

# Chapter 13

## The Ethnic System of Supplementary Education: Nonprofit and For-Profit Institutions in Los Angeles' Chinese Immigrant Community

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**I**nformal social settings outside of school are as important as formal educational settings for children's learning and achievement. In the United States, informal settings are often organized by ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) to mediate the processes of individual learning, which consequently lead to intergroup differences in educational outcomes. This chapter examines how a particular type of informal social setting is created and structured by the ethnic community to generate resources for school success. By looking specifically into the nonprofit and for-profit institutions serving young children and youth in Los Angeles' Chinese immigrant community, I unfold an ethnic system of supplementary education that not only offers tangible support but also reinforces cultural norms in pushing immigrant children to succeed in school.<sup>1</sup>

### Behind the Ethnic Success Story: Community Forces and the Ethnic Social Environment

The 2000 U.S. Census shows that nearly three-quarters (73%) of U.S.-born Chinese Americans between ages 25 and 34 (and half of U.S.-born Asian Americans) have attained at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 15% of African Americans and 30% of whites (Xie & Goyette, 2004). What is more striking is that the children of Chinese immigrants, who are from low-income

immigrant or refugee families, live in Chinatowns, and attend urban public schools in poor neighborhoods, also manage to show up as their high school valedictorians or in freshmen classes of prestigious colleges and universities in disproportionately large numbers. The high educational achievement among Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans seems to have continually perpetuated the model minority stereotype. However, what is behind the ethnic success story is more complicated than what statistical data suggest. For a long time, educators and researchers have sought to explain the unequal educational outcomes of different ethnic minorities by focusing on either cultural factors—an ethnic group's traits, qualities, and behavioral patterns—or on structural factors—a group's unique historical encounters of domination and subjugation, socioeconomic backgrounds, immigration selectivity, labor market conditions, and residential patterns. For example, some studies have found that residential segregation and social exclusion of poor African Americans give rise to distinct values and norms that are at odds with those of mainstream society in regard to work, money, education, home, and family life (Wilson, 1996), or even to an oppositional collective social identity that entails a willful refusal of mainstream norms and values relating to school success (Fordham, 1996; Fukuyama, 1993; Kohl, 1994; Ogbu, 1974). These values and norms in turn lead to a set of self-defeating behavioral problems, such as labor-force nonparticipation, out-of-wedlock births, welfare dependency, school failure, drug addiction, and chronic lawlessness (Lewis, 1966; Wilson, 1996). Other studies, in contrast, have found that low-income families of racial/ethnic minorities tend to concentrate in poverty-stricken and unsafe inner-city neighborhoods. Parents who lack human capital (e.g., education, professional job skills, and English proficiency for immigrants) have few options other than to send their children to dilapidated urban schools that have inadequate facilities and resources, poorly trained and inexperienced teachers, and large proportions of low-achieving students, hence putting children at a much higher risk of school failure (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 2005; Massey & Denton, 1995; Olsen, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). These explanations, however, largely overlook certain ethnic social settings, which create resources conducive to education for co-ethnic group members to the exclusion of non-co-ethnic members, who may share the same neighborhood and the same access to public education.

In my view, ethnicity cannot be simply viewed as either a cultural or a structural measure. Rather, it encompasses values, norms, and behavioral patterns that are constantly interacting with both internal and external structural exigencies, such as group-specific contexts of exit and reception.<sup>2</sup> In American society, the concept of ethnicity is inherently interacted with social class. That is, the educational experience of Chinese Americans in Los Angeles may not be the same as that of Mexican Americans in the same metropolis, because the children of these two ethnic groups grow up in

different informal social settings. One particular type of such settings is what I term the ethnic social environment.

What is in the ethnic social environment that affects education? We know that social class shapes both formal and informal social settings and has a powerful impact on children's educational experience and their future life chances (Gordon, Bridglall, & Meroe, 2005). Children of middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds have access to quality public schools in their neighborhoods or to private schools that are more resourceful. These children are also exposed to informal social settings in support of academic achievement, such as families with highly educated and well-informed parents practicing "concerted cultivation" (Lareau, 2003), and communities in which positive and caring adult role models are next door and various preschool education, afterschool tutoring, and extracurricular activities are around the corner (Zhou et al., 2000). Children of low-income families, in contrast, live in homes and communities with fewer human capital, cultural capital, and social capital resources conducive to education. They have to attend poor urban schools that are often understaffed and insufficiently funded. Moreover, their lived experiences growing up in socioeconomically disadvantaged cultural communities are usually not reflected in school curricula, readers, textbooks, and other learning materials (Scribner and Cole, 1991). Furthermore, they are disproportionately tracked into low-ability and low-performing classes (Kozol, 2005; Olsen, 1997; Xiong & Zhou, 2005). Such incongruous formal educational settings are further exacerbated by seemingly disruptive informal social settings plagued by extreme poverty, high crime, social disorganization, and economic disinvestment (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Boykin & Allen, 1991; Ogbu, 1974; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

However, informal social settings are also mediated by race or ethnicity to reinforce or undercut class disadvantages (Gordon et al., 2005). Native-born African American parents, Latino immigrant parents, and Asian immigrant parents in low-income neighborhoods all stress the value of education for their children, and the children of these racial groups all agree that education is imperative in securing a good job (Carter, 2005; Lareau, 2003; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Yet, only the children of Asian immigrants as a group seem to have gained an upper hand in actualizing that value and show higher rates of academic success than other minority groups (Portes & MacLeod, 1996; Steinberg, 1996). It seems that what determines a child's learning and development is not merely social class but also what Ogbu and his associates call "community forces," which also affect informal social settings in ethnic-specific ways.

