Doing Ethnography in Business: Identity Manipulation and Its Implications

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This paper is an autoethnography of my experiences during participant observation in a business organization in Hong Kong. The paper examines an ethnographer's manipulations of cultural identity in the field, its connection to the cultural context of Hong Kong society, and its implications for business. Furthermore, this paper analyzes, through the lens of an anthropologist who was born in mainland China and educated both in mainland China and Japan, the process of identity manipulation based on 1.5 years of fieldwork in a Japanese multinational retailer in Hong Kong. During my participation in the retail shops as a full-time intern, I assumed multiple cultural identities related to ethnicity and social class, and sometimes I felt the necessity to manipulate these identities to seem like an insider to achieve my personal research objectives. This paper describes the process of identity manipulation to reveal the complex web of identity, society, politics, and culture, and how individuals can take an active role in self-interpretation in the realization of personal aims. It also discusses the basic skills which a good ethnographer should possess, such as being a silent listener, maintaining a neutral stance, and thinking holistically; these skills are similar to those needed by a good manager.

Keywords: autoethnography, multiple identity, manipulation, business

INTRODUCTION

As Kramsch (2012, 483) stated, "mobility and global flows are slowly erasing cultural and national origins." That is to say, the complexity of cultural identity is increasing in the modern era. With the massive and dramatic movement and communication of people thanks to the innovation and sophistication of technology, cultural identity is now becoming fragmented, composed not of a single but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities. This shift does not indicate that people have separate individual cultural identities; rather, it is more about negotiating meaning among such identities. The increasing complexity of cultural identity has also influenced modern business operations. Companies no longer manage people from a single cultural identity with homogenous behavior and cultural characteristics, but multiple identities based on socially constructed differences, such as ethnicity, race, and gender. Managing people from various cultural backgrounds has been one of the most important yet challenging tasks for managers in internationally operating companies. Numerous studies have examined the identity shift and changes linked to the international movement of people in business and how the development of corporate identity has been influenced by such changes in the business environment and/or organizational restructure. However, research relating to how a person changes

his/her identity and how such changes relate to the surrounding sociopolitical and cultural environment has remained largely under-researched.

This paper uses the autoethnographic approach to examine the individual changes in multiple identities so as to reveal the complex web of identity formation and shifts in response to changes in the sociopolitical and cultural sphere. In contrast to the conventional literature on identity, this paper focuses less on the passive aspect of identity and aims at shedding light on the proactive side of identity, particularly by showing how an individuals with multicultural backgrounds can take an active role in self-interpretation and seek personal gain based on his/her understanding of the culture. This paper also discusses the potential implications of incorporating the basic skills of an ethnographer into corporate training. Starting with a review of previous publications on identity and autoethnography, this paper then goes on to introduce the field site, and then discusses the reasons for identity manipulation and its processes.

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Identity is a way for a person to identify himself/herself, while the self as self-representation comprises of culturally shaped constructs of the self which one applies to oneself. Cultural identity is a social construction that gives the individual a sense of being and ways of acting (Yep 1998). Some scholars have argued that "I" is not a unified subject, but it is a "solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. 'I' is, itself in *infinite layers*" (Trinh 1989, 94). Cultural identities are characterized as "political, fluid, and nonsummative (Yep 1998; Yep Lovaas, and Pagnois, 2002)". "Political" refers to the fact that few people are ranked at the top of the social hierarchy, while many others are in lower positions (Bornstein 1998). The term "fluid" indicates that cultural identity is evolving, growing, and ever-changing, and individuals can move within the power hierarchy, and the term "nonsummative" means one's cultural identity cannot be quantified or separated from the aspects of identity which are related to culture, race, class, gender, or sexuality because a multicultural, "hybrid" person is the sum total of all these elements (Yep 1998). Takagi (1992) wrote that "marginalization is not as much about the quantities of experiences as it is about qualities of experience" (22-23).

Autoethnography provides a space to express the complexity of identity and disrupts the illusion of homogeneity of particular groups of people. Using self-examination, autoethnography explores cultural, political, and social issues through personal experience (Deitering, Stoddart, Schroeder 2017). Through theoretical, methodological, and textual approaches, autoethnography reflects on and is represented through "evocation [of] the relationship among self and culture, individual and collective experience, and identity politics" (Stacy 2007). Multiple identities are not individually separate from each other; rather, people are always "in between" these identities. While some might get confused, others can naturally switch from one to another. In her book, *Creating a Multivocal Self: Autoethnography as Method*, Julie Choi (2016) described the importance of *working in the middle of things* as a necessary condition in speaking about a multilingual life based on the examination of how language shapes identity performances and the potential for new identity formations.

