

Guanxi in Heritage Language Learning among Chinese American Children

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I. Introduction

My upbringing in Chinese society informs me of the importance of *guanxi* (social capital) for individual and group survival and success. The literature that I am exposed to in graduate study in the U.S. and my experience as a Chinese language teacher to a group of Chinese American children further consolidate my belief that social capital (*guanxi*) matters in various ways in the U.S. as well. This study illustrates the significance of local social capital (i.e., ethnic community forces and social structure in the US context, e.g. ethnic language schools) and transnational social capital (i.e., social networks in home country) in Heritage Language (HL) learning among Chinese immigrants and Chinese American (CICA) children. Ethnographic research methods are used in this study, including intensive, participant observation, interview, informal conversations with parents and children in a local Chinese language school named Columbia Academy of Chinese Language (CACL) and a cultural event held in Columbia. The results show that local and transnational social capital have great impact on the CICA children's HL learning in that local social capital functions to reinforce social norms, enlist social support, impose social control, to build and expand social networks, and to nurture ethnic identity and pride among Chinese immigrant parents and peers. Transnational social capital plays an even more important role in HL and culture learning. Social networks in home country help CICA

children to develop first-hand knowledge of the cultural norms, traditions, and social and political structures of home country through different means of communication. Through transnational interaction, CICA children develop a dual frame of reference, with which they compare and contrast their personal experiences in the cultural contexts of the US and their homeland. In so doing, they could avoid “identity confusion” and reconstruct their identity as Americans of native culture heritage. This positive reconstruction of ethnic identity, in turn leads to higher interest and motivation in learning heritage language and culture, more active participation in the community activities, and higher educational achievement in the long run.

These are some specific questions that guide my study:

- How do Chinese immigrant parents utilize local and transnational social capital (re)produced by Chinese community and Chinese language school (CACL) to help second generation CAC learn heritage language? What are some of the functions of the social capital?
- To what extent does globalization’s recent effects on the proliferation of mass-mediated communications impact the social capital utilized by Chinese immigrant parents? And to what extent do these changes require a re-conceptualization of prior theories?

II. Theoretical Framework

Although a highly multilingual country, the United States has established itself as an *English-only* country. The English-only ideology has resulted from the notion of “one nation, one language” (presuming to be the way to achieve equality), English-only ideology has persisted and enmeshed in the movements of peoples, products, and communication that characterize globalization in the 21st century. Despite the presence and developments of bilingual education in the United States, the language of schooling is, and has been, English. However, with the ever-increasing development of the Chinese economy and its strategic importance in world economy, the world’s eyes have zoomed in on China and Chinese language in an ever-

increasing pace. Mandarin is acknowledged as one of the three “world languages” that all people will find useful in future world (Language statistics & facts).

Heritage Language

Chinese language in the US is mostly learnt as a “heritage language.” The term “heritage language” in this study is defined as the language spoken by immigrants in the family or associated with the heritage culture. Many scholars have given definition to “heritage language.” Krashen has defined heritage language as the language spoken by minority language groups rather than by the dominant culture (1998, p. 3). Valdés provided three main criteria for identifying the heritage language learners in the US:

Raised in homes where a non-English language is spoken; speak or merely understand the heritage language; and are to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language (2001, p. 38)

Chinese Heritage Learners (CHL), thus, refers to learners who have had exposure to Chinese outside the formal educational system, typically in their home or community (Wu, 2002).