According to Ogbu and his associates, community forces are the products of sociocultural adaptation embedded within a cultural community, which entails specific beliefs, interpretations, and coping strategies that

a racial/ethnic group adopts in response to often hostile societal treatment or social exclusion (Fong, 2003; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1974; Ogbu & Simon, 1998). Ethnic minorities can turn their distinctive heritages into a kind of ethnic armor and establish a sense of collective dignity. This strategy enables them to cope psychologically, even in the face of discrimination and exclusion, or to accept and internalize socially imposed inferiority as part of their collective self-definition and to develop an “oppositional outlook” toward the dominant group and mainstream institutions, including education (Fordham, 1996; Ogbu & Simon, 1998).

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While community forces refer to a common cultural heritage along with a set of shared values, beliefs, behavioral standards, and coping strategies with which members of a cultural community are generally identified, I argue that these community forces must arise from and be supported by the social structures of an ethnic community. Thus, the ethnic community should neither be simply understood as a neighborhood where a particular ethnic group’s members and/or businesses concentrate nor as a geographically unbounded racial or ethnic identity in the abstract. Rather, it contains various ethnic structures, such as economic organizations, sociocultural institutions, and interpersonal networks that have been established, operated, and maintained by group members. Because community forces dictate the orientation, coping strategies, and corresponding behaviors of different ethnic groups in regard to mobility goals and means of achieving these goals, informal social settings created and regulated by these forces are likely to facilitate or hinder educational achievement and other long-term mobility goals independent of social class factors (Fernandez-Kelly, 1995; Fordham, 1996).

The informal social settings with which the children of Chinese immigrants are in daily contact may be understood through ethnic social structures in the immigrant community, including various economic, social, and cultural organizations as well as the social networks arising from co-ethnic members’ participation in these ethnic organizations. Therefore, an examination of specific ethnic social structures can provide insight into how ethnicity interacts with social class to create a particular social environment to promote academic achievement of immigrant children. The aim of this chapter is not to explain the differences in educational outcomes between Chinese and other ethnic groups but rather to describe a particular type of informal setting to which a successful group of immigrant children is routinely exposed. I try to find out why the children of Chinese immigrants, regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds, excel and succeed in the educational arena in disproportionately large numbers. I do so through an in-depth examination of how nonprofit and for-profit ethnic institutions serving children and youth are developed to form an ethnic system of supplementary education in the Chinese immigrant community in Los Angeles.<sup>3</sup>

## The Formation of the Ethnic Social Environment Conducive to Education

### *Cultural Values and Norms for Educational Achievement*

While education is generally considered a primary means to upward social mobility in all American families, the educational value is emphasized in some unique ways in the immigrant Chinese family as it is transplanted in the new homeland. First, the children's educational success is very much tied to face saving for the traditional Chinese family. Parents in China and Chinese immigrant parents in the United States often explicitly or implicitly remind their children that achievement is a duty and an obligation to the family rather than to an individual goal and that, if they fail, they will bring shame to the family. This time-honored face-saving norm has been carried over to America to form a community force that drives both children and parents in the area of education. Children are under pressure to excel in every step along the path to a good college education. Their success is not only bragged about by parents among relatives, friends, and co-ethnic coworkers but also featured in Chinese language newspapers, club/organization newsletters, and even radio and television programs. Parents, on the other hand, are under pressure to facilitate their children's education not just to honor family and to vindicate their own sacrifices associated with immigration but also to show to their community that they are *good* parents.

Chinese immigrant parents also take a pragmatic stance on education. They see education not only as the most effectively means to success in society but also the *only* means (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). The parents are keenly aware of their own limitations as immigrants and the larger structural constraints, such as limited family wealth even among middle-income immigrants, lack of access to social networks connecting to the mainstream economy and various social and political institutions, and entry barriers to certain occupations because of racial stereotyping and discrimination. Their own experience tells them that a good education in certain fields would be a safe bet for their children to get good jobs in the future. These fields include science, math, engineering, and medicine, as well as business and law to a lesser extent. Therefore, in practice, the parents are concerned more about their children's academic coursework, grades, majors, and college rankings than about the children's well-rounded learning experience. They would discourage their children's interests in pursuing history, literature, music, dance, sports, or anything that they consider unlikely to lead to well-paying, stable jobs but pressure their children to get involved in these academic fields and extracurricular activities only to the extent that such involvement would

enhance the children's chance of getting into Ivy League colleges and other prestigious universities. Even though the children often get frustrated by the fact that their parents choose the type of education for them and make decisions for their future, many of them end up internalizing their parents' educational values.

Cultural values and norms are one thing. Everyday practices and outcomes are quite another. How does the immigrant family ensure that norms are effective and that values are actualized? In American society, the immigrant family alone cannot ensure that the children excel in school, as opposed to being just like everybody else on average, even if that family has sufficient socioeconomic resources. The U.S.-born or U.S.-raised children can readily fight back if they feel that their immigrant parents are imposing on them old-world norms and values that are at odds with those of American mainstream. In the Chinese immigrant community, there are specific ethnic social structures, in the form of nonprofit and for-profit institutions, in support of education. Next, I describe a growing ethnic system of supplementary education composed of Chinese language schools and a range of for-profit ethnic institutions serving young children and youth from immigrant families.

