

Negotiating Culture and Ethnicity: Intergenerational Relations in Chinese Immigrant Families in the United States¹

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In the United States, most children of Chinese immigrant parentage live in two-parent, nuclear families, with a smaller number in extended families and transnational families. In these various immigrant households, the Confucius values of filial piety, education, hard work, and discipline have been modified to serve as normative behavioral standards for socializing the younger generation. Many Chinese immigrant parents claim that they have sacrificed for their children's better future in America. They would expect that their children achieve the highest level of education possible, help move the family up to middle-class status, and, most importantly, take care of the parents when they are old and frail. Deviation from these expectations is considered a shame, or a failure, on the part of the family and is thus sanctioned by the family and even the entire ethnic community.

It is not easy, however, for immigrant families to enforce these cultural values and behavioral standards and guarantee that familial ex-

¹The original version of this chapter was presented at the Conference on Immigrant Psychology: Rethinking Culture, Race, Class & Gender, April 11–12, 2003, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. I thank Ram Mahalingham for his helpful comments.

pectations are met, because of vulnerabilities associated with parental foreign birth, intense bicultural and intergenerational conflicts, and different paces of acculturation between parents and children. Like all other immigrant children, the children growing up in Chinese immigrant families have simultaneously and constantly encountered two different sociocultural worlds: one—the “old” world—from which they attempt to distance themselves, and the other—the mainstream American society—to which they aspire, and are also pushed, to assimilate. Often, children regard their immigrant parents as *lao-wan-gu* (old stick-in-the-mud or stubborn heads from the old world) and parental ways as feudal, outdated, or old fashioned. The children’s consequential rebellion against tradition is constant and intrinsic to their experience of straddling two sociocultural worlds. Parents, on the other hand, view their own parenting ways as the best to ascertain success. But they are constantly worried about their children becoming too Americanized too soon and are horrified by their children’s acting up. Moreover, contemporary Chinese immigrants are an extremely diverse group in their socioeconomic backgrounds and settlement patterns. The diverse socioecultural contexts—ethnic enclaves, ethnoburbs,² and White middle-class suburbs—in which these families further constrain parent–child relationships. This chapter examines how immigration and cultural change affect family life in the Chinese immigrant community in the United States. In particular, it explores the paradoxical family process through which children and parents cope with intricate relationships and negotiate priorities in life that benefit both individual family members and the family as a whole.

THE “OLD” VERSUS THE “NEW” SECOND GENERATION

Chinese Americans are by far the oldest and largest Asian-origin group in the United States. They have endured a long history of migration and settlement that dates back to the late 1840s, including some 60 years of legal exclusion. With the lifting of legal barriers against Chinese immigration during World War II and the enactment of a series of liberal immigration legislation since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 (also referred to as the Hart–Cellar Act), the Chinese American community has increased more than 10-fold: from 237,292 in 1960, to 1,645,472 in 1990, and to nearly 2.9 million (including some half a million mixed-race persons) in 2000. Much of this extraordinary growth is primarily due to immigration. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly Immigration and Naturalization Service or INS), more than 1.3 million immigrants were admitted to the United States from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as permanent residents between 1961 and

²*Ethnoburb* is a term developed by Wei Li (1997) to refer to suburban ethnic clustering of diverse groups with no single racial ethnic group dominates.

2000 (USINS, 2002).³ China has been on the list of top ten immigrant-origin countries in the United States since 1980. The U.S. Census also attests to the big part played by immigration. As of 2000, the foreign born accounted for more than two-thirds of the ethnic Chinese population in the United States. The majority of the U.S.-born is still very young, living in immigrant families, and is just beginning to come of age in large numbers. At present, the ethnic Chinese population is primarily made up from the first generation (foreign-born), approximately a quarter belongs to the second generation (U.S.-born of foreign-born parentage), and only a small fraction (about 10%) belongs to the third-plus generation (U.S.-born of U.S.-born parentage).

THE "OLD" SECOND GENERATION

As is well documented in the history of Chinese immigration to the United States, Chinese immigrants initially came to this country from the southern region of China's Guangdong Province (Chan, 1991). Many were young men leaving behind their parents, wives, and children in rural villages in search of a sojourner's dream—to make money and then return home with "gold and glory" (Zhou, 1992). They helped develop the American West and built the most difficult part of the transcontinental railroad west of the Rockies, but ended up being targets of nativism and racism when their work was no longer needed (Saxton, 1971). Poor economic conditions in the late 1870s exacerbated anti-Chinese agitation, leading to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which lasted until 1943. Consequently, immigrant Chinese built Chinatowns and reorganized their sojourning lives within these socially isolated enclaves on the West Coast, such as in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and in other major urban centers to which many had fled, such as New York and Chicago. Within Chinatown, levels of coethnic interaction and solidarity were high, almost entirely through working in Chinese-owned businesses and socializing in various family or kinship associations, hometown or district associations, and tongs or merchants' associations.