Maintaining and developing HL is significant not only for national interests such as economic development, world affairs, and community relations, but also for individual advancement (Crawford, 1999). Previous studies have discussed the advantages for an individual to develop his or her heritage language in addition to the dominant language spoken in the country in which they reside. For instance, Portes and Hao (1998) found that HL learning promotes cognitive development and academic achievement; Garcia (1995) and Krashen (1998) related the HL ability to more career opportunities. Other benefits for individual HL ability include a more positive self-concept or identity (Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004), a stronger sense of

one's own cultural identity (Tse, 1998), and closer bonds with family and community through shared values (Fishman, 1996; Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004). For a group or community, sharing a common heritage language can connect speakers with their culture and history, and build stronger bonds with older members of their communities and families (Cho, 2000; Fishman, 1996; Tse, 1997). Another study conducted by Reyhner and Tennant (1995) found learners of the heritage language can "recognize the hidden network of cultural values that permeates the language," which in turn can "add to the knowledge and skills required to 'walk in two worlds'" (p. 280). Despite all these benefits, HLs are still diminishing, and the literacy skills in the HL are very limited among younger generations of immigrants because most of them are educated exclusively in English (Campbell, 1998).

Status of Chinese as HL in the U.S.

The status of Chinese as HL in the U.S. has experienced ups and downs with the change of Chinese immigrants' status in American history. The 18th through mid-20th century was a period of discrimination and segregation of Chinese into Chinatown. This situation has not been changed until the 1943 when the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed and Chinatowns was developed into normal communities for the Chinese immigrants. Public sentiment toward Chinese slowly changed from hostile to greater tolerance after WWII. A critical turning point for Chinese immigrants came in 1965 when the Immigration Act abolished racial discrimination against all immigrants. The favorable social position for Chinese was further consolidated with the pass of laws in 1970 and 1976, which has given preference to those with professional skills or well-educated intellectuals and highly skilled workers who spread out near universities and into the suburbs instead of congregating in Chinatowns. This made up the second wave of Chinese immigration. A third wave of Chinese immigrants started in late 1970 and early 1980s, when

four different sub-groups, including refugees from Southeast Asia, legal and illegal working-class Chinese, affluent people from Hong Kong and Taiwan, professionals, students, and their families, came around and after the Tian'anmen Square Incident in 1989 from the PRC. These four groups dramatically changed the landscapes of the Chinese communities in the US (Wang, 2007).

Along with the Chinese immigration patterns, three major types of Chinese community schools in the US were developed: (1) the traditional Chinese schools in and around Chinatowns in large cities, which taught and still teach in Chinese dialects such as Cantonese, Taishanese, or Fukienese, aimed to preserve language and cultural heritage in the second and succeeding generations. Unlike other European ethnic groups, who were under pressure to assimilate, the Chinese were legally excluded from the melting pot and their children were deprived of equal educational opportunity. As a result, the Chinese had to establish their own schools to provide education and vocational training for their children (Wong, 1988); (2) the suburban Chinese schools established by the second wave of Chinese immigrants since the late 1960s and 1970s, which teach Mandarin and traditional Chinese characters, reflecting the fact that most these immigrant families were from Taiwan or Hong Kong; and (3) the Mainland Chinese schools since the 1980s, which also teach Mandarin but using simplified Chinese characters, reflecting the fact that most families were from PRC (Wang, 2007). Since the early 1990s, because of the political movement toward independence in Taiwan, a new branch of Chinese schools has established to teach Taiwanese, a dialect related to Minnanyu (also known as Fukienese). These systems of Chinese heritage schools are independent of one another and usually do not interact.

Nowadays, Chinese school systems have evolved into well-organized educational and cultural institutions with much broader range of functions beyond the preservation of ethnic

language and culture (Wang, 1996). The majority of the contemporary Chinese schools are nondenominational and non-profit aimed not only to maintain language and culture, but also to serve the educational needs of immigrant children. Without support from formal educational system, Chinese language schools are usually left alone to wrestle with a myriad of challenges and their efforts have largely been unnoticed by mainstream society (Wang, 1996).

