

Ren and Yuan: A Cultural Interpretation of Chinese Women's Responses to Battering

Agnes Tiwari, Margaret Wong, and Heidi Ip

L'étude a pour but d'examiner les réactions des femmes chinoises face à la violence conjugale, dans le contexte de la culture chinoise. Cette étude s'appuie sur le vécu de 11 Chinoises vivant à Hong Kong. Une analyse des témoignages de ces femmes révèle la présence de valeurs chinoises dans leurs réactions quant à ce type de violence. Elles ont recours au *ren*, ou à l'endurance, comme mécanisme d'adaptation, et au *yuan*, au destin, pour expliquer l'échec de la relation. Les stratégies que ces femmes utilisent pour composer avec la violence démontrent clairement la présence d'une attitude de tolérance et de créativité. Leurs réactions face à la violence révèlent de la détermination et diffèrent selon le statut de la relation.

The purpose of the study was to examine women's responses to battering within the context of Chinese culture. The stories of 11 Chinese women living in Hong Kong formed the basis of the inquiry. Analysis of the women's accounts revealed Chinese values in their responses to battering: they adopted *ren*, or endurance, as a coping mechanism and used *yuan*, or predestination, as an explanation for their failed relationship. The resilience and resourcefulness of the women are clearly demonstrated in the strategies they employed to cope with the abuse. Their responses to battering were purposeful and varied according to the status of their relationship.

Introduction

Traditionally, Chinese culture ascribes women inferior status and condones violence against women (Cheung, 1996; Honig & Hershatter, 1988). Studies show that in response to wife battering, women employ strategies to protect themselves and their children and to survive the abusive relationship (Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998; Dutton, 1996; Koss et al., 1994). Given the socialization of Chinese women into submissive and subservient roles, how do they respond in abusive relationships? Despite the increasing attention paid to violence against women in Chinese societies, there is still a paucity of information on the responses of Chinese women to battering. In places such as Hong Kong,

Agnes Tiwari, RN, PhD, is Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing Studies, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. Margaret Wong, BSW, MSc, is Executive Director, Harmony House, Hong Kong. Heidi Ip, BASW, Dip. Chinese Lang. & Lit., is Coordinator, Harmony House.

where Chinese values are mixed with Western norms, the extent to which Chinese culture affects the mentality and behaviours of battered women is an under-researched area. Studies conducted in Hong Kong have concentrated on the nature and effects of violence against women (e.g., Tang, 1998; Tang, Wong, Cheung, & Lee, 1999; Yeung, 1991), while little is known about the women's responses to battering.

The purpose of this study was to examine the responses of battered women in Hong Kong based on their own stories, which were the first accounts by battered women ever to be published in Hong Kong. By locating these stories in the context of Chinese culture, the study attempts to provide a cultural interpretation of Chinese women's responses to battering. As traditional values and beliefs have been shown to persist in many Chinese societies, despite Western influences and socio-economic changes (Cheung, 1996), it is hoped that the findings will also be relevant for Chinese communities outside of Hong Kong.

In this paper, wife battering is defined according to the definitions offered by Campbell (1999). Wife battering, which is different from wife beating, is defined as ongoing severe violence inflicted by men on their female partners. Such violence is not seen as usual in the society, and is accompanied by other means of coercion. It is a pattern of abusive behaviour and control rather than an isolated act of physical aggression.

Literature Review

Women in Chinese Societies

Chinese culture emphasizes harmony, discipline, and self-restraint in interpersonal relationships, yet condones violence against women (Goodwin & Tang, 1996). It has been suggested that due to the inferior status traditionally ascribed to women in Chinese societies, aggression against women may be seen as more acceptable and less evil in these societies than in others (Tang, Lee, & Cheung, 1999). In Hong Kong, a former British colony, remnants of traditional patriarchal values are evident despite Westernization and rapid socio-economic changes. Although educational attainment among women has improved significantly and women have achieved greater social status, gender differences remain in higher education and employment (Westwood, Mehra, & Cheung, 1995). Gender inequality is particularly evident in rural Hong Kong, where attempts to modify patriarchal traditions have met with strong opposition (Wu, 1995). Local studies show that while

Hong Kong people generally accept gender equality, many still adhere to traditional views concerning women and their roles (Cheung et al., 1994; Choi, Au, Cheung, Tang, & Yik, 1993).