### *Chinese Language Schools*

Chinese language schools have been an integral part of the ethnic community in the Chinese Diaspora worldwide. In the United States, Chinese language schools date back to the late 1880s.<sup>4</sup> Just like other ethnic language schools in the immigrant German, Scandinavian, Jewish, and Japanese communities, Chinese language schools initially aimed to preserve language and cultural heritage in the second and succeeding generations (Acherman, 1989; Beatty, 1995; Harada, 1934; Onishi, 1948; Shimada, 1998; Svensrud, 1933). They were cultural institutions independent of the public school system and were often regarded as competing with rather than supplementary to a child's formal schooling (Leung, 1975). From the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to the outbreak of World War II, most Chinese immigrants were confined to Chinatowns and so were Chinese language schools. As an old saying goes, "Wherever there is a visible Chinese enclave, there is at least one Chinese language school."

Chinese language schools before World War II were among the very few ethnic institutions serving children. According to earlier studies of Chinese language schools in San Francisco's Chinatown, early schools were mostly private and financed primarily by tuition (\$4-\$5 a month) or donations from churches, temples, family associations, and Chinese businesses. Each school was governed by a board consisting of mostly elite members from ethnic organizations and businesses in Chinatown (Fan, 1976; Fong, 2003; Foreman, 1958; Tom, 1941). Schools typically had 1-2 part-time teachers, instruction

was in Cantonese, and classes were held daily for 3-4 hour in the evenings and Saturday mornings, usually in the basement of a teacher's home or in a room inside a family association building. Teachers were not certified in any formal way. Their pedagogical approaches typically emphasized cramming, spoon-feeding, or mechanical memorizing, which were popular teaching methods of the time in China. Before World War II, there were about a dozen Chinese language schools in San Francisco's Chinatown serving nearly 2,000 K-12 children, four in Los Angeles' Chinatown and at least one in New York and other major cities where the Chinese population was visibly present (Foreman; 1958; Ma, 1945; Tom, 1941).

Early Chinese language schools aimed primarily to train children to be proficient in Chinese language and culture and were thus perceived by mainstream America as competing with public education and inhibiting assimilation. There was some truth to such perceptions. Under legal and social exclusion, Chinatown's children attended segregated public schools during regular school hours on weekdays and spent many more hours after school, on weekends, and during summer vacations learning Chinese in ethnic language schools. Immigrant parents believed that proficiency in the Chinese language was more practical for their children than educational success in American schools, since their children's future options were limited to either returning to China or finding jobs in Chinatowns (Leung, 1975; Wong, 1988). Parents also believed that a strong Chinese identity and ethnic pride instilled in the children through Chinese cultural and moral teachings were necessary to help the children cope with racism and discrimination. Children attended Chinese language schools in their neighborhoods after regular school as a matter of course with little questioning. Even though most children lacked enthusiasm and interest, many of them did recognize the practical value of Chinese schooling, as their future prospects were largely limited to Chinatowns or China (Chun, 2004). Like other ethnic organizations in Chinatown, earlier Chinese language schools had very little contact with mainstream institutions and education in ethnic language schools was supplementary but *not* complementary to public schooling. In some sense, the findings from past research about the lack of effects or significantly negative effects of Chinese schooling on academic performance and physical and mental health of immigrant Chinese children seemed to have missed the point that public education and assimilation at that time were issues irrelevant to the excluded Chinese.

The repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 marked a new era for Chinese Americans. For the first time in history, immigrant Chinese and their offspring were legally allowed and encouraged to participate in American society. While Chinatowns still concentrated the majority of the Chinese in the United States, residential movements out of the enclave among those from more affluent families and among the upwardly mobile young adults grew

into an irreversible trend. Chinese language schools, however, suffered from stagnant growth and even decline, as mainstream American society became more open to immigrant Chinese families and their children and put greater pressure on them to assimilate. The children, especially adolescents, started to question the necessity of Chinese schooling and the practical value of Chinese language proficiency. Their schoolteachers posed similar questions about Chinese learning and indirectly encouraged the children to break away from the ethnic language schools under the rationale that such ethnic education would place too much burden on their young minds and serve to confuse and ultimately impede their social and intellectual developments. Indeed, some earlier studies designed from this rationale found that ethnic language school attendees were more likely than the nonattendees to show unfavorable outcomes such as sleepiness, eye strain, a lack of outdoor and leisure activities, low academic performance on standardized tests, a lack of leadership quality, and a double identity dilemma (feeling part Chinese, part American, but belonging to neither; Fan, 1976; Ma, 1945).<sup>5</sup> Other factors that caused Chinese language schools to decline included the aging of the teachers, who were mostly non-English speaking and slow to adjust to changes, the rigidity of the curriculum and teaching methods, residential dispersion, and the opening of various educational and vocational opportunities outside Chinatown. Thus, going to Chinese school became a burden on the child and a source of parent-child conflict. Yet, the children continued to attend Chinese language schools because their parents made them, but most dropped out by the sixth grade. Parents were ambivalent as well. While they wanted their children to learn English and excel in school, many feared that they would lose their children if their children became too Americanized.