Multiple identities, changes of identities, and construction of different sets of identities have raised the awareness of many business organizations along with the increasing flow of business across borders. Multiple group memberships exist in an organization, as each membership can belong to both the company and an individual group. Business organization, representing one type of community, supports presentation of self; therefore, identity management is significant for employees whose membership crosses organizational power relationships. People project themselves into their cultural identities, internalize their meanings and values, and make them a part of them. In business literature, identity construction and management have been considered to have a significant impact not only on employees themselves both psychologically and physically, but also on the overall performance of a business organization (Wayne and Liden 1995; Harris, et al. 2007; Vecchio and Sussmann 1991). In relation to autoethnography in business settings, a book edited by Andrew Herrman (2017), *Organizational*

Autoethnographies: Power and Identity in Our Working Lives, discussed various issues such as power, gender, work identity, sense making, and psychological contracts in workplace. It provides the reader with a vivid and dynamic picture of the modern workplace and how it is changing.

This paper aims at "peeling off" the layers of my cultural identities by describing how I made the shift from one to another and operated in-between these identities. The autoethnographic approach to my long-term fieldwork in a Japanese company operating in Hong Kong explores how I behaved based on my interpretations of specific national cultures and corporate culture. It also aims at presenting the features of cultural identities as fluid, political, and nonsummative.

SETTING THE SCENE

On July 1, 1997, Hong Kong's sovereignty was returned to China, and before and since then, Hong Kong has kept its unique position as a place where West meets East, and is associated with concepts such as capitalism, cosmopolitanism, and post-colonialism. The socio-political sphere in Hong Kong in relation to the development of the local economy, the emergence of local identity, and a competitive job market have largely influenced employee mindset and corporate culture.

Under the policy of "one country, two systems" implemented after the handover, Hong Kong's economy has struggled with three external shocks, including the Asian Financial Crisis which started in 1997, the bursting of the so-called "dot.com" bubble around 2000, and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic that lasted from 2002 to 2003. Despite such setbacks, the economy of Hong Kong has relatively continued to grow steadily with the opening of its doors to increasing Chinese investment and collaboration through projects such as the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) in 2003, and the opening of the high-speed rail link and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge in 2018. Meanwhile, there have been direct/indirect socio-political conflicts in terms of control and sovereignty. For instance, the 2014 Hong Kong protests (i.e., The Umbrella Movement) for political freedom demonstrated the increasing conflict between Hong Kong and mainland China. The protests have received global media attention. An increasing number of mainland Chinese have been traveling to Hong Kong, which has been claimed to contribute to create a shortage of milk powder supplies, threatening basic healthcare, and lowering social morality (Chris 2011, Tsang 2016, Lazarus 2016; Brown 2015).

Economic opportunities and threats in the socio-political sphere have contributed to the birth of a rather new notion of local identity. The University of Hong Kong has conducted an ethnic identity poll, and its 2018 results show that more people have identified themselves as "Hongkonger" (Hoeng gong jan 香港人 in Cantonese, meaning Hong Kong person) or "Hongkonger in China" rather than "Chinese" and "Chinese in Hong Kong." This result indicates that Hong Kong identity is in a period of transition, particularly after the handover.

The above discussion describes how local people in Hong Kong have felt about mainland China as well as toward their local identity, but how does Japan fit into this context? Some scholars have argued that the introduction, implementation, and consumption of Japanese culture, such as the interest in Japanese popular culture (Iwabuchi 2002), learning of new type of shopping culture in a department store (Chan 2000), love of made-in-Japan products (Zhu 2016), and the change of meaning of supermarkets (Wong 2009), have contributed to shape a unique local identity by providing something "sophisticated" culturally and superior than local culture. However, this does not mean that the people of Hong Kong accept it uncritically since the cultural logic of Hong Kong is to deny the "unifying cultural foundations" and that "they want or need to embrace and ridicule at the same time" (Chan 2000:53).