Chinese culture is not the only culture that institutionalizes the inferiority of women. Many other cultures give men the right to control women and to use force in disciplining their wives. For example, in countries as far apart as Bangladesh, Mexico, and Nigeria it is considered a husband's right to use violence in disciplining an errant wife (Gonzalez Montes, 1998; Osakue & Hilber, 1998; Schuler, Hashemi, Reily, & Akhtar, 1996). Chinese or non-Chinese, as long as cultural beliefs and practices favour male dominance and female submissiveness, women's autonomy will be undermined and their vulnerability exploited. However, it has been suggested that culture can be a double-edged sword in gender-based violence. While culture can disadvantage women and aggravate their vulnerability, it can also be a creative resource in confronting abuse against women (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999). In a Canadian Aboriginal community, for example, traditional sanctioning and healing practices are used to restore justice to the woman and punish the perpetrator (Match International Centre, 1994), while in India and Bangladesh domestic violence is addressed through *Salishe*, a traditional system of local justice (Datta & Motihar, 1999). It has been suggested that Chinese people use a "persevering approach" to life's problems (Hwang, 1988). The persevering approach is derived from the Confucian tradition of self-control and includes such strategies as self-instruction in patience and non-resistance. Also, Chinese people may use the Buddhist concept of *yuan*, meaning predestination, to explain interpersonal matters and social events. It has been found that *yuan* serves a protective function in explaining away negative exchanges and that those who use *yuan* tend to have fewer depressive symptoms (Bond, 1991). To what extent have traditional Chinese values offered protection to battered women? The paucity of information on the experience of Chinese women in abusive relationships makes it impossible to speculate.

Women's Responses to Battering

Studies of women's response to battering show that battered women are not passive victims. Gondoff and Fisher (1988) provide evidence that women in abusive relationships are active survivors rather than helpless victims. The women in their study increased their help-seeking as the violence increased, which refutes the hypothesis of learned helplessness. In an urban field study of battered women, Hoff (1990) found

that the women were able to cope with life-threatening crises despite intimidation and self-blame. They also developed strategies for both coping within the abusive relationship and eventually leaving it. Landenburger (1989) found that as the abusive relationship continued, the woman's perception of the experience and her choices gradually changed; this study also identified a process of entrapment and recovery. The lived experiences of abused women formed the basis of Lampert's (1996) study into how women give meaning to their abusive experiences and respond to the violence. Lampert found that "within contradictory interactional contexts, these abused women developed strategies intended to halt, change or cope with their partners' violence" (p. 286). In a prospective study, Campbell et al. (1998) found strength, resistance, and resourcefulness in a sample of battered women as they faced frightening circumstances in their intimate relationships. The aforementioned studies demonstrate that the response to battering is a complex process, with the women actively employing protection and survival strategies. While the findings provide important insights into this complex phenomenon, none of the studies focused on the experience of Chinese women.

It has been suggested that women's responses to abuse are limited by the options available (Dutton, 1996) and that the fear of social stigma often prevents women from seeking help (Heise et al., 1999). In Chinese societies where domestic violence is stigmatized and wife battering is concealed within the family, since "shameful family affairs should not be disclosed to outsiders," how do battered women survive in abusive relationships? What role does culture play in accentuating or lessening the women's suffering? In light of the lack of information in this area, a closer examination of Chinese women's responses to battering is warranted.