During the exclusion era, there were few women, families, and children living in Chinatowns, known as bachelors' societies. The sex ratio was nearly 27 males per female in 1890, and dropped to 9 males per female in 1910. Although the sex ratio gradually evened out over time, males still outnumbered females by more than 2:1 in the 1940s. The shortage of women combined with the "paper son" phenomenon and other illegal entry of young men stifled the formation of "normal" families and the natural reproduction of the ethnic population. Because of restricted immigration, the size of the second generation was small but had become increasingly visible among the aging bachelors since the

³The number was 792,529 between 1961 and 1990, and 528,893 between 1991 and 2000.

early 1930s. In 1900, less than 9% of the ethnic Chinese population was U.S.-born; because of low immigration, the U.S.-born share increased steadily to over half between 1940 and 1970. The children born in the United States prior to World War II were mostly born in the late 1920s and the 1930s and were still very young at the outbreak of the war. As of 1930, the proportion of US-born went up to 41%. Like other racial minority children, the children of Chinese immigrants were not permitted to attend public schools with White children, and as they grew up, few were able to find jobs in the mainstream economy commensurate with their levels of education.

During and after World War II, more Chinese women than men were admitted to the United States, most of them as war brides, but the annual quota of immigrant visas for the Chinese was only 105 after the lifting of the Chinese Exclusion Act. In the 1950s, hundreds of refugees and their families fled Communist China to come to the United States, and despite low immigration, the arrival of Chinese refugee families contributed to the increased proportion of U.S.-born children, which went up to 61% in 1960. Between 1940 and 1970, the U.S.-born outnumbered the foreign-born in the Chinese American community. This “old” second generation was disproportionately young; almost all of them had immigrant parents, and the majority grew up in Chinatown.

THE “NEW” SECOND GENERATION

After World War II, the ethnic Chinese community in the United States grew steadily as the old second generation reached adulthood and had shifted to a more settled community comprising a U.S.-born majority by 1960. However, contemporary Chinese immigration brought about an unprecedented transformation. As impacted by the Immigration Act of 1965, which abolished the national origins quota system and gave priority to family unification and to the importation of skilled labor, the Chinese American community rapidly transformed from a bachelors’ society to an immigrant-dominant family community. The 10-fold growth of the Chinese American population from 1960 to 2000 is not merely a matter of numbers but rather a significant turning point for community development and identity formation. What characterizes this social transformation is the tremendous within-group diversity in terms of place of origin, socioeconomic background, patterns of geographic settlement, and modes of social mobility.

Compared to earlier Chinese immigrants, contemporary Chinese immigrants have arrived not only from mainland China but also from the greater Chinese diaspora—Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, and the Americas. In Los Angeles, for example, 23% of Chinese American population was born in the United States, 27% in mainland China, 20% in Taiwan, 8% in Hong Kong, and 22% from other countries around the world as of 1990. Diverse origins entail diverse cultural patterns. Linguistically, for example, Chinese immi-

grants come from a much wider variety of dialect groups than in the past. Although all Chinese share a single ancestral written language (varied only in traditional and simplified versions of characters), they speak numerous regional dialects—Cantonese, Mandarin, Minnan, Hakka, Chaozhou, and Shanghai—that are not easily understood even among Chinese immigrants.

Contemporary Chinese immigrants have also come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Some arrived in the United States with little money, minimum education, few job skills, and from rural areas like their counterparts of the past, which forced them to take low-wage jobs and settle in deteriorating urban neighborhoods. Others came with considerable family savings, education, and skills far above the levels of average Americans. Nationwide, for example, levels of educational attainment among foreign-born Chinese were significantly higher than those of the general U.S. population. In 2000, 65% of foreign-born Chinese aged 25 to 39 years had attained at least 4 years of college education, compared to 30% of U.S.-born non-Hispanic Whites.

Contemporary Chinese immigrants have also shown diverse patterns of settlement, which are characterized by concentration as well as dispersion. Geographical concentration, to some extent, follows a historical pattern: Chinese Americans have continued to concentrate in the West and in urban areas. One state, California, accounts for nearly 40% of all Chinese Americans (1.1 million). New York accounts for 16%, second only to California, and Hawaii, 6%. However, other states that historically received few Chinese immigrants have now witnessed phenomenal growth, such as Texas, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois, Washington, Florida, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. Among large cities (with populations over 100,000), New York City (365,000), San Francisco (161,000), Los Angeles (74,000), Honolulu (69,000), and San Jose (58,000) have the largest numbers of Chinese Americans. Small suburban cities in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area have also seen extraordinarily high proportions of Chinese Americans in the general population. Traditional urban enclaves, such as Chinatowns in San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston, have continued to exist and receive new immigrants, but they no longer serve as primary centers of initial settlement, as many new immigrants, especially the affluent and highly skilled, bypass inner cities to settle into suburbs immediately after arrival. Currently, only 2% the Chinese in Los Angeles, 8% of the Chinese in San Francisco, and 14% of the Chinese in New York live in old Chinatowns. The majority of the Chinese American population is spreading out in outer areas or suburbs in traditional gateway cities as well as in new urban centers of Asian settlement across the country, and half of all Chinese Americans live in suburbs. New ethnoburbs—multiethnic, immigrant-dominant suburban municipalities—have appeared since the 1980s, showing a completely new pattern of immigrant settlement

(Li, 1997). The 2000 Census records 11 suburban cities in the United States in which Chinese Americans make up more than 20% of the city's population.