Hong Kong also has a competitive job market where the ability to speak at least two languages, Cantonese and English, tends to be a basic requirement for many retailers to satisfy the needs of foreign visitors as well as local residents. This has, to some extent, created an education and social class gap among employees. As Hong Kong is a former British colony, English is used as the primary language of instruction in many local schools, and the emphasis on English use has been pronounced in comparison to mainland China and Japan. This does not mean that all Hong Kongers have the same level of English proficiency; the reality is quite the opposite because of differences in educational experiences as well as

socioeconomic background. While some Hong Kongers have had the opportunity to study overseas for their primary education, others have studied in local schools with limited exposure to English. This education gap has created a divide between privileged Hong Kongers (i.e., those who are fluent in both languages) and others (i.e., those who can only speak Cantonese or limited English). Having a bachelor's degree also leads to better career opportunities. While pursuing higher education is the dream of many local young teens, the increasing number of applicants each year and the limited number of higher education institutions has resulted in a limited number of young people who are able to study at prestigious universities (or any university) in Hong Kong.[1]

English language and educational gaps have created paradoxical emotions among members of the local young generation, in particular, those who pursue jobs after graduating from secondary school. A mixture of feeling superior as well as inferior to people with higher education degrees was also observed at my fieldwork site, here called as Ichi. On the one hand, secondary school graduates at Ichi felt confident about their years of work experience in comparison to the fresh university graduates who generally had no or little work experience. On the other hand, the secondary school graduates felt inferior due to their lack of a university degree and lower English proficiency level. This complex feeling of superiority/inferiority also reinforced the implicit social class division in Hong Kong distinguishing privileged people from others on the basis of their educational background and English proficiency level.

In such a complicated and dynamic social, political, and economic environment, Ichi, a Japanese fashion retailer, entered the Hong Kong market in 2005. Thanks to its unique business model, appropriate location, operational strategy, and the love of Japanese products among local shoppers in Hong Kong, the company enjoyed huge success from the very first year in the market. This was unexpected for the Japanese top management, since previous overseas operations had shown only limited results; therefore, Hong Kong became a representative success case. To save costs, maintain efficiency, and stay flexible to the local market, Ichi proactively recruited local talent, and almost all the store managers were from the local area and were relatively young, on average, in their 20s or 30s.

The store where I spent most of my fieldwork days was what I call the ET store, which was located in a shopping mall in a new area of Eastern Hong Kong surrounded by several new residential housing neighborhoods and shopping malls. The shopping mall wherein the Ichi store is located is one of the large-scale shopping arcades in the area's center. Most of the shops inside the shopping mall are chain stores targeting primarily middle to upper-income customers. Sometimes tourists visit the store, but most of the regular customers live nearby. The shopping mall receives a relatively large number of visitors on a daily basis because it is directly connected to a metro station. This type of store location is common in Hong Kong, where numerous shopping malls are connected to metro stations.

My shift of work normally started early in the morning, which was considered the best shift since employees can go home before dinner time. It took about 50 minutes to 1 hour to get from my house to the store using both bus and the metro. After arriving at the metro station, I normally bought breakfast from a nearby bakery or local restaurant. With my breakfast in one hand, I would greet my colleagues, and then I would sit down in the staffroom to write down the daily announcements. In general, there were around ten to fifteen morning-shift employees, including both full-timers and part-timers. The average age of the Ichi employees in Hong Kong was slightly lower than that of Japan because Japan has more housewives working as part-timers, which raised the average age, and also owing to policy of the local Hong Kong head office to create a young and fresh store atmosphere. While many full-timers had previous work experience in retail or related industries, the part-timers were mostly high school or college students or people who were looking for full-time jobs.

I felt comfortable in this work environment since I was also a student in graduate school and spent most of my time interacting with the young part-timers. However, I cannot deny the fact that I was nervous about how I was perceived by them, and if I would ever be perceived as an *insider*, which would help me to obtain sufficient data. Although at first most of my energy was spent learning the actual job tasks, I gradually was able to focus more on understanding the culture of the store and interpreting the behaviors of the employees, and based on these understandings and interpretations, I started to project the identity I thought they wished to see in me so as to achieve my objectives as a researcher.