Method

Narrative inquiry was the method used in this study. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) describe narrative inquiry as one of the personal-experience methods in social science inquiry. Narrative is, in this sense, "both phenomenon and method" (p. 416). As a phenomenon, it names the structured quality of experience to be studied. As a method, it determines the patterns of inquiry for the study of the phenomenon. To preserve the distinction between phenomenon and method, it is customary to call the phenomenon *story* (what the narrator tells) and the inquiry *narrative* (the researcher's account). In narrative inquiry, narrative researchers describe the storied lives of people, collect and tell stories

of them, and write narratives of experience. Redwood (1999) says that for both the researcher and the reader of narrative research "there is a thrill from entering into another's story" (p. 674), either from glimpsing the unfamiliar or from identifying with the well-known. Although stories of personal experience may be dismissed by some as anecdotal evidence, they can be gathered and analyzed, and used as a research method (Cortazzi, 1993).

In narrative research the researched world cannot be reproduced without some form of narrative analysis. The form of analysis largely depends on the researcher's views on the construction of knowledge (Redwood, 1999). For example, where a phenomenological interpretation of a narrative is adopted, the lived experience of the narrator is emphasized in the analysis. Further, narrative analysis often appears to be an almost intuitive process (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994), typically taking the perspective of the narrator and using terms defined by the analyst (Reissman, 1993). An analysis of narratives "cannot reveal what someone 'really' thinks or feels because any truth is simply a construction" (Redwood, p. 674), so it is not surprising that narrative analysis struggles continuously with the problem of context, or the embeddedness of a story within personal or group experience (Manning & Cullum-Swan). However, the merits of narrative are well known. Abma (1998) contends that active sharing of stories can transform professional practice. Clark (1995) concludes that personal stories facilitate knowing, health, and caring in nursing. Coles (1989) and Mishler (1984) argue for the utility of narrative analysis in medical social science and assert that healing necessarily involves the telling, hearing, and unravelling of stories. Although narrative research has yet to play a major role in the development of nursing science, the merits of storytelling in nursing and health care are increasingly being recognized (Berman, 1999). The narrative inquiry method was chosen for this study because it provided a means of discovering a woman's experience of battering from her own point of view and because the women's stories were a rich source of information.

In this study, the experiences of and responses to battering were identified based on the stories of a group of battered women. The stories appear in the book *Herstory: Family Constraints and Violence* (Harmony House, 2000), published by an organization providing shelter and services to battered women in Hong Kong. The purpose of the book, the first of its kind to be published in Hong Kong, was twofold: as a community education project and as narrative therapy. As a community education project it was designed to raise awareness about the incidence and prevention of spousal abuse. As narrative

therapy it was designed to encourage battered women and to recognize their efforts and achievements. The women either wrote their own stories or told them to interviewers; once accuracy was confirmed there was no further editing of the stories, in order to preserve the words of the women as told or written. Each story is followed by a commentary written by a social worker who was involved in providing care to the woman, in order to bring out the context of the woman's account. The commentary was checked by the woman for accuracy and authenticity and modified as required.

Of the 19 women whose stories appear in the book, 11 consented to have their stories used for research purposes. Although two of the researchers (Wong and Ip) were responsible for publishing the book, none of the researchers had taken part in interviewing the women or collecting the stories.

Sample

The 11 women whose stories were used in the study ranged in age from 31 to 45 years. All were Chinese: two had been born in Hong Kong and nine were immigrants from China who had settled in Hong Kong within the preceding 7 years. With the exception of one, whose status was "separated," all of the women were divorced at the time of telling their stories. All had left the abusive relationship. In their stories, the women were reflecting back on their lives with the abusive partner. All but one of the women had dependent children. About half of the women had received primary schooling. The remaining half were educated to secondary level. Their educational level was below the Hong Kong average. This reflects their immigrant status, as in China, unlike in Hong Kong, mass tertiary education had yet to come about. Only two of the women were employed. Nine were receiving social assistance.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was performed for each of the 11 stories. Patterns and unique textual data (such as events and reported behaviours) were coded, categorized, and abstracted to form themes. Descriptive data (such as marital status, absence or presence of abuse) provided the contextual aspects of the woman's personal situation. The stories were read and analyzed separately by all three researchers. Only after consensus was achieved would the themes be accepted.