These demographic changes in the Chinese American community have created multiple contexts under which the new second generation (the U.S.-born or U.S.-raised children of contemporary immigrants) is coming of age. Three main neighborhood contexts are particularly important analytically: (a) traditional ethnic enclaves, such as inner-city Chinatowns, (b) ethnoburbs, and (c) White middle-class suburbs. The challenges confronting new Chinese immigrant families are constrained by the interaction between unique family dynamics and immediate contextual factors. How these challenges affect family relations is what I now turn to discuss.

NEW CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE CHINESE IMMIGRANT FAMILY

During the era of legal exclusion, most of the Chinese immigrants were isolated in inner-city ethnic enclaves, which were characterized as bachelors' societies. Many Chinatown "bachelor" workers were actually married but left their wives, children, and parents behind in their villages in China. Of the few "normal" families that existed in the bachelors' society, many were families of merchants or of workers who were able to claim to be partners of the merchants for immigration purpose. In old Chinatowns, individuals and families were well connected to the ethnic community, highly dependent on it for social, economic, and emotional support, while also subject to its control. Chinatown children grew up in a unique extended family environment, surrounded by and under the watchful eyes of many "grandpas" and "uncles" who were not related by blood but related by an intricate system of family kin or parental friendship associations. Their behavior and that of their parents were closely monitored by a closely knit ethnic community. They were either "good" kids—loyal, *guai* (obedient), and *you-chu-xi* (promising)—or "bad" kids—disrespectful, *bai-jia-zi* (family failure), and *mei-chu-xi* (good-for-nothing). They grew up speaking fluent Chinese, mostly in local dialects, going to Chinese schools, working in Chinese-owned businesses in Chinatown, and interacting intimately with other Chinese in the ethnic enclave. Many wished to become like other American children but faced resistance from the larger society as well as from their own families. The larger society looked down on the Chinese and set barriers to keep them apart, such as segregation in schools and workplaces. The Chinese families tied their children to Chinatown and its ethnic institutions, with Chinese school being the most important one, to shield them from being harmed by overt discrimination. Consequently, despite much adolescent rebellion and intense generational conflicts within the family, the children often found themselves going

full circle back to ethnic networks without much room to act up and eventually becoming nobody but Chinese.

Unlike members of the old second generation, who were legally excluded from participating in the American mainstream and who simply did not have the freedom to choose whom they wanted to be, the new second generation lived in a more open and more accepting society even though their growing-up experiences were constrained by diverse family socioeconomic backgrounds and immediate neighborhood contexts. Those who reside in inner-city Chinatowns are generally from recently arrived, low-income families. Like the old second generation, they speak Chinese fluently, interact primarily with people in a Chinese-speaking environment, and participate in various cultural and social institutions of the ethnic community. However, they no longer live in a hostile environment that socially and legally excludes the Chinese. Even though they may still go to schools with mostly immigrant Chinese and other minority children in their neighborhoods, they have more opportunities to interact with non-coethnic children, move around in society, and choose what they want to do in life. But because of the structural constraints associated with disadvantaged class status, Chinatown children would face greater risks of being trapped in permanent poverty and downward assimilation than their middle-class peers (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Those who reside in multiethnic ethnoburbs are mostly from upper- and middle-income families mixed with some low-income families. They generally go to suburban public schools that are better and have more resources than inner-city schools, although those schools are also likely to be dominated by coethnic and other minority children. They also have easy access to a wide range of ethnic institutions quite different from those in old Chinatown, such as after-school tutoring (*buxiban*), academic enrichment centers, and sports and music programs offered by Chinese-owned private businesses. They too speak Chinese fluently, interact with other Chinese, and are associated with things “Chinese,” including food, music, and customs. But they also interact with people of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The children of Chinese immigrants who reside in suburban White middle-class neighborhoods tend to have parents who have achieved high levels of education, occupation, income, and English proficiency and who are fluent bicultural, transnational, cosmopolitan, and highly assimilated. These children attend schools with predominantly White students and have few primary contacts with coethnic peers. Many grow up speaking only English at home and have friends who are mostly Whites.

Overall, the new second generation grows up in a more open society than the old generation. These children are free of most of the legal barriers to educational and occupational attainments that blocked the mobility of the old second generation. They also tend to live in “normal” family neighborhoods and have more sources of so-

cial support beyond the ethnic community. And they have much more opportunities to “find themselves,” “be themselves,” and “become American” and have more leverage to rebel if they choose to. For example, they have to power to report to authorities, call 911, or even threaten to throw their parents in jail when they feel being “abused” at home, because social institutions and the legal system in the large society provide such support. And should they decide to run away from home, they would have more options to get by. Ironically, immigrant parents in a more open society often find it harder than in the isolated enclave to raise children according to their ways, because of the more intense bicultural conflicts between the parents’ social world and the mainstream society.