SELF-REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY MANIPULATION

This section discusses my identities related to social class and ethnicity to represent the fluid, political, and "nonsummative" features of cultural identity, and how I was "in-between" my identities. First, I sometimes hid my position as a student in a prestigious university to downgrade my projected social class, while at other times, I used this as a way to become closer to people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. I could not have imagined that my educational background would have influenced my interactions with locals at the beginning, but after observation and conversations for several weeks, I found many secondary school graduates had mixed feelings toward people with higher education degree, particularly the management trainees who mostly had bachelor's degree. Many secondary school graduates seemed to have felt inferior to and jealous of the management trainees. They seemed to feel inferior because of their lack of a bachelor's degree and lower English proficiency level, while it appeared that they also felt jealous of the fact that the management trainees were entitled to a fast track to a management position because of their educational background. "Unfair" was another term they used to describe this situation related to the management trainees because most of the trainees had just graduated from university and had much less work experience than some of the secondary school graduates. Giving fresh university graduates a fast track to a management position is not an uncommon practice in Japan, but the local Hong Kongers working at Ichi seemed to have strong resentment for this idea. This is probably also due to the fact that majority of the local store managers in Hong Kong are promoted to their management position on the basis of their years of experience rather than their educational background.

The negative feelings of the non-management trainees toward the management trainees were sometimes apparent, and in fact, such sentiments were also apparent among the full-timers. I remember groups of full-timers, who were considered to have seniority because of their longer periods of working at Ichi (normally more than six months), displayed their resentment toward one female management trainee who had just graduated from a prestigious local university by intentionally not following her managerial instructions. The full-timers also complained about her poor work abilities behind her back with each other and even with other managers; one store manager even agreed with them and encouraged such discussions. On the other hand, that particular female management trainee was also reluctant to interact with others not only because she felt such resentment against her, but also because she felt that talking to them was a waste of time and was below her intellectual standards. During the lunch break, which most of the employees would spend in the staff room, the female management trainee would open an English novel and read while eating. This behavior showed her reluctance to talk to anyone in the room as well as her superiority for being an educated person with English fluency.

These complex feelings and conflicts at the field site led me to hide my educational background, including my attendance at a prestigious university and my English ability. Looking back at this experience, I believe I was trying to create an image of a person who possessed sufficient knowledge and language abilities, but yet was able to feel empathy toward others. For instance, I did not talk about my graduate school life proactively with the part-timers unless I was asked, but rather tried to show my empathy toward what they had to say about the female management trainees, and vice versa. Most of the time, this means that I needed to join their chitchat sessions where particular staff members were gossiped about. Although sometimes I did not feel like it, I went along on these occasions anyways to collect data as holistically as possible. I was not sure if this worked or not, but on some occasions, the part-timers said they wanted me to be a management trainee at Ichi because they could bear to work with me.

In contrast, I intentionally talked about my life as a graduate student at the prestigious local university as a way of connecting with the management trainee, which gave me access to valuable information by talking to her. Honestly speaking, I myself sometimes felt resentment toward her because of her rude treatment with the staff members, including myself, as I forgot about me simply being a researcher in the field. Later, through discussions with her, I showed empathy concerning the issues she was struggling with. Showing empathy toward her was, in fact, not my intention, because of my previous

bad experiences working with her, but listening to her story, I also realized that people can be blind sometimes to the feelings of others.

I also tried not to display my level of English proficiency, but did not hesitate to do so when needed necessarily. For instance, once a part-timer, and on another occasion, a full-timer, suddenly asked me how to pronounce a particular type of fabric on the shop floor, and I was able to spell them. They were impressed by me, as they were trying to test my English abilities. Some might have wondered why local employees cared so much about English proficiency, since Hong Kong is well-known as a place where people can often speak both Cantonese and English, but this does not apply to all situations. English is a mandatory skill for many retail workers, but this is, in general, limited to higher-end and luxury shops. Although the average English level in Hong Kong is higher than in many other countries and regions, it is also true that the native language, Cantonese, plays a more significant role in verbal communication, which means that English is not a mandatory skill for non-work-related daily communication.[2] I am not a native English speaker, but as I mentioned above, the ability to speak English is a part-timer's way to distinguish themselves from others; therefore, while I tried not to emphasize my English proficiency, I would not hesitate to show it if it was important for my fieldwork.

The above discussion showed how I manipulated my educational background and English level so as to adjust my perceived social class according to the person or group I was interacting with. It expressed that such cultural identity has the characteristic of fluidity, as I positioned myself in-between the so-called privileged and non-privileged classes by showing empathy toward both sides. This implies that individuals can proactively and strategically move between privileged groups representing superiority and power, and non-privileged groups, representing inferiority and powerlessness according to what the individuals want to achieve in a particular scenario.