As stories contain multiple meanings and are open to a variety of interpretations (Abma, 1998), and as mute material evidence cannot "speak back" (Hodder, 1994, p. 398), care was taken to interpret the women's stories in a way that would ensure auditability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Contextual interpretation was used in analyzing the text (Hodder), and the meanings of the text were noted. To guard against imposing their preconceptions and missing the emerging themes, the researchers meticulously analyzed the women's accounts in terms of context, people, and events. The sense and coherence of the analysis from which emerging themes were derived was carefully checked for antecedents and consequences. The commentary accompanying each story also served as a means of checking convergence of the researchers' interpretations and those of people closely involved with the women and their stories.

Results

Women's Reports of Violence

All 11 women reported that they had been subjected to ongoing acts of violence such as shoving, slapping, grabbing, or threatening with weapons (usually knives or choppers). In some cases the injuries were severe enough to require hospitalization. The women also reported other forms of coercive control, including belittlement, intimidation, humiliation, financial deprivation, physical removal from the matrimonial home, and denial of access to their own children. However, only two women identified sexual abuse in their violent relationships, one of whom reported being raped by her husband during a particularly violent episode. This woman's use of the word "rape" is significant. Marital rape is not widely recognized in the local community, and traditionally Chinese women believe it is their duty and obligation to submit to their husbands sexually. While the reported low incidence of sexual abuse may be accurate, underreporting should not be ruled out. Studies have found that Chinese people are generally reluctant to discuss sexual matters (Bond, 1991; Goodwin & Tang, 1996) as sex is a taboo subject in Chinese culture. It is therefore notable that this woman described her experience of sexual coercion as rape.

Responses to Battering

When the women's stories were examined, the complexity of their responses to battering became evident. While the women might have appeared to be passive victims of violence, careful analysis of their

accounts revealed that many of their actions/non-actions had been deliberate and purposeful. Also, as evident in their recalling of the experience, their responses varied according to the status of the relationship. Thus, the results presented here will be classified by relationship status.

Relationship status: still in the abusive relationship. In their stories, the women recalled how they coped with the abuse while they were still living with the partner:

When he used jia fa [rules of the family] on me, I accepted it for reasons of ren ru fu zhong [endure humiliation in order to carry out an important mission]. (p. 81)

I thought that if I used ren ru fu zhong he would be impressed by my effort and might even change back to the good husband I once knew. (p. 86)

For two years, I ren shou [endured] his bad behaviour and did everything to please him in the hope that one day he would change. (p. 54)

For the sake of our children, I tried my best to ren qi tun sheng [endure the injustice and dare not say anything]. (p. 24)

For five, six years, I responded to his behaviour with ya ren [suffering in silence]. (p. 70)

I responded with ren [endurance] to his foul language and humiliation and tried to ignore it. (p. 10)

The women repeatedly used the word *ren* to describe their way of coping with the abuse. *Ren*, or endurance, involved actions such as doing what the partner wanted or trying to please, as well as seemingly non-actions such as suffering in silence or ignoring the abusive behaviour. *Ren* was a conscious, purposeful choice — a means of dealing with the problematic relationship. In the excerpts above, it is apparent that some of the women used *ren* to avoid further violence or to prevent escalation of the abuser's anger. Some also used *ren* to please their partner in the hope that the relationship would improve.