Administratively, most of Chinese language schools are operated entirely by parent volunteers, voluntary administrators and board members with the assistance of a small, moderately compensated teaching staff. They are usually affiliated with nonprofit organizations such as Chinese-American associations or Chinese religious organizations. Although relatively small and without institutional support, the members of the Chinese language schools usually have tightly-knit social capital that maintains the function and development of the school in order to achieve a nationally shared and focused objective: to help U.S.-born or -raised children integrate into mainstream American society by fostering ethnic culture, heritage, and identity, and to provide a wide range of tangible supplementary (rather than competing) services to help children do well in regular schools and ultimately gain admission into prestigious colleges (Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Social capital

Social capital refers to the intangible resources embedded within interpersonal relationships or social institutions (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman (1988) illustrates three forms of social capital: as obligations and expectations, as information channels, and as social norms. The obligations and expectations serve as criteria for membership; information channels provide opportunities for members, and social norms provide the criteria for rewarding or sanctioning individual actions. Lin (1999) provides four explanations about why embedded resources in social networks will enhance the outcomes of individual and institutions' actions, including

facilitating information flow about opportunities and choices; exerting influence or social control; granting social credential to members and exclusive accessibility to resources; consolidating identity and recognition based on social capital.

In the context of education, social capital is important for students' success. For example, social capital in the form of parental expectations and obligations for educating their children matters; the network and connections between families whom the school serves matter; to the disciplinary and academic climate at school matter; and to the cultural norms and values that promote student efforts matter (Stevenson & Stigler, 1996). Therefore, social capital can account for the ethnic disparities of student achievement. Coleman (1988) argued that the educational expectation, norms, and obligations that exist within a family or a community are important social capital that can influence the level of parental involvement and investment, which in turn affect academic success. At the institutional level, disciplinary climate and academic norms established by the school community and the mutual trust between home and school are major forms of social capital. They have been proved to be influential not only on creating a learning and caring school climate, but also on improving the quality of schooling and reducing inequality of learning outcomes between social-class groups.

In summary, social capital is a useful means to explain ethnic disparities of educational achievement. Ethnic groups with higher and more solid stocks of social capital are more likely to produce students with better academic performance than ethnic groups with low stocks. In the case of Chinese people, social capital (*guanxi*) is significant due to its primary place in traditional Chinese philosophy with a stress on the centrality of social interaction in the formation of the individual's identity and sense of fulfillment as a "person." (Key concept of Confucianism is *jen* (*ren*), or human heartedness (Mei 1967, p. 328), which involves self-

cultivation and education, in particular, learning how to treat other people. Gold, Guthrie and Wank (2002) argued that “understanding and successfully managing interpersonal relationships are considered as essential elements of being authentically “Chinese”, regardless of time or place (p. 10). Pye puts “the Chinese tend to see the manipulation of human relationships as the natural and normal approach for accomplishing most things in life” because they perceive “society as a web of human relationships and associations” from this view, Chinese culture creates a deep psychological inclination for individuals to actively cultivate and manipulate social relations of instrumental ends (Gold, Guthrie and Wank (2002) .

Therefore, I am curious about how these Chinese immigrant parents have transplanted the social capital to the U.S. context and whether and how social capital can be utilized to help the second-generation Chinese American children to maintain and enhance Chinese as heritage language. Through an examination of the social capital within a specific ethnic social structure, such as ethnic language schools that target children and youth, I aim to provide insight into how social capital established within a certain ethnic institution with shared values, beliefs, and norms are sustained and expanded to create a social environment conducive to heritage language and culture learning.

III. Design and Methodology

Settings and Participants

This study sets in Columbia, South Carolina, which has made many initiatives to spread Chinese language and culture due to its unique characteristics. First of all, South Carolina is the 9th largest trading partner with China among 50 states in the US and first largest in the South East of the US. Furthermore, the University of South Carolina (USC) is the central place where more and more international students and visiting scholars from China choose to study (about

140 faculty members, staff, and visiting scholars are from China). In addition, the near 3,000 Chinese reside in the city and surrounding area of Columbia and the demand of Chinese families for their children to maintain Chinese language and culture has made Chinese language learning imperative. Lastly, the desire of many other members of the population (especially adoptive families with Chinese children) for their children to acquire fluency in a major world language other than English has accelerated the popularity of Chinese in South Carolina.