A significant turning point in the development of Chinese language schools occurred in the late 1960s. The growth momentum continued in the 1980s and peaked in the mid-1990s as a direct result of phenomenal Chinese immigration. Between 1961 and 2000, nearly 1.5 million immigrants were admitted as permanent residents from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other parts of the world. The new arrivals are no longer only the poor, uneducated peasants from villages of Canton that traditionally sent emigrants to the United States. Many are cosmopolitan urbanites, college-educated professionals, skilled workers, and independent entrepreneurs. Upon arrival in the United States, a majority of them manage to bypass Chinatowns to settle directly in more affluent outer areas or suburbs in traditional gateway cities as well as in new multiethnic, immigrant-dominant suburban municipalities. The latter have been referred to as "ethnoburbs" (Li, 1997). Today, more than half of the Chinese immigrants live in suburbs and those who remain in Chinatowns have shrunk in relative numbers. For example, less than 3% of Los Angeles' ethnic Chinese population lives in Chinatown as of 2000.

The openness in mainstream American society does not automatically guarantee desirable outcomes of economic mobility and social integration. Decades of legal exclusion, social isolation, discrimination, and persistent racial stereotyping have left the Chinese with practically one feasible channel—public education. Whereas children’s education was never an issue for survival in a society full of bachelors and sojourners, it has now become an urgent and central issue for the immigrant family and the entire ethnic group. As immigrant families and the ethnic community redefine their goals, the ethnic community and its social and cultural institutions are simultaneously transformed to meet new demands. Consequently, the past 30 years have witnessed a revival and rapid growth of ethnic institutions in Chinatowns and new Chinese ethnoburbs.

Contemporary Chinese language schools are registered as nonprofit ethnic organizations. These language schools have evolved to a much broader range of functions beyond language and culture to facilitate, rather than compete with, children’s education (Fong, 2003; Lai, 2000, 2001, 2004; Leung, 1975). The 1995 survey conducted by the National Council of Associations of Chinese Language Schools (NCACLS) counted a total of 634 registered Chinese language schools in the United States (223 in California) with 5,542 teachers serving 82,675 K-12 students (Lai, 2004; Wang, 1996). Even though the number of Chinese language schools has not changed much in Los Angeles’ Chinatown, the number in Chinese ethnoburbs in San Gabriel Valley and other suburbs in Los Angeles’ metropolitan area has increased exponentially (Fong, 2003). As of the summer of 2006, Southern California Council of Chinese Schools listed 106 member schools: 7 in the City of Los Angeles (3 in Chinatown) and 88 in Los Angeles’s suburbs.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike traditional Chinese language schools, contemporary Chinese language schools are afterschools, offering ethnic language instruction as well as a range of elective classes, such as Chinese Geography and History, Chinese painting and calligraphy, Chinese and western style chess, crafts, cartoon, music and performing arts, computer, basketball and badminton, kung fu, lion and dragon dance, and Chinese cooking and cuisine. Some schools, those in Chinatown or Chinese ethnoburbs in particular, run classes 7 days a week, from 3:00 to 6:30 p.m. daily after regular school hours and half day on weekends. The majority of the suburban schools are weekend schools, using space in local public schools or churches. Students usually spend 2 hour on Chinese language learning and one or more hours on regular school homework or other selected specialties. Many schools also offer academic tutoring, standardized test preparation (e.g., SAT, SATII, AP, etc.), math and science drill, and special skill training seminars such as speech, classic poetry reading, debate, and leadership. For example, Thousand Oaks Chinese School, founded in an affluent white suburb northwest of Los Angeles, started with just 8 students and one teacher in 1975 and has grown into a school

of 560 students and 50 teachers in 2005 in its 30 language classes and 20 enrichment or cultural classes, ranging from SAT preparation for the Chinese subject test, calculation with an abacus, calligraphy, dancing, and ping pong. Some Chinese schools are accredited institutions for extra credits in Chinese language to fulfill the foreign language requirement in regular high schools. As nonprofit institutions, Chinese languages schools charge tuitions, ranging from a low of \$150 per child per semester to a high of \$450 and depend largely on parental volunteerism in fund raising and administration. Teachers are college-educated Chinese immigrants, who may or may not have prior teaching experience or teaching certification. They are recruited mainly through informal referrals within the ethnic network.

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Each school has a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and parental involvement is expected. Suburban Chinese schools also organize a variety of parent-run activities for parents and adults, giving parents an option to stay in school rather than drive back and forth to drop off and pick up their children. These parent-run activities include a variety of seminars on parenting, doing business, real estate or other financial investments, and family financial management; information sessions on how to help children select Advanced Placement (AP) courses, prepare for standardized tests, and apply for colleges and college financial aid; and leisure classes such as t'ai chi chuan, chorus singing, and folk dancing.

Chinese schools in the United States at any given time enroll only about 10-25% of the school-age children (5-14-year-old) of Chinese ancestry (Lai, 2004). However, most of the children of Chinese immigrants have been to a Chinese school or a Chinese language class at some point in their preteen years. In fact, "going to Chinese school" is a common Chinese American experience.