The commentaries accompanying the stories also make reference to *ren*:

When one is abandoned by one's loved one, it is hard to get over the pain. However, such is the reality and one must ren tong [endure the pain] and accept it. (p. 15)

Even though the husband uses force in every encounter, the wife responds with ren each time. I wonder where she has learned this. Maybe she has been influenced by traditional values. (p. 84)

The use of a coping mechanism (*ren*) is by no means unique to this study. Similar tactics have been documented in other studies. For example, Landenburger (1989) identifies *enduring* as a phase in the entrapment and recovery process, and Campbell et al. (1998) describe "subordinating the self" (p. 755) as a strategy used by women to avoid violence. It appears that in the face of frightening circumstances, both Chinese and non-Chinese women are likely to use coping strategies to protect themselves and their children. Interestingly, a number of women in this study used Chinese idiom to describe their acts of *ren*, such as *ren ru fu zhong* (endure humiliation in order to carry out an important mission) and *ren qi tun sheng* (endure the injustice and dare not say anything). Both of these would be used regularly by Chinese parents and teachers in teaching children to discipline themselves. Whether the women's use of Chinese idiom in describing their responses to battering is rooted in the Confucian teaching of self-instruction in patience would require a more in-depth, reflective discussion than this study allowed.

The women's stories suggest that a number of factors might have influenced their decision to endure the abuse rather than end the relationship. One factor would be an inability to leave because of harsh socio-economic realities. However, this did not apply to all of the women. Indeed some were breadwinners supporting the partner. Another possibility is that the women were, like most Chinese people, brought up to believe that "shameful family affairs should not be disclosed to outsiders." Thus the need to protect the family name would cause them to conceal and endure the abuse. Further, several of the women expressed the view that *cong yi er zhong* (marriage is forever). For them, ending the relationship would be out of the question at that time; their only option was to learn to live with the abuse. Yet another possibility was that the women had been socialized into traditional Chinese thinking, in which *ren* is a feminine virtue.

More than half of the women (six out of 11) admitted to having had suicidal thoughts, though none had acted on them. It was not entirely clear from the stories what might have stopped them. While a couple of the women made vague references to their responsibility to their children, they did not elaborate on the issue. However, the women were very clear that they had to be strong in order to survive, and *ren ru fu zhong* frequently featured in their discourse. Notwithstanding this, it is impossible to conclude that *ren* acted as a buffer against self-harm.

Relationship status: had ended the relationship. In their stories, the women also recalled how they felt about the abuse after they had phys-

ically left the relationship and made a final break from the abusive partner:

I felt I was so silly. I put my heart in the family and yet he was only using me. He even used me as a sex object. I finally decided that I should not allow myself to be hurt any more, so I took the children with me and found a place for us in the shelter. (p. 54)

I came to the conclusion that even if I were to struggle on, there would be no hope for our relationship. Rather than prolong the agony, I decided to divorce him. (p. 60)

At the end I had to accept the reality. Despite years of ren nai [exercising restraint] in order to save our marriage, we had to part. Perhaps this is yuan — the end of our yuan as wife and husband. (p. 68)

I learned to live again after leaving him. I now have a better understanding of yuan. With the blessing of those who cared about me, I left the shelter and took my first step as a single parent. (p. 82)

I often hear people say “yin yuan tian zhu ding” [marriage is predestined in heaven]. How I wish that mine could have lasted forever...but it was not to be. (p. 66)

All my life I have tried my best to fulfil my responsibilities and be kind to people. What have I done to deserve this? Perhaps it is yin guo [punishment for bad deeds in a former life]. (p. 108)

The women's recalling of this relationship status was substantially different from that of the previous status. Instead of enduring the abuse, they re-evaluated their situations. As the futility of their numerous efforts and attempts at endurance became apparent, they decided that something had to change. They began to look for an explanation for the failed relationship and found an answer in *yuan*: when *yuan* is over, the relationship ends. A key feature of their responses was a playing down of *ren* and an emphasis on *yuan*.

Although the women appeared not to rely on *ren* in this relationship status, *ren* was a part of their re-evaluation: they weighed up their efforts to improve the relationship and their partner's abusive behaviour. When repeated efforts had failed to change the abusiveness or to prevent further deterioration, they concluded that it was time to change their strategy. It is apparent that in the process of weighing up the situation, the women gained insights into the relationship and their partner's abusive behaviour. Further, they were prepared to act.