For all the above-mentioned needs and demands for Chinese language, this study zooms in on a local Chinese language school and its members, a group of Chinese immigrant parents who have established and maintained a strong social capital in this particular ethnic institute—Columbia Academy of Chinese Language (CACL) in Columbia, South Carolina. CACL is a well-organized educational and cultural institution with much broader range of functions beyond the preservation of ethnic language and culture. Like the majority of the contemporary Chinese language schools in the US, CACL is also nondenominational and non-profit with missions of “promoting Chinese language, culture and heritage among Columbia residents, facilitating children's linguistic, cognitive, and social development, enhancing multi-cultural understanding and diversity in communities, and developing global citizen among young people” (CACL Mission Statement). CACL operates on Sunday afternoons, offering two-hour of Chinese language classes and one hour of enrichment electives, including Chinese painting, drama, and ballet for both children and parents. Two tracks of Chinese language programs are offered: Chinese as a Second Language (CSL) focusing on K-12 students whose mother tongue is not Chinese (native Americans who are interested in Chinese and adopted Chinese children of American parents), and Chinese as a Heritage Language (CHL) offers Chinese classes to K-12 students with at least one of the parents as a native Chinese speaker. Administratively, CACL is

operated entirely by parent volunteers, who are affiliated with nonprofit organizations such as Columbia Association of Chinese (CAC), Confucius Institute (CI) or Friendship Association of Chinese Scholars and Students (FACSS). Although relatively small and without institutional support, all members of CACL maintain a tightly-knit social capital that keeps the school function and develop.

Data Collection Methods

An ethnographic approach is utilized in order to gain insights into the entire culture, operation and belief systems within this organization. As a teacher of CACL, I have easy access to various venues within and outside the territory of CACL, such as students' homes, various sites where different cultural events are held by CACL and Chinese community. However, I do keep in mind that researcher should be a "neutral distant reflective observer (dialoguing between the research process and the product)" (Grbich, 2009, p. 40).

Data was collected by carefully observing and documenting of the settings or context, the administrative structure of the organization, the participants and their language, rituals, events, shared belief systems, and behaviors and actions and so on. The field notes and journal have been written right after the observation period to document the events in the physical setting as well as monitor my own subjectivity. In addition to the observation in CACL classrooms, lounge and hallways, I also conducted one-on-one interviews with four participants (parents). I intentionally selected parents whose children are in different grade levels, including grade two, three, four and five (my class). I did inform the participants that their involvement in the study was their own decision and they can choose not to participate in any time. I had informal conversations with four participants in different occasions prior to the interview, so they were very willing to accept my interview. With each participant, I conducted one session of interview

lasted 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews transcribed in a timely manner and were sent back to participants for their review, clarification and comments. At the same time, they were asked to choose a pseudonym of their own preference to protect their privacy.

I do keep in mind that my multiple roles as a female, teacher and researcher come with concerns while interacting with participants. *As a female*, I selected mothers as my participants out of instinct, which might have rendered my data restricted due to the limited female lenses and voices. *As a teacher*, who is greatly respected and considered as authority based on Chinese culture, there exists a natural gap between me and my participants. They could have said what they thought I may like to hear rather than saying what is actually the truth. *As a researcher*, I might have led or they are willing to proceed in my direction thus miss their own viewpoints. Therefore, I consciously selected participants from all grade level rather than all from my class. I also assured them that I was not authority although I am a Chinese teacher, and there were no “right answers” and that the purpose of the interviews was to help me better understand what resources they use to help their children learn Chinese language. In my interactions with my participants, four principles guided me: first, I respect for participants’ autonomy by recognizing and making allowances that take the independence and desires of the participants into consideration; second I protect participant’s privacy by securing the data in a careful; third, I did what I can to work for the benefits of my participants by providing them with Chinese language learning resources and professional materials; last but not the least important is the fairness in treating participants. In a word, I bear in mind the positive and the negative impact of my identity or role to my study because it is what makes it unique.