Like all other immigrants, contemporary Chinese immigrants confront some of most profound challenges when they move to America. The first challenge is the drastic change in the sociocultural context surrounding the family. In their respective homelands—mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong—Chinese families are often extended in nature, with grandparent(s) and other relatives either in the home or in close contact. Upon arriving in the United States, these close family, kin, and friendship ties and the associated support and control mechanisms are disrupted. In the past, individual migrants and their families came from the same rural villages in sending countries and arrived in a transplanted village in the United States, so the broken ties could be easily rebuilt in Chinatowns that resembled those left behind in villages in the homeland. Today, however, immigrants are from diverse origins; even if they are from the same region and share the same local dialect, they are unlikely to belong to the same social circle and are just as likely to be strangers as they were to move from one place to another in their own homelands. The unfamiliar sociocultural environment, combined with the lack of American cultural literacy, English language proficiency, and education and job skills for some, adds to the difficulty in initial settlement. When immigrant families arrive first in ethnic enclaves or ethnoburbs, they may be able to reconnect to or rebuild ethnic networks, but these new ethnic networks tend to be composed of coethnic “strangers” rather than close kin and friends and tend to be more instrumental than emotionally intimate and homey. As I have just mentioned, the majority of contemporary Chinese immigrant families disperse into White middle-class suburbs. Such geographic dispersion further detaches new immigrants from the existing ethnic community and makes it more difficult for them to rebuild social networks based on common origins and a common cultural heritage. Although affluent Chinese immigrant families may not need ethnic networks and ethnic resources as much as their working-class counterparts, many find them comforting, convenient, and at times instrumental for enforcing certain traditional Chinese values to which they hold firm, but they are physically far away from the ethnic community.

The second challenge is the significant change in family relations in the immigrant family. The majority of the children live in families with both parents working full-time and some at several jobs on different shifts. Because of disadvantages associated with immigrant status, many Chinese immigrant men experience downward mobility and have difficulty in getting jobs that secure their role as main breadwinners. Women have to work outside the home, and many contribute equally, if not more, to the family while continuously taking the principal responsibility for childrearing, which has subtly changed the spousal relations. That women work outside the home often creates difficulty in the family. Without the help of grandparents, relatives, and other close friends, many young children become latch-key children, staying home alone after school hours, which is in violation of government regulations. Changes in parent-child relations are also noteworthy, particularly in families where the parents have low levels of education and job skills and speak little or no English. Often these parents have to depend on their children as translators and brokers between home and the outside world, which severely curtails parental authority.

The third challenge is the generation gap that is exacerbated by a cultural gap between the immigrant family and the larger society. This gap is particularly discernible in the discrepancy in goal orientation and the means of achieving goals between immigrant parents and their U.S.-born or -raised children. Because of immigrant selectivity, most adult immigrants and the parent generation are busy working, focusing first on putting food on the table and then moving themselves or their families up in society. They structure their lives primarily around three goals, as a Chinese immigrant put it: "To live in your own house, to be your own boss, and to send your children to the Ivy League." They too try to acculturate or assimilate into American society but only in ways that facilitate the attainment of these goals. The children, in contrast, want more. They aspire to be American like everyone else, in the words of a U.S.-born high school student from Los Angeles' Chinatown, "looking cool, going to the ball games, eating hamburgers and French fries, taking family vacations, having fun ... feeling free to do whatever you like rather than what your parents tell you to."

This cultural gap sets the parents and children apart, often dampens the already strained parent-child relations. Often children regard their immigrant parents as *lao-wan-gu* and parental ways as outdated and old-fashioned, and they consciously rebel against parental traditions. The parents, aside from juggling work and household responsibilities that devour most of their waking hours, are worried that their children have too much freedom, too little respect for authority, and too many unfavorable stimuli in school, on the street, and on the television screen at home, and are horrified by their children's acting up. However, they experience difficulty in communicating with their Americanized children and in mediating between

their expectation and their children's own needs, which further intensifies intergenerational conflicts. To make matters worse, the parents' customary ways of exercising authority or disciplining children, which were considered normative and acceptable in the old world, have suddenly become obsolete and even illegal, further eroding parental power in parent-child relations.

It should be noted that the cultural gap also affects the relations between foreign-born adolescents and their U.S. born or -raised coethnic peers. Immigrant youth, those who arrived in the United States as teenagers, had spent the majority of their formative years in a different culture, were schooled in a different language, had established peer groups, and were immersed in a different youth culture than that in the United States. In their homeland, they played a leading role in defining what was *in*, what was cool, and what was trendy, and many were average students in their schools. However, once in the United States, they suddenly find themselves standing out the wrong way, becoming the objects of mockery and ridicule and being referred to derogatively as FOBs (fresh-off-the-boat) by their U.S.-born or raised coethnic peers (Chiang-Hom, 2004; Pyke & Dang, 2003). They also experience hardship in school. Because of the language cultural difficulties, many newly arrived adolescents are unable to express themselves and are thus misunderstood by the teacher and fellow students; they are frequent teased, mocked, or harassed by other students because of their different look, accent, and dress; and they fear to bring these problems up at the dinner table for fear that their parents will get upset or blame them. When their problems are unaddressed by schools or by parents, the youth become discouraged, and the discouragement is sometimes followed by losing interest, plunging grades, and eventually dropping out of school and joining gangs. These problems are summed up in a community organizer's remark: "It is sometimes easier to be a gangster. These kids were generally considered 'losers' by their teachers, parents, and peers in school. In school or at home, they feel uncomfortable, isolated, and rejected, which fosters a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness and a yearning for recognition. In the streets, they feel free from all the normative pressures. It is out there that they feel free to be themselves and to do things wherever and whenever they want, giving them a sort of identity and a sense of power."