Furthermore, I intentionally manipulated my ethnic identity to portray myself as either Taiwanese or Japanese according to the situation. I am ethnically mainland Chinese, as are my parents, and I have a Chinese passport. I can speak fluent Mandarin thanks to my studies in junior and senior high school in China. This was straightforward and not confusing, but I am also a native Japanese speaker thanks to my primary and higher education in Japan. Therefore, when I was asked where I was from, I normally answered that "I was born in mainland China, but raised in both mainland China and Japan." However, I would emphasize either the former (born in mainland China) or the latter (raised in both mainland China and Japan) depending on the situation. I was not unfamiliar with the misidentification of my ethnicity since I have experiences of being misidentified as a Japanese person while I was in Western countries, as a Korean in China, and so on. I was used to this type of misidentification because sometimes I simply just do not care, and I am also unable to categorize myself into the single ethnicity of being mainland Chinese, although I do not, by blood, belong to any other ethnicities. What surprised me during my fieldwork at Ichi was that many locals felt more comfortable labeling me as Taiwanese or sometimes Japanese than mainland Chinese. I still remember when a local male part-timer, after we discussed my personal experiences living in mainland China and Japan, he said, "You shouldn't tell others you are mainland Chinese. You can just say you are Taiwanese." I did go along with his suggestion by emphasizing the Taiwanese/Japanese categorization since I wanted to avoid inflaming the increasing anti-China sentiment in Hong Kong.

The logic of the local Ichi employees, which also reflected the way I interpreted and reinterpreted my ethnic identity, had several explanations. First, my Mandarin has a Southern accent, which they found more familiar and distanced from mainland China, since they tended to stereotype the Northern accent (or some people called it standard Mandarin) as mainland Chinese. I also sometimes intentionally imitated the Taiwanese accent or tried to speak like a typical Southern person. Speaking Southern-accented Mandarin is probably due to my study experience at a junior high school in Southern China, where I learnt Mandarin as well as some of the local dialect, and then at a senior high school I attended in Northern China, where I learnt "standard" Mandarin, and finally at graduate school in Hong Kong while talking to local and Taiwanese classmates in Mandarin who had stronger Southern accents.

Some of my behaviors and external appearances have also helped stereotype my image of being Taiwanese/Japanese. Take my way of speaking, for example, being educated and having lived in Japan, I

learnt the Japanese way of how to be polite to others, which is often considered to be too much in Hong Kong, but they still seemed to appreciate being properly apologized and being thanked for small favors. I recall that once a local store manager told me that she was impressed by a Japanese store manager who greeted a bus driver with a smile, and described the Japanese store manager as "kind" and "nice." I also felt many local employees were genuinely surprised and grateful when I thanked them for small favors. Some of them would say, "No need to thank me. It's just a small thing." However, I would still thank them the next time they did a similar favor because I found that this was a way for me to show my distinctiveness as well as demonstrate the Japanese part of my cultural identity, which was something that locals felt to be superior to their own culture. When I thanked them, I would also not forget to smile, since I found this to be an effective way of showing Japanese politeness, although this did not mean I would behave in this way in my daily life. Such polite behaviors successfully attributed strong images of non-mainland Chinese or Japanese to my identity.

External appearance, such as the use of makeup, also provided me with space to manipulate my cultural identity. Because of the exposure to popular culture and frequent visitors, the local staff found that young Japanese and Taiwanese women wore makeup more often and more detail-focused than Hong Kong women. Wearing makeup was not a strange act for me, nor was it difficult, because it is common in Japan to do so and I became used to it while living there. I did not spend much time on makeup during my fieldwork, but from the local employees' perspective, I wore Japanese style makeup, which was considered time-consuming to apply. Makeup was also a way for the locals to distinguish mainland Chinese from Japanese/Taiwanese tourists, since most young mainland Chinese women seem to spend no or little time on makeup. Hong Kong working women also wear makeup in general, but many students do not, while Taiwanese and Japanese students have higher percentages of doing so. I did not have any intentions at that time of making myself appear more Japanese, but I was aware of some of the underlying rules, such as wishing for a soft look while penciling in my eyebrows and applying eye liners, rather than a dramatic makeup look, which could be considered a typical characteristic of Japanese and Taiwanese makeup, in comparison to the typical Korean style.

