therefore demonstrates that once we engage children in discussions in a respectful and meaningful manner, new spaces beyond either Chinese, English, black or white can be opened up to allow for a rethinking of essentialist meanings of race, ethnicity, identity, culture and nation.
Appendix 1:

Research Information Leaflets

Leaflet for children (front and back)

A research project about Chinese children in England

About myself

- I am a student from the University of Surrey in Guildford.
- I am looking for Chinese girls and boys living in England to help me.
- I want to see you as many times as possible.
- I want to do some activities with you and talk to you.

If you might like to help me

Think about the questions, before you decide if you want to help me with this project.

Are you happy to share your experience and thought with me?
Would it be ok to tape-record while we are talking?
Would it be ok for me to use things you told me in my reports?
Would your mother, father or guardian be ok about your talking to me?

If you decide to help me

- We will talk and do the activities at your home.
- I will not tell other people what you told me.
- If I write in a report about what you told me, I will not use your real name, so that other people will not know it was you.
- If you want to, we will miss out any activities or questions.

We will stop whenever you want to stop the activities or interviews.

Interested in taking part?

[ ] Yes, I want to take part.
[ ] No, I do not want to take part.

Yes? Please read the followings:
- I have read the leaflet and I know what this project is about.
- I know I do not have to take part in this project unless I want to.
- I know that I do not have to do the activities or answer the questions which I do not want to.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this project anytime.
- I know that what I say will be taped and only the researcher can listen to the tapes.
- I know that what I say may be used in reports and publications but my real name will not be used.

Agree to the above? Please sign.
Name __________________________
Date ________________________

Parent or guardian:
Signature _____________________
Date ________________________

If you want to contact me

My name Daisy, Yin Tak Wong
Telephone 07786 318592
Email yin.wong@blueyonder.co.uk

2002
Would you like to take part in a research about Chinese children in England?

Who is doing the research?
This study is being carried out as part of my PhD research degree course, which is being undertaken at University of Surrey, Guildford.

What is the goal of the research?
To learn more about Chinese children's world and their identities.

If you decide to take part in this research, what will be involved?
There are two parts of this research: children carry out the first part, involving activities such as taking photo and making board games. The second part involves interviews with parents about a range of issues. Interviews will be taped and should take about 1 1/2 hour, and it will take place in a location of your choice.

What about confidentiality?
Information you give me will be treated as strictest confidential and only I will be able to access. Your identity will not be physically attached to the report, although what you say may be quoted directly in it.

Is your participation voluntary?
Yes it is! You can participate, refuse to take part or withdraw at any time during the study for any reason, and without any prejudice and penalty.

How can you get more information about this research?
If you would like more information about this research, you can contact me at the number or email address below anytime.

My name: Daisy, Yin Tak Wong
電話 / Tel: 07786 318592
Email: yin.wong@blueyonder.co.uk

Thank you! I greatly value your help in assisting me with this research.

2002
Appendix 2:

Labels of ‘Hello Alien’ Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School: I study at</th>
<th>Family: I live with</th>
<th>Food: I like eating</th>
<th>Things I can do:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age: I am _______ years old</th>
<th>Things I enjoy doing:</th>
<th>Religion:</th>
<th>Height and weight:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am a girl/boy</th>
<th>Money:</th>
<th>Sister and brother:</th>
<th>My mother is a</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am British, Chinese, English, Others</th>
<th>Country where my family from:</th>
<th>Grandparent(s)</th>
<th>Pets: I have/I want to have</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country where I'm living in:</th>
<th>My happiest moment:</th>
<th>Friends:</th>
<th>Where I was born:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Sports I like playing:</th>
<th>Where I live:</th>
<th>Clothes I like to wear:</th>
<th>My father is a</th>
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<tr>
<th>Language(s) I speak:</th>
<th>Something made me sad:</th>
<th>Music I like:</th>
<th>People I like and dislike:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things that I like and dislike:</th>
<th>Where my parents were born:</th>
<th>Colour of hair, eyes, skin:</th>
<th>I want to be a</th>
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References


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