These challenges are real and serious with a far-reaching impact on the well-being of immigrant parents and children as they both strive to get ahead and get accepted in American society. Next, I explore some of the most intense points of intergenerational conflicts and the ways in which parents and children come to appreciate and reconcile differences.

STRADDLING TWO SOCIOCULTURAL WORLDS: CONFLICTS AND RECONCILIATION

Today second-generation Chinese Americans are still very young and are just beginning to come of age in significant numbers.⁴ The 2000 Current Population Survey indicates that 44% of the U.S.-born Chinese are between ages 0 and 17 years and another 10% between ages 18 and 24.⁵ Differing from their foreign-born parents, children of immigrant parentage lack meaningful connections to the sociocultural world from which their parents came. Thus, they are unlikely to consider a foreign country as a point of reference, and are much more likely to evaluate themselves or to be evaluated by others by the standards of their country of birth or the one in which they are raised (Gans, 1992; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997). However, because of their immigrant parentage, the children have constantly found themselves straddle two sociocultural worlds—Chinese versus American—which is at the core of head-on intergenerational conflicts within the Chinese immigrant family.

In the Chinese cultural context, filial piety dictates parent-child relationships (Sung, 1987). But this norm is often expected more of the children than of both parents and children reciprocally. That is, the child's filial responsibility is the debt of life owed to parents and the children are expected to suppress their own self-interests to satisfy parental needs, regardless of whether parental needs are appropriate or rational (Dion & Dion, 1996; Yeh & Bedford, 2003). Relative to filial piety is the notion of unconditional obedience, or submission, to authority—the parent, the elder, and the superior. The parent is the authority in the home, as is the teacher in the school. The parent, often the father, is not supposed to show too much affection, to play with children, or to treat children as equals. The parental stone-faced authoritative image often inhibits children from questioning, much less challenging, their parents. Furthermore, in the traditional Chinese family, there is little room for individualism. Every member is tied to one another, and every act of individual members is considered an honor or a shame to the whole family. Thus, Chinese parents are expected to bring up their children in ways that honor the family.

Asymmetric filial piety, unconditional submission to authority, and face-saving override other familial values in the traditional Chinese family. Even though changes have occurred through modernization,

⁴Estimated from the Current Population Survey (CPS) data, 1998–2000. See Logan et al. (2001).

⁵Compared to 8% between 0 and 17 years and 8% between 18 and 24 years in the first generation.

these traditional influences are still quite substantial after families migrate to a new social environment. In the American context, such absolute familial practices are frowned on, and children and parents are expected to be independent individuals on equal terms. So parent-child conflicts in the immigrant Chinese family are not just inter-generational but cultural.

SENSITIVE PRESSURE POINTS

The immigrant Chinese family is often referred to by the children as a “pressure cooker,” where intense intergenerational conflicts accumulate and sometimes boil to the point of explosion. There are some sensitive pressure points in the immigrant Chinese family—the issues of education, work ethic, consumption behavior, and dating, among others, which can stir up potentially intense conflicts (Sung, 1987).

Education is perhaps most important for the immigrant Chinese family when it comes to raising children. Chinese parents, who were raised in Confucian tradition, tend to be particularly demanding and unyielding on their children’s educational achievement. Although education is generally considered a primary means to upward social mobility in all American families, it is emphasized in some unique ways in the immigrant Chinese family. First and foremost, the children’s success in school is very much tied to face-saving for the family (Sung, 1987; Zhou, 1997). Thus, parents consistently 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. So children are under tremendous pressure to succeed. Parents are also pressured to ensure children’s success, because bragging is common among relatives, friends, and coethnic coworkers.

Immigrant parents also take a pragmatic stance on education. They believe that education is not only the most effective means to success in society but also the *only* means. 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. So in practice, the parents are concerned more about their children’s academic coursework, grades, and majors in their preferred fields than about the children’s well-rounded learning experience and extracurricular activities. They would discourage their children’s interests in pursuing history, literature, music, dance, sports, or anything that they consider unlikely to lead to good-paying, stable jobs. Instead, they 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 an Ivy League college. The children often get frustrated by the fact that their parents choose the type of education for them and make decisions for their future, even although they share the same value of education with their parents.

Another sensitive point issue is the work ethic. Immigrant Chinese parents believe that hard work, rather than natural ability or innate intelligence, is the key to educational success. Regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds, they tend to think (also tend to make their children believe) that their children can all get A's in their tests in school if they just work hard. If the children get a grade lower than what the parents expect, they will be scolded as not working hard enough. The parents also believe that by working twice as hard, one can overcome structural disadvantages associated with immigrant and/or racial minority statuses. Although they are very concerned about their children's learning, they are interested mostly in their children's report cards and will not be satisfied with any grades other than an "A." And they tend to ignore the fact that not everybody learns English, catches up with school work, and established productive relationship with teachers and fellow students at an equal rate. Many do not participate in the parent-teacher associations at their children's schools, considering these an "interference" with school in educating their children (but they do get actively involved in Chinese schools). As a result, the children often find themselves working at least twice as hard as their American peers and simultaneously feeling that their parents never think that they work hard enough.