*For-Profit Educational Institutions: Afterschool  
Tutoring, Academic Drill, College Preparation,  
and Enrichment*

The development of Chinese language schools has also paralleled the rapid development of for-profit ethnic afterschool institutions geared solely toward educational achievement and college admissions since the late 1980s, such as *buxiban* and *kumon*, academic cram schools, college preparatory centers, and enrichment programs, as well as early childhood intellectual development programs. The *Southern California Chinese Consumer Yellow Pages* listed 135 academic afterschool tutoring establishments, including *buxibans* and *kumons*, 50 art schools/centers, 90 music/dancing studios, and 14 daycare and preschools (*California Chinese Consumer Yellow Pages*, 2004). There are also hundreds of private home afterschools not listed in phone directories. Many of these unlisted home afterschools are run by stay-at-home mothers

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who take care of three to five children of the same ages as their own children, which can be found in the advertisement section of nationally circulated or local Chinese language newspapers.

These private afterschools have been incorporated into the region's burgeoning Chinese enclave economy. Like other Chinese ethnic businesses, they concentrate in Chinatown and Chinese ethnoburbs in Los Angeles' San Gabriel Valley. They vary in scale, specialty, quality, and formality, ranging from transnational enterprises with headquarters or branches in Taiwan and mainland China with highly specialized curricula and formal structures to one-person or mom-and-pop operations that are more informal and less structured. Some of these private institutions offer comprehensive academic programs like Chinese language schools but others tend to be highly specialized and have concrete objectives that are often more academically oriented than linguistically oriented. For example, many private institutions offer English, math, chemistry, physics tutoring, and intensive drilling courses that aim solely to help children perform better in formal schools, even though some of the instruction or tutoring may be bilingual. Thus, their core curricula are supplementary to, rather than competing with, the public school curricula. These for-profit programs are also embedded in nonprofit Chinese language schools as well as in other ethnic organizations serving immigrants, such as family, kin, and district associations and churches. Like nonprofit Chinese schools, teachers may or may not have prior teaching experiences and are recruited through informal co-ethnic network. But for some specialized programs, such as those tutoring SAT verbal, writing, and English skills, these institutions would prefer recruiting non-Chinese certified teachers who are teaching at formal schools. Programs with certified teachers from formal schools tend to be the most expensive. Unlike nonprofit Chinese schools, for-profit institutions often do not require parental involvement and do not have programs for parents.

Students enrolled in ethnic afterschools are almost exclusively Chinese from immigrant families of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Daily programs tend to draw students who live nearby, while weekend programs tend to draw students from both the local community and elsewhere in greater Los Angeles. Driving through the commercial corridor of Monterey Park, Alhambra, and San Gabriel, the growing Chinese ethnoburbs east of Los Angeles, one can easily see the flashy bilingual signs of these establishments, such as "Little Harvard," "Ivy League School," "Stanford-to-Be Prep School," "IQ180," "Hope Buxiban," "Little Ph.D. Early Learning Center" (a preschool), and "Brain Child" (a daycare center).

Major Chinese language newspapers, such as the *Chinese Daily News*, *Sing Tao Daily*, and *China Press*, publish weekly education editions with success stories, educational news and commentaries, and relevant information, such as standardized tests' schedules, high school and college ranking, application

deadlines of major schools, programs, and tests. For-profit institutions also place advertisements in the Chinese language newspapers (Zhou & Cai, 2002). Chinese language advertisements are targeted more to the parent than to the child, making such promises as to “bring out the best in *your* child,” “turn *your* child into a well-rounded superstar,” and “escort your child into *your* dream school” [emphases added] as well as to “improve your test scores by 100 points” and “open the door to UC admission.” Many Chinese youth whom I interviewed agreed that going to a Chinese school or a Chinese-run *buxiban* or *kumon* program had been a shared experience of being Chinese American, even though they generally disliked the fact that they were made to attend these ethnic institutions by their parents (Zhou & Kim, 2006; Zhou & Li 2003). Unlike nonprofit Chinese language schools, for-profit institutions rarely offer seminars and activities for parents. However, parents become acquainted with one another during brief drop-off or pick-up times.

As the ethnic system of supplementary education takes root in the Chinese immigrant community, offering various academic and cultural enrichment programs and afterschool care, the children of Chinese immigrants are drawn by community forces into an ethnic social environment with ample resources in support of the mission that “every student is a success.”

## Intangible Benefits, Costs, and Tradeoffs

Tangible resources, in terms of availability and access, offered by the ethnic systems of supplementary education seem obvious. There are intangible benefits too. Nonprofit and for-profit ethnic institutions do not merely provide educationally relevant services supplementary to public education but also serve as a locus of social support and control, network building, and social capital formation.

First, the ethnic system of supplementary education provides an important physical site where formerly unrelated immigrants (and parents) come to socialize and rebuild social ties. Reconnecting with co-ethnics often helps ease psychological and social isolation associated with uprooting. Even though parental interaction occurs mostly during drop-off and pick-up times or in parent-run activities, these brief moments are important for the formation of co-ethnic ties. These co-ethnic ties may not be strong ties but they nonetheless serve as bridge ties that connect immigrants to, rather than isolate them from, the mainstream society by making their social life richer and more comfortable.