Yuan featured prominently in the women's accounts of this relationship status. They referred to *yuan* as the reason for the failed relationship, perceiving it as predetermined by external forces, referring to

"heaven" and "deeds of a former life." The women did not conceive *yuan* merely as a passive coping mechanism. This is evident in their use of *yuan* to explain why the relationship had failed despite their efforts to make it work. These women had no apparent feelings of guilt or self-blame. On the contrary, they were positive about their decision. One woman described her new life as "born again," another talked of her "new vision," and a third spoke of the "inner strength" she had mustered. Yet life was anything but easy for these women at that point. They were poor, were living in squalid conditions, and constantly had to hide from their abusers. As single parents, they had to fulfil the parenting role with insufficient social support and to live with social stigma and rejection. Despite these difficulties, they were positive. Some took the initiative to advance their education by enrolling in courses; others took up voluntary work to help other battered women or other people in need; all put effort into rebuilding a family life with their children in the aftermath of the abuse. There is no doubt that the support of families and friends played an important part in their rehabilitation. The shelter for abused women and social workers also played a key role in the recovery process. Given the women's references to *yuan*, it is possible that this concept was also responsible for their positive outlook and actions. Indeed, Lee (1995) suggests that *yuan* helps to preserve mental health by providing ready answers concerning life's vicissitudes, warding off feelings of guilt, and offering hope for the future.

It is clear that certain events caused these women to re-evaluate their situation and make the decision to end the relationship. In some cases the events were specific and extreme. For example, two of the women decided to leave after an episode of escalated violence when they thought they were going to die. Three were physically thrown out of the matrimonial home. In two cases, the abuse was extended to the children, causing the women to leave for the children's safety. For the others, however, the events were not so obvious and the decision to leave was a gradual one. The "suffocating effect" of the abuse, as described by one woman, repeated beatings, and lack of improvement in the partner's behaviour eventually convinced them that they had to end the relationship. The incidents that prompted these women to finally leave are not unique. They are similar to the "turning points" described in Campbell et al. (1998). The women in Hoff's (1990) study identified similar circumstances leading to their decision to leave. The complex process involved in deciding to leave is worth noting. The women in this study clearly had different thresholds for abuse, different perceptions of what was tolerable or intolerable, and different views on when it was time to leave.

Interestingly, none of the commentaries make reference to *yuan*. However, the commentaries clearly describe the resilience of the women:

In the end she decided to leave the home that had been her prison...even though the journey as a single parent was a difficult one, she was able to derive joy and comfort from the little achievement she made. (p. 85)

To Ah Ling, this is a valuable lesson. She has found herself...in the middle of the darkness. She has become a new person... I believe from now on nothing could stop her from living a free and self-determined life. (p. 75)

Discussion

As demonstrated in other studies, battered women are not passive victims (Campbell et al., 1998; Dutton, 1996; Koss et al., 1994). Rather, they actively strategize to survive in abusive relationships. The women in this study used strategies to protect themselves and their children from the abusive partner. Through the exercise of *ren*, they attempted to avoid further violence and maintain a harmonious relationship with the partner. Even when the relationship had to end, they attributed the failure to *yuan*, thus avoiding feelings of guilt and interpersonal hostility. Despite their vulnerability and socio-economic disadvantage, the women demonstrated strength, resilience, and resourcefulness in their struggle against the odds. This belief in *yuan* is significant. The stories of these women show that, even in a culture that condones violence against women, traditional Chinese values such as *yuan* can be used in a positive way.

The women's inclination to use *ren* in the face of violence may have stemmed from their socialization into Chinese women's roles. Maintaining harmony is of paramount importance in Chinese culture (Bond, 1991; Gao, Ting-Toomey, & Gudykunst, 1996), and the practice of *ren* is a way of avoiding discord. Also, women are expected to preserve harmony in the family, even if it means sacrificing themselves (Chen, 1991). Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that the women in this study chose to use *ren* in dealing with their abusive relationships.