A third sensitive issue is related to the value of thrift. Immigrant Chinese parents emphasize savings as a means of effectively deploying available family resources. They often bluntly reject material possessions and conspicuous consumption on the part of children and perceive spending money on name-brand clothes, luxurious accessories, and fashionable hairstyles as a sign of corruption, which they often term as becoming "too American" (the code word for "bad"; Sung, 1987). However, these parents seldom hesitate to spend on whatever they consider good for their children, such as books, computer software, after-school programs, Chinese lessons, private tutors, and other educational-oriented activities. They do not just do it in the best interest of their children but are also driven by the mentality of "turning sons into dragons (and daughters into phoenixes)."

The fourth sensitive issue is dating, especially dating at an early age. Chinese parents consider dating in high school not only a wasteful academic distraction but also an unhealthy, promiscuous behavior, especially for girls (Dion & Dion, 2001). But parents' attitudes toward dating in high school grow more ambivalent over time. It is interracial dating, rather than early dating in general, that "freaks them out." The parents' overconcern about girls is more out of practical consideration

about the potential risks of unwanted pregnancy than out of moral consideration about having sex.

The different views on these issues between parents and children have become the sources of intense parent-child conflicts as the children rapidly acculturate into American ways. For both parents and children, there is often a bitter feeling about being so far apart from each other. Working-class Chinese immigrant parents living or working in ethnic enclaves or ethnoburbs are usually demanding and unbending when it comes to their children's education and behavioral standards, but they do not have the time, the patience, the cultural sensitivity, and the financial and human capital resources to be more compromising, and their reference group is usually made up of other Chinese immigrants parents with whom they maintain frequent contacts. Middle-class Chinese parents living in White middle-class suburbs are demanding too and expect high performance of their children, but because of their higher socioeconomic status and higher level of acculturation, they consciously try to be more like other American parents while adhering to what they believe is good for their children. Although most are unyielding to the cultural expectations, some middle-class parents develop a sense of guilt for not being model American parents and become more easygoing and less strict with their children. For example, when a child refuses to do schoolwork on weekends as the father demands, talking back with "nobody works on weekends," a middle-class father living in the suburb would shrug with a smile and do nothing much but let his child run off with his friends, because he himself doesn't have to work on weekends. But the working-class father would get mad and make the child feel guilty about his own sacrifice, because he has to work on weekends to support the family.

ETHNIC NETWORKS AND ETHNIC INSTITUTIONS AS MEDIATING GROUNDS

Tremendous parental pressures for conformity and achievement in the Chinese immigrant family can lead to intense intergenerational conflict, rebellious behavior, withdrawal from school, and alienation from the networks that are supposed to help. Alienated children fall easy preys to street gangs. Even those children who do well in school and hope to make their parents happy and proud are at risk of being rebellious. A high school student said, "But that [doing well to make parents happy] never happens. My mother is never satisfied no matter what you do and how well you do it." This remark echoes a frustration felt by many other Chinatown youths, who voiced how much they wish not to be compared with other children and how much they wish to rebel.

Intense bicultural conflicts, coupled with the American popular culture that glorifies self-indulgence and youth rebellion, severely cir-

cumvent the role of the family in socializing children in the expected direction. Paradoxically, however, many Chinese immigrant children, regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds, seem to have lived up to their parents' expectations. Most remarkable is in the area of education, where Chinese immigrant children outperform other Americans, including non-Hispanic Whites, by significantly large margins. They have scored exceptionally high in standardized tests, have been overrepresented in the nation's prestigious and Ivy League schools, and have disproportionately made the top lists of many national or regional academic contests. They have appeared repeatedly in the top-10 award winners' list of the Westinghouse Science Talent Search, now renamed as the Intel Science Talent Search, one of the country's most prestigious high school academic contests. In 1991, 4 of the top 10 winners were Chinese Americans; all of these were either foreign-born or U.S.-born of foreign-born parentage. Their level of educational achievement is far above that of the immigrant generation, which is also already much higher than the national average. For example, at the University of California, Los Angeles, where I teach, the proportion of Chinese Americans in the entering class in the past few years has reached 18%, higher than the proportions of Blacks and Latinos combined.

Is the extraordinary educational achievement of Chinese Americans a result of the parental pressure for success and enforcement of Confucian values? There is no simple answer. A more appropriate question is: How is it possible for the Chinese immigrant family, plagued with potential and real intergenerational conflicts, to exercise parental authority and enforce the Confucian value of education? As I have just discussed, the home is usually where conflict erupts and boils up to a point that neither parents nor children have any room to breathe. Why would the children end up doing what their parents expect them to do? Based on my research in the Chinese immigrant community, I highlight two of the less obvious but most sensible lessons—the formation of an ethnic institutional environment and multiple ethnic involvements.