Second, the ethnic system of supplementary education serves as an intermediate ground between the immigrant home and American school, helping immigrant parents—especially those who do not speak English well—learn about and navigate the American education system and make the best

of the system in serving their children even when they are unable to get involved personally in formal schools and their PTAs. Through these ethnic institutions, immigrant parents are indirectly but effectively connected to formal schools and are well informed about specific factors crucial to their children's educational success. They also readily exchange valuable information about child rearing and share success stories or failure lessons. Such co-ethnic interaction reaffirms the educational goal of the immigrant family while putting pressure on, and even creating competition among, parents. In this sense, social capital arising from participation in Chinese language schools, afterschools, and other ethnic institutions is extremely valuable in promoting academic achievement by offering an alternative for parental involvement.

Third, the ethnic system of supplementary education fosters a sense of civic duty in immigrants who are often criticized for their lack of civic participation in mainstream U.S. society. In nonprofit institutions, many parents volunteer their time and energy for tasks ranging from decision making to fundraising to serving as teaching assistants, event organizers, chauffeurs, security guards, and janitors. Parents also take the initiative in organizing community events such as ethnic and American holiday celebrations.

The intangible benefits for children are also multifold. First, Chinese language schools and other relevant ethnic institutions offer an alternative space where children can express and share their feelings of growing up in immigrant Chinese families. A Chinese schoolteacher we interviewed said,

It is very important to allow youths to express themselves in their own terms without any parental pressures. Chinese parents usually have very high expectations of their children. When children find it difficult to meet these expectations and do not have an outlet for their frustration and anxiety, they tend to become alienated and lost on the streets. But when they are around others who have similar experiences, they are more likely to let out their feelings and come to terms with their current situation.

Second, these ethnic institutions provide unique opportunities for immigrant children to form different peer networks, giving them greater leverage in negotiating parent-child relations at home. In immigrant families, parents are usually more comfortable and less strict with their children when they hang out with co-ethnic friends. This is because they either know the parents or feel that they can communicate with co-ethnic parents if things should go wrong. When children are doing things that would cause their parents anxiety, they can use their co-ethnic friendship network as an effective bargaining chip to avoid conflict. In the case of interracial dating, for example, a Chinese girl may simply tell her mother that she will be studying with so-and-so from

Chinese school (whose parents are family friends), while spending time with her non-Chinese boyfriend.

Third, these ethnic institutions nurture ethnic identity and pride that may otherwise be rejected by the children because of the pressure to assimilate. In ethnic language schools and other ethnic school settings, children are exposed to something quite different from what they learn in their formal schools. For example, they read classical folk stories and Confucian sayings about family values, behavioral and moral guidelines, and the importance of schooling. They listen to or sing ethnic folk songs, which reveal various aspects of their cultural heritage. Such cultural exposure reinforces family values and heightens a sense of ethnic identity, helping children to relate to their parents' or their ancestor's "stuff" without feeling embarrassed. More important, being part of this particular ethnic environment helps alleviate bicultural conflicts that are rampant in many immigrant families. Many children we interviewed, especially the older ones, reported that they did not like being made to go to these ethnic institutions and to do extra work but that they reluctantly did so without rebelling because other co-ethnic children were doing the same. As Betty Lee Sung (1987) observed in her study of immigrant children in New York City's Chinatown, bicultural conflicts are

[M]oderated to a large degree because there are other Chinese children around to mitigate the dilemmas that they encounter. When they are among their own, the Chinese ways are better known and better accepted. The Chinese customs and traditions are not denigrated to the degree that they would be if the immigrant child was the only one to face the conflict on his or her own. (p. 126)

However, the ethnic effect is by no means uniformly positive. Overemphasis on educational achievement comes with costs. Tremendous pressure on both children and parents for school achievement can lead to intense intergenerational conflict, rebellious behavior, alienation from the networks that are supposed to assist them, and even withdrawal from formal schools. Alienated children easily fall prey to street gangs and are also vulnerable to suicide. Ironically, pressures and conflicts in a resourceful ethnic environment can also serve to fulfill parental expectations. Children are motivated to learn and do well in school because they believe that education is the only way to escape their parents' control. This motivation, while arising from parental pressure and being reinforced through their participation in the ethnic institutions, often leads to desirable outcomes.

What are the tradeoffs? Chinese immigrants perceive education as the only feasible means of social mobility that would yield observable returns. They tend to be extremely pragmatic and realistic about what to do and what

not to do. The tradeoff is often viewed as a sacrifice that not only parents but also children are expected to make. A nonprofit program organizer summed it up in these words:

Well, tremendous pressures create problems for sure. However, you've got to realize that we are not living in an ideal environment. Without these pressures, you would probably see as much adolescent rebellion in the family, but a much *larger* [emphasis in tone] proportion of kids failing. Our goal is to get these kids out into college, and for that, we have been very successful.

For the majority, expected outcomes seem well worth the sacrifice. But for a small minority, undesirable outcomes, such as depression, running away, and even suicide, can be devastating to families. It should also be noted that access to the ethnic system of supplementary education is more restricted for working-class families than for middle-class families in the Chinese immigrant community. While Chinese language schools are accessible and for-profit afterschool programs have varied price tags and are thus affordable to most families, high-quality academic and specialized enrichment programs tend to be more expensive and less affordable for working-class families. Many high-quality private *buxibans*, college preparatory schools, music and dance lessons, and other enrichment programs, which rival mainstream institutions such as the Princeton Review and Kaplan, are extremely expensive. However, a high demand for afterschool services from immigrant parents' with higher than average SES and high rates of self-employment in the immigrant community stimulate new business opportunities for prospective co-ethnic entrepreneurs aiming at serving working-class immigrant families. When working-class families are exposed to this kind of informal setting where education becomes a basic need, they are under pressure to provide for their children's education in the same way as they do for their children's food and clothing.