My discussions on behavior and external appearance provided me with several examples of manipulating my ethnic identity at Ichi, in my attempts to avoid being labeled as mainland Chinese and inflaming anti-China sentiment. This shows the political aspect of cultural identity because my intention was based on my understanding of the political conflict between mainland China and Hong Kong. It also shows my "in-between" position, since I did not want to clearly identify myself as either Taiwanese or Japanese, but rather show both sides of my identity, because I assumed the locals would not regard me as purely Japanese or Taiwanese since I am ethnically neither.

Besides the political and fluidity features, examples of social class and ethnicity also demonstrate the "nonsummative" feature since these identities cannot be quantified or separated. These aspects of my identity are due to educational background, language ability, experiences of studying and living abroad, my interpretation of national cultures and corporate culture and ethnic origin. As Yep described, this type of "multicultural 'hybrid' person is the sum total of all these elements (2000:53, quotation from original publication)." Besides the totality of these features, it also implies that individuals are mostly in-between their multiple identities.

This paper has several practical business implications, particularly concerning how to incorporate ethnographic skills in management, since being a good ethnographer has many similarities to being a good manager because both have gained skills, such as being able to holistically analyze the situations they were put in, gathering sufficient information for their analysis, and gaining various perspectives from different stakeholders. Here, we leave the definition of "good" to other papers, but being a good ethnographer/manager is challenging because both need to have soft skills to understand and communicate with people. This does not intend to promote my experience as an example of a good ethnographer, but rather aims at summarizing points for a possible future study incorporating ethnography into management training.

First, an ethnographer/manager needs to be a silent listener. An ethnographer/manager needs to not only avoid getting in the middle of workplace politics, but also needs to build trusting relationships with

different parties. They must have the bigger picture in mind concerning what their goals are and find the best ways to achieve them. Second, an ethnographer/manager needs to remain neutral. It is expected for an ethnographer to be "blank" before and while in the field, and this might be challenging for a manager; however, the important point is for them to be a "stranger" as much as possible to find a fresh look at existing issues, which may eventually lead to innovative solutions. Third, an ethnographer/manager needs to be less emotionally attached to the organization they are investigating to remain objective. It is natural for a human being to be emotional, and emotional skills can be powerful if properly used; however, at the workplace, it is necessary to rethink what their roles are and properly execute them at work.

CONCLUSION

This paper is an autoethnography of my experiences as a participant observer in a business organization, and aims at examining the manipulation of identity in the field, further understanding the surrounding cultural context, and the implications for business. This paper by a researcher who was born in mainland China and educated both in mainland China and Japan analyzes the process of identity manipulation on the basis of 1.5 years of fieldwork in a Japanese fashion retailer in Hong Kong. During my participation in the retail shops as a full-time intern, I assumed multiple identities related to ethnicity and social class, and sometimes I felt that it was necessary to manipulate these identities to build trusting relationships and achieve my objectives as a researcher. This autoethnography implies how the complexity of the sociopolitical environment of Hong Kong, as well as its relations with mainland China and Japan, have contributed to the creation of a dynamic space, and how my interpretation of the workplace environment prompted me to behave in certain ways. Based on the arguments of previous scholars on cultural identity, this paper also presented and confirmed the features of cultural identity: that it is political, fluid, and "nonsummative". My manipulation of multiple identities implies that ethnographers could be proactive in making good use of their identities as academic fieldworkers to improve research outcomes.

This paper has several implications for management. Good ethnographers and good managers possess similar skills. A manager may want to avoid workplace politics, rather to build trusting relationships with various stakeholders, which in general an ethnographer will bear in mind during the fieldwork. A manager may also want to stay as a "stranger" so as to gain fresh perspectives, which sometimes leads to innovative solutions, and this is also similar to an ethnographer's effort to remain a "blank paper" during the fieldwork. Lastly, a manager needs an ability to stay rational for sensemaking while also trying discerning emotions and behaviors to have a holistic perspective, which has also been a goal for an ethnographer in the field.

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ENDNOTES

1. The report shows only 47.2 percent of Hong Kong pupils thought they would finish their university education, compared with 80.9 percent in South Korea and 70.1 percent in Singapore (Ada 2003). Many part-timers at that time told me that they aimed at doing an associate degree to find a decent job, and if not possible, they would consider pursuing a bachelor's degree.
2. Regardless of individual English proficiency level, they would normally use English to send text messages or post on social media sites, while they would use Cantonese for oral communication.

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