This study reveals that socialization into traditional Chinese culture is particularly strong among certain social groups, such as immigrants from China. Among these more traditional groups, wife battering may be especially prevalent. The low status traditionally ascribed to women makes them more vulnerable in a community that gives men the right to control their wives. Also, women who have been socialized to tolerate their husband's bullying and violence will be reluctant to disclose

the abuse to outsiders for the sake of family harmony. Thus, front-line professionals should be particularly sensitive to the occurrence of wife battering in these groups, so that appropriate professional attention can be promptly provided.

Interestingly, none of the women identified the stress of immigration as the cause of their abuse even though, for most, the battering had begun after they arrived in Hong Kong. Indeed, the majority of them described vividly their joy and relief upon joining their partner in Hong Kong. Their immigrant status, however, seems to have adversely affected their ability to cope once the abuse started. Some of the women expressed difficulty coping with violence from an intimate partner in a foreign land without the support of family and friends. Educated in China, they were ill-qualified for the Hong Kong job market, and this precipitated their financial dependence on their husbands and their need to tolerate the violence at least initially. The disadvantages faced by abused immigrant women should be noted so that more effective intervention programs can be designed to meet their needs.

The findings of this study have implications for nursing. First, dealing with abusive relationships is a complex matter and not one of simply choosing between staying in or leaving the relationship. The woman has to use strategies that will maximize her own and her children's safety. Therefore, nurses should try to understand why women stay in abusive relationships and the context of their response to battering. This would help to prevent disparity between the woman's and the nurse's point of view and thus facilitate communication. Second, the woman's verbalization of her responses to battering evolves with the status of the relationship. While still in the relationship, the woman is likely to express the need to endure the situation. However, once the decision is made to end the relationship, she is more inclined to talk about its failure as predestined and her about her hopes for a better future. The change of view is clearly detectable in the woman's discourse. By soliciting the woman's view of her relationship, the nurse may be able to assess the relationship status, then use the assessment to offer culturally sensitive care based on her readiness to stay in or leave the relationship. Finally, the nurse can help the woman to develop a safety plan in accordance with her relationship status. For example, while she is still enduring the violence the woman may be helped to devise ways to protect herself and her children, such as by seeking assistance from social services or identifying neighbours who might provide help in case of emergency. When a decision is made to leave the relationship, the nurse can advise the woman to prepare for the final departure, such as by packing important documents and obtain-

ing contact numbers for a women's shelter. This partnership in developing a safety plan would not only improve understanding between the woman and the nurse, but also empower the woman to overcome the effects of the abuse.

Conclusion

A major limitation of this study is that the women recalled their abusive experience retrospectively. Future studies may focus on uncovering responses to battering as they occur. Also, the study involved mainly immigrant women; more indigenous Hong Kong Chinese women should be included in future studies to allow a comparison of results. In this study the women were unable to participate in the construction of meaning during the analysis. A process such as negotiated thematic analysis would have allowed them to participate in the analysis and thus add breadth and depth. In addition, as culture is only one aspect of the abusive situation, the interaction of social, economic, political, and cultural factors in influencing women's responses to battering should also be explored.

Despite its limitations, this study offers insight into women's responses to battering within the Chinese cultural context. The women's accounts reveal the Chinese values of *ren* and *yuan* in their responses to battering. Far from being passive victims, these women actively used strategies to help them survive in the abusive relationship. Their strategies were purposeful and varied according to the status of their relationship. The women's strength, resilience, and resourcefulness are clearly demonstrated in their responses to battering.

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Authors' Note

Questions or comments should be directed to: Dr. Aggi Tiwari, Department of Nursing Studies, University of Hong Kong, G/F, Block B, Queen Mary Hospital, Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong. Telephone: 852 2819 2629. Fax: 852 2872 6079. E-mail: <afytiwar@hkucc.hku.hk>.