Data Analysis

I categorized my data based on the types of social capital established and utilized by parents. The basis of classification includes, domains in which social capital is established and maintained, the social capital among different generations, and the language use in social capital maintenance.

IV. Findings and Discussion

The findings show that social capital was created among different generations, including the social capital among parents, among children (siblings and friends). Furthermore, the interview and observation data show that English is the prevalent language used among these children due to the predominance of English use at school and social settings outside the family. All participants (parents) indicate that they have to force children to speak Chinese with them at home. However, their children tend to code switch to English when interacting with siblings. As for peer interactions at Chinese language school and social life, the trend is that the longer these children stay in the U.S. and the older they grow, the easier they shift to English.

The domains in which social capital is established include both *local social capital* and *transnational social capital*. Local social capital means the ethnic community forces and social structure in the US context, for example, the ethnic language schools, church and various cultural events held in the local area; and the *transnational social capital* refers to the social networks in home country, especially with the increasing trend of globalization, back-and-forth migration is much more possible and forms of mass-mediated communication are much more accessible, which means that the transnational social capital can be established and maintained easier, which in turn may generate more opportunities and better chances for Chinese American children to maintain and develop their Chinese language.

Chinese immigrant parents utilize both local social capital and transnational social capital to facilitate CICA children in maintaining and developing their HL proficiency. By local social capital, I mean the local ethnic community forces (e.g., shared values, beliefs, behavioral standards, and coping strategies) and the local social structure (e.g. Chinese language schools). Transnational social capital, on that other hand, refers to the social networks in homeland and the institutionally-supported program such as “In Search of Roots” Summer Camp Program in China (<http://www.c-c-c.org/roots/ISR1.htm>) under the auspice of the Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco (CCF), the Chinese Historical Society of America (CHSA), and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in Guangdong Province, People’s Republic of China. The following part illustrates in detail how Chinese immigrant parents capitalize on these local and transnational social capital and the cultural values they brought with them from China to support children’s heritage language and culture maintenance.

1. Local Social Capital

The Chinese ethnic institution CACL functions not only as a place where immigrant Chinese parents utilize to help their children learn Chinese language and culture, but also as the locus of social support, a center for social control, a location for building social credential, and a locality for consolidating social capital among its members.

1) Social Support and Information Channel

While class is in session, parents usually sit in the empty classrooms to socialize with each other. In this way, CACL serves as bridge ties that facilitate the exchange of valuable information and connect immigrants with each other, and facilitate HL learning among their children. In an interview, one parent said,

While waiting for our children until class ends, we parents communicate with each other here, or participate in a variety of things that we organize for ourselves, including ballet dancing

and fitness exercise. I've built a lot of friendship here. My kids don't like here that much. I simply tell them, "this is not even YOUR choice, you MUST go."

I've heard my friends saying that when their children grew older, they would experience ethnic identity confusion. They would question who they are and where they are from. So I think I should provide my daughter the basic means to explore these questions and avoid identity conflict as early as possible. I want to let her know that she is a Chinese, with virtues of hard-working and intelligent. This way she would not feel lost.

Through interaction, parents build social networks, and share valuable experiences to help each other understand the importance of HL in children's life in the U.S.. They also share important resources to help children's Chinese language learning. One day one of my students handed to me a book with a large and complete collection of Chinese poems, saying, "*Miss Wu, my mother asked me to hand this for your making copies to share with our classmates since it is Chinese Tang Dynasty poem week.*" I was touched by the commitment the parents made to CACL and to children's Chinese language learning. Social support is thus established in CACL to facilitate Chinese language maintenance.