In Chinatowns, there have developed an ethnic enclave economy and a range of ethnic social and cultural institutions to support the daily needs of Chinese immigrants. As the community shifts from a bachelors' society to a family-based community, traditional ethnic institutions also shift their functions to serve families and children, ranging from weekend Chinese schools to a much wider variety of educational and recreational enterprises, such as daily afterschool classes that match formal school curricula, English enhancement classes, exam cram schools, college prep schools, music/dance/sports studios, and so on. These children-oriented enterprises, both nonprofit and private, have also developed in Chinese ethnoburbs.

The Chinese language school is particularly illustrative. In New York City, the Chinatown Chinese Language School (*Zhongwen*

xuexiao), run by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), is perhaps the largest children- and youth-oriented organization in the nation's Chinatowns.⁶ The school annually (not including summer) enrolls about 4,000 Chinese children, from preschool to 12th grade, in its 137 Chinese language classes and over 10 specialty classes (e.g., band, choir, piano, cello, violin, T'ai chi, ikebana, dancing, and Chinese painting). The Chinese language classes run from 3:00 to 6:30 p.m. daily, after regular school hours. Students usually spend one hour on regular school homework and two hours on Chinese language or other selected specialties. The school also has English classes for immigrant youths and adult immigrant workers (Zhou, 1997; Zhou & Li, 2003).

As Chinese immigrants became residentially dispersed, Chinese language schools likewise have begun to spring up in suburbs. As of the mid-1990s, there were approximately 635 Chinese language schools in the United States (189 in California), enrolling nearly 83,000 students (Chao, 1996). The Chinese language school experience is a definitive ethnic affirming experience for most Chinese immigrant children. In response to the question "What makes you Chinese?" many Chinese students agree that "going to Chinese school" defines what is Chinese. In Chinese language school, Chinese immigrant children come to understand their own problems with their parents as common in all Chinese families and that their parents are simply acting like all other Chinese parents. They come to terms with the fact that growing up in Chinese families is different. As Sung (1987, p. 126) observed:

For Chinese immigrant children who live in New York's Chinatown or in satellite Chinatowns, these [bi-cultural] conflicts are moderated 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 were the only one to face the conflict on his or her own.

Ethnic institutions not only provide a site where Chinese children meet other coethnic peers, but also allow the children to develop their own strategies to cope, some of which may be disapproving. For example, when it comes to dating, a girl can tell her parent that she is going out with so-and-so from the Chinese school whom her parent knows, but runs off with her White sweetheart to a movie or to the shopping mall. And the parent would confirm it with the reference from the Chi-

⁶The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) is a quasi-government in Chinatown. It used to be an apex group representing some 60 different family and district associations, guilds, tongs, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Nationalist Party, and has remained the most influential ethnic organization in the Chinese immigrant community.

nese school, whom the girl has already warned in advance. Chinese parents usually trust their children's friends from Chinese schools because they also know the parents of these Chinese school friends.

Chinese language schools have become an ethnic community for Chinese immigrants, especially those who do not live in Chinatown or Chinese ethnoburbs. Most of the suburban Chinese language schools are registered as nonprofit organizations that require much parental volunteer support.⁷ When children enroll in Chinese schools, their parents automatically become members of the school's administrative body, and volunteer their time to serve as principal and/or administrative officials (Chao, 1996; Wang, 1996). As a result, suburban Chinese schools function as ethnic social organizations where adults (parents) come to socialize. A Chinese parent likens the suburban Chinese school to a church, and said in an interview at a Chinese school:

We are non-religious and don't go to church. So coming to Chinese school weekly is like going to church for us. While our children are in class, we parents don't just go home because we live quite far away, we hang out here and participate in a variety of things that we organize for ourselves, including dancing, fitness exercise, seminars on the stock market, family financial management, children's college prep. I kind of look forward to going to the Chinese school on Saturdays because there is the only time we can socialize with our own people in our native language. I know some of our older kids don't like it that much. When they complain, I simply tell them, "this is not a matter of choice, you must go."

In these ethnic settings, parents meet with other parents who share similar concerns and problems and work out strategies to deal with them.

In summary, ethnic institutions are vital in positively affecting the younger generation. Instrumentally, these institutions provide a safe, healthy, and stimulating environment where youngsters, especially the ones whose parents are at work, can go after school. The Chinese schools and various after-school programs not only ensure the time spent on homework or on other constructive activities, but also help to keep children off the streets and to reduce the anxieties and worries of working parents. More important, these ethnic institutions offer some space where children can express and share their feelings. A Chinese school teacher said, "It is very important to allow youths to express themselves in their own terms without 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 streets."

⁷For-profit Chinese language schools are often found in Chinatowns or ethnoburbs, including many kindergartens and child care centers for young children, and offering various tutorial programs for secondary school students (Wang, 1996).

Ethnic institutions also serve as a bridge between a seemingly closed immigrant community and the mainstream society (Zhou & Li, 2003). Immigrant parents and the children who live in ethnic enclaves or ethnoburbs are relatively isolated, and their daily exposure to the larger American society is limited. Many parents, usually too busy working, tend to expect their children to do well in school and to have successful careers in the future, but are unable to give specific directions to their children's educational and career plans, leaving a gap between high expectations and realistically feasible means of meeting these expectations. Ethnic institutions fill this gap to help young people to become more aware of their choices and potentials and to help them find realistic means of moving up socioeconomically into mainstream society instead of being stuck in Chinatown. After-school programs, tutor services, and test preparation programs are readily available in the enclave, making school after school possible and an accepted norm. An educator said, "When you think of how much time these Chinese kids put in their studies after regular school, you won't be surprised why they succeed in such a high rate."