### Concluding Remarks: Lessons From the Immigrant Chinese Experience

The chapter aims to address the question of whether it is culture or structure that promotes the educational achievement of immigrant children. Existing quantitative data and anecdotal evidence show that the children of Chinese immigrants, even those from poor immigrant families and attending inadequate inner-city schools, are doing exceptionally well in school and that they fare better than other native-born racial groups, including whites. One explanation for their success leans on the cultural influence of Confucianism

while the other focuses on immigration selectivity. This case study of the ethnic system of supplementary education in the Chinese immigrant community shows that “culture” and “structure” intersect to create an ethnic social environment promoting school success.

The Chinese case is unique in several significant ways, and each indicates the culture-structure interaction.<sup>7</sup> First, the Confucian value on education adapts to contemporary mobility aspirations and expectations to affect educational practices in China and immigrant Chinese families in the United States. In present-day China, a good college education is viewed as the single most important means to upward social mobility. Many families, urban families in particular, are doing everything possible and necessary to ensure that their children eventually get into prestigious universities. Since the best educational opportunities are relatively scarce, aspiring college-bound students must compete with one another through the annual national college entrance examination. Often times, students only have one chance to take this exam; as a popular saying suggests, “one exam [the national college entrance exam] determines a child’s future.” Consequently, a family’s educational drive is geared almost entirely toward academic outcomes to the neglect of the subtleties and intricacies in a child’s learning process and often at the expense of the child’s well-rounded development. Meanwhile, a wide range of private *buxibans*, exam cram schools, enrichment programs, and English language programs emerge to fill the growing demand, serving preschoolers and K-12 graders. Some preschool child development centers for 2-5-year-olds even have rigorous academic curricula, including math, Chinese, English, music and dance, and are staffed with foreigner experts. These homeland practices and afterschool institutions are believed to be effective and thus get transferred into America, as Chinese immigrants strive to push their children to success in school.

Second, immigrant selectivity, which draws a tremendous amount of human capital and financial resources, and structural barriers, which deter many highly educated and economically resourceful immigrants from assimilating into the mainstream American economy, combine to boost the growth of the Chinese enclave economy. As the demand for educational services from Chinese immigrant families grows, various nonprofit and for-profit institutions emerge to form an ethnic system of supplementary education. Once the ethnic system of supplementary education takes root, it further stimulates new demands for more and better services; hence the rise of an ethnic social environment in which educational values are reaffirmed and tangible resources conducive to school success are easily accessible.

Third, the visibility of a co-ethnic middle class in the Chinese immigrant community provides role models as well as opportunities for co-ethnic interaction across class lines. Unlike traditional immigrant enclaves that concentrate new arrivals of low-SES backgrounds and native racial ethnic

minorities, contemporary Chinese immigrant communities tend to grow in suburbs (or ethnoburbs) and comprise immigrants of varied SES backgrounds. Even in inner-city Chinatowns where poor and low-SES immigrant families tend to concentrate, there is a significant presence of co-ethnic middle-class members who go there on a regular basis to work, do business, shop, or entertain, and participate in various activities of the ethnic institutions. The co-ethnic middle class serves two main functions. On the one hand, the sheer presence of a disproportionately large number of highly educated professionals, particularly those who have been incorporated into the mainstream American economy, provides role models to show that education would pay off. On the other hand, the return of middle-class co-ethnics, who are residentially assimilated, to the ethnic enclave provides opportunities for mixed-class interaction. Social ties formed from mixed-class co-ethnic interaction tend to transcend class boundaries to become instrumental bridge ties, which heightens the significance of Bourdieu's conception of social capital. That is, social capital consists of not only products of embedded social networks or relationships, but processes that reproduce access, or lack of access, to power and resources.

Several lessons may be drawn from the Chinese American experience. First, the Chinese case suggests that informal social settings are as important as, if not more important than, formal social settings such as schools to affect children's educational achievement. Within the Chinese immigrant community, a well-established Chinese system of supplementary education makes available and accessible resources in helping promote and actualize the educational value. However, there is a lack of institutional mechanisms within the ethnic system of supplementary education to deal with problems, especially intergenerational conflicts, mental stress, depression, and excessive peer pressures from unhealthy competition. There is also a lack of interconnectedness between these ethnic educational institutions and other nonprofit social service organizations already existing in the community. Moreover, the utility of ethnic resources and social capital may be effective only to a certain point, that is, to ensure that immigrant children graduate from high school and get into prestigious colleges. But beyond high school, these ethnic resources may become constraining. For example, many children of Chinese immigrants tend to concentrate in science and engineering not only because their families want them to do so but also because their co-ethnic friends are doing so. After graduating from college, they often lack the type of social networks that facilitate their job placement and occupational mobility. In these respects, there is much room for improvement in the existing ethnic systems of supplementary education.

Second, the ethnic Chinese system of supplementary education is not easily transferable to other ethnic or immigrant minority groups because of variations in immigration histories, group-level socioeconomic characteristics,

patterns of incorporation and community organization, and host society reception. While it is unrealistic to expect other minority groups to follow suit, it may be possible to open up ethnic resources to non-co-ethnic members through greater interethnic cooperation and public assistance. For example, nonprofit interethnic organizations can help make available educationally relevant afterschool services, particularly for-profit services, provided by ethnic Chinese to other Asian and Latino immigrants who are likely to share the same locale. The state can provide financial assistance to families in need to access private afterschool services.

Third, ethnic entrepreneurship in the area of education may offer an alternative path to publicly funded afterschool programs. As the Chinese case shows, nonprofit organizations and for-profit organizations are interconnected to foster informal social settings conducive to education. The state should continue to improve existing afterschool programs while also providing incentives to potential entrepreneurs to develop private afterschools and other educationally related programs (such as tutoring, music, sports, etc.), especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

In summary, the Chinese ethnic system of supplementary education may not be a direct causal factor for the extraordinary educational achievement of the children of Chinese immigrants but it does provide an informal social setting in which educationally relevant resources are both available and accessible. This kind of informal social setting is not necessarily intrinsic to a specific culture of origin. Rather, it results from the culture-structure interaction, which is unique to a national-origin group's migration selectivity, premigration SES, the strength of a preexisting ethnic community, and the host society's reception. Most immigrant families, Chinese and non-Chinese alike, place high value on education and consider it the most important path to upward social mobility. However, value cannot be actualized without the support of the family *and* the ethnic community. But the ability of the family and that of the ethnic community to influence children vary by national origins and generations. National-origin groups that constitute a significant middle class with valuable resources (i.e., education, job skills, and financial assets) upon arrival in the United States have a leg up in the race to move ahead in their new homeland, while others lacking group resources trail behind. Educators and policymakers should be careful not to attribute school success or failure merely to culture, or to structure, but to the culture-structure interaction.

## Notes

This chapter draws material from the author's published work in "Ethnic language schools and the development of supplementary education in the immigrant

Chinese community in the United States," *New Directions for Youth Development: Understanding the Social Worlds of Immigrant Youth*, Winter 2003, pp. 57-73 (coauthored with Xiyuan Li) and "Community forces, social capital, and educational achievement: The case of supplementary education in the Chinese and Korean immigrant communities," *Harvard Educational Review*, 76, 2006, pp. 1-29 (coauthored with Susan Kim).

1. I draw on the conception of supplementary education developed by Gordon and his colleagues to frame my study of ethnic organizations serving youth and children (Gordon et al., 2005).

2. Contexts of exit and reception are group-level measures (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Variables for contexts of exit may include premigration socioeconomic characteristics (education, occupation, income, etc.), homeland educational practices, and conditions of exit (regular or undocumented migrant status, refugee status, etc.). Variables for contexts of reception may include government policy toward a specific national origin or ethnic group, public attitude, and the organization of the preexisting co-ethnic community.

3. The data on which this chapter is based are drawn from multiple sources: (a) I extract relevant data from a multisite ethnography of immigrant neighborhoods in Los Angeles, in which Chinatown was selected as one of the main research sites. In this study, neighborhood-based ethnic institutions (including nonprofits, for-profit establishments, and other locally based social structures) were closely observed and face-to-face or phone interviews were conducted to examine how social organization at the neighborhood level affects immigrant children's school adaptation. Relevant data include intensive field observations in ethnic language schools, private afterschools, and educational institutions as well as interviews with ethnic language schools' principals, parents, and adolescent participants in Chinatown. (b) I use data from two other ethnographic case studies: a weekend Chinese language school in a white middle-class suburb west of Los Angeles and a private afterschool in a Chinese ethnoburb east of Los Angeles. (c) I conducted content analyses of Chinese language newspapers or other media accounts, advertisements, and curricular materials. The ethnic newspapers circulating in the Chinese immigrant community heavily advertise the academic schools such as the SAT prep schools as well as the language schools during the beginning of the school year. In addition, there are sections in the newspapers that cover education related topics on a weekly basis. Some of the articles in the education sections are translations of what has been published by the *Los Angeles Times* or popular mainstream magazines such as *Newsweek* on such topics as best U.S. colleges, college admissions guidelines, admission rates, graduation rates. Thus, content analysis gives me a unique viewpoint of what kind of information has been available to the Chinese immigrant community when it comes to education and how ethnic institutions are interacting with individuals involved in them.

4. Some noted that Chinese language schools dated as far back as the late 1840s, at the time when Chinese laborers started to arrive in the United States in large numbers (Wang, 1996).

5. These same studies also found favorable outcomes among Chinese school attendees, in terms of general health, posture, nutrition, and grade point averages.

These conflicting results imply that Chinese schooling is complex leading to multidimensional outcomes. I also suspect that the association between Chinese school attendance and the lack of leadership quality may have been spurious.

6. Compiled by the author from the Southern California Council of Chinese Schools' Web site: <http://scccs.com/member/MemWeb.htm> (viewed on July 31, 2006). The numbers do not include the less structured, private and weekend Chinese language classes.

7. Now in the United States, only the Korean immigrant community presents a comparable ethnic system of supplementary education (Bhattacharyya, 2005; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

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