Furthermore, ethnic institutions function as cultural centers, where Chinese traditional values and a sense of ethnic identity are nurtured. Students participating in the after-school programs, especially the U.S.-born and -reared, often speak English to one another in their Chinese classes, and they actually learn a limited number of Chinese words each day. However, they are exposed to something that is quite different from what they learn in school and are able to relate to Chinese "stuff" without being teased about it. They also listen to stories and sing songs in Chinese, and these reveal different aspects of Chinese history and culture. Children and youths learn to write in Chinese such phrases as "I am Chinese" and "My home country is in China," and to recite classical Chinese poems and Confucius sayings about family values, behavioral and moral guidelines, and the importance of schooling. A Chinese school principal made it clear: "These kids are here because their parents sent them. They are usually not very motivated in learning Chinese per se, and we do not push them too hard. Language teaching is only part of our mission. An essential part of our mission is to enlighten these kids about their own cultural heritage, so that they show respect for their parents and feel proud of being Chinese." Like other ethnic businesses, ethnic educational enterprises also attract suburban middle-class Chinese immigrants to return to Chinatown or ethnoburbs regularly, even though some may do so less frequently than others.

With the development of a wide range of ethnic economies and ethnic sociocultural institutions, Chinese immigrants, despite differences in origin, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic dispersion, have many opportunities to interact with one another as they participate in the ethnic community in multiple ways. Working, shopping, and socializing in the ethnic community tie immigrants to a

closely knit system of ethnic social relations. Social networks, embedded in the broader Chinese immigrant community, function to reinforce common norms and standards and exercise control over those who are connected to it. Involvement in different type of ethnic institutions also helps children alleviate parental pressure. In many respects, the ethnic community and the tangible and intangible resources it provides have proven effective. Pressures and conflicts in a well-integrated ethnic community can serve to fulfill familial and community expectations. Children are motivated to learn and do well in school because they believe that education is their only way to get out of their parents' status and out of their parents' control. This motivation, while arising from parental pressure and being reinforced through their participation in the ethnic community, often leads to desirable outcomes. A community youth program organizer summed 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] proportions of kids failing. Our goal is to get these kids out into college, and for that, we have been very successful."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In America, many Chinese immigrant families expect their children to attain the highest levels of educational achievement possible and rely on them to move families up to middle-class status as a way to repay parental sacrifices and to honor the family name. Deviation from these normative expectations is considered shameful or "losing face" for the family. This study shows that it is not easy for immigrant families to enforce these cultural values and behavioral standards and to guarantee that familial expectations are met because of structural vulnerabilities associated with disadvantaged immigrant status and intense bicultural conflicts. In this situation, both parents and children have to constantly negotiate culture and ethnicity, make compromises, and resolve conflicts in order to navigate the "right" way into mainstream American society. However, this undertaking is by no means a family-only matter, but requires the involvement of broader networks of social support. In the case of contemporary immigrants, a well-organized, resourceful ethnic community that gears itself toward social mobility into mainstream American society plays a crucial role in providing not only tangible resources, in the form of ethnic educational institutions and children-oriented programs, but also intangible ethnic networking, serving as effective mechanisms of social control and sanctioning.

As a sociologist of immigration and race and ethnicity, I believe that cultural values and behavioral patterns seemingly unique to an ethnic group are not intrinsic to that group, but that they emerge from con-

stant interactions with structural circumstances, including favorable (or unfavorable) contexts of reception of the immigrant group from the host society and the group's own orientation toward the host society and its ability to muster moral and instrumental supports. Thus, examining the immigrant family through the perspective of cultural psychology is helpful insofar as it pays close attention to various structural factors mediating the role of the family in affecting educational achievement. I thus reiterate that the processes leading to desirable outcomes are highly contingent on context, or on unique ethnic social environments.

It is evident from various quantitative data sources that young Chinese Americans are extremely driven to do well in school and are disproportionately represented at the nation's best universities, and that being Chinese has a significantly positive effect on educational achievement. However, what comes next has often gone unnoticed. On a personal note, as a immigrant mother who has raised a 1.5-generation child in America and as a professor at a university attended by a high concentration of Asian American students (making up nearly 40% of UCLA's undergraduate student body), the subject matter I have explored here holds personal significance for me. Although Chinese immigrant parents have been overwhelmingly preoccupied with their children gaining admission to prestigious colleges, many of them have overlooked the costs that come with success. My random observations at home and on campus, coinciding with my qualitative fieldwork, indicate that once these children get in to their families' desired colleges, they are more or less on their own just like everyone else, without the clear guidance and all the family and community supports to which they have gotten so accustomed, and many of them feel lost and even suffer from emotional breakdown. This underscores the importance of shifting focus on the mental health and intellectual growth of the individual—how the children fare all on their own in a highly competitive academic environment that is simultaneously ultraliberal, and how they survive and thrive in this new environment. In this respect, the perspective of cultural psychology is beneficial.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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