2) Social control and social norm

Parental interactions also help to reinforce the social norms shared by Chinese people, such as hard-working, academically successful, higher educational achievement, filial piety and so on. The following are some parents' expectations for their children,

"I want my daughter to get at least Master's degree."

"My expectation for her Chinese is that she would be able to read the Classic Chinese Literature, such as our "Four Classic Chinese Literature. I think this will be very helpful to improve her Chinese and cultural proficiency.

"Doctor should be the career that the children should pursue."

*"I always hope that they could form and sustain a Chinese peer group so that they can always get together to share their feelings and experiences, to communicate and learn from each other in their own language because they would be in the similar situation and face similar social pressure. This kind of network is **SO** different from the one with Americans—it's more like a **BIG** family*

These social norms such as high academic achievement, patriotism, collective-orientation were initially built in Chinese society, and they were transplanted into U.S. context by these parents, and was reinforced in this ethnic institute CACL—a unified cultural environment. With the further structural support, i.e., Chinese language class and Chinese teachers, Chinese values and norms such as respect for authority, filial piety, and hard work are transmitted and reinforced in Chinese language classes. These social norms become stronger and stronger with the constant social comparison parents make. One of the central topics among these parents is children of different families within the community. Parents tend to compare their own children with others' children and with prevailing social norms as we can see in these remarks:

“Xu’s son speaks Chinese so fluently, so we often carpool to create opportunity for kids to communicate in Chinese and to learn from each other.”

“Li’s children went to Duke University with a full scholarship. We need to talk with Li about how to help her kids in academics.”

“Yan’s daughter plays violin so well, especially the “Butterfly Lover” (a traditional Chinese violin music), so I send my daughter to the same violin teacher.”

Parents are making social comparison not only in academics, but also in all other aspects, which I think is due to the influence a combined social norm of both Chinese and American society. Chinese social norm conditioned these parents to view education as the only means to measure individual success, so academic achievement is still considered as the priority. However, parents also realize the high value of skills and talents other than academics in American society. Therefore, they also attach great importance to other talents to create more opportunities for their children. During these constant comparisons, these children had to strive ahead in everything, including the proficiency level in Chinese language.

3) *Social credential*

The resources provided by these social ties and their acknowledged relationships to the individual are considered as certifications of the individual’s social credentials, some of which

reflect the individual's accessibility to resources through social networks and relations—his/her social capital. CACL teachers are granted privileges to use the Chinese teaching resources provided by Confucius Institute for free. CACL parents are entitled rights to elect and to be elected as principal or other leadership position, and CACL children were the only ones who can sit in the classrooms to learn Chinese. They are all granted a social credential as CACL member, who could take advantage of the social capital within the group to help Chinese language and culture maintenance. Collectivism is reflected through their concerted efforts in creating and developing opportunities and resources to benefit all members.

4) Social network building

In this tightly-knit organization, local social capital is built not only among parents, but also among peers to facilitate HL learning, and to nurture ethnic identity and pride.

“We have several Chinese families in our community, so we often carpool to take kids to school. I used to ask them to communicate in Chinese, but they stopped their lively conversation immediately. Sometimes those kids who are good at Chinese would follow my instruction and speak Chinese confidently, but those who are not good at it would keep quiet all the way, which made me feel so bad about having isolated them.

*I always hope that they could form and sustain a Chinese peer group so that they can always get together to share their feelings and experiences, to communicate and learn from each other in their own language because they would be in the similar situation and face similar social pressure. This kind of network is **SO** different from the one with Americans—it's more like a **BIG** family.*

From the parents' voice above, we can see that parents consciously make efforts to assist transmission of the existing social capital to younger generations. Having a peer group that values the heritage language was the most critical element in language maintenance (Tse, 2001). Peers helped each other develop positive opinions about becoming highly literate in the heritage language. Peers also use HL ability as a critical standard for gaining access to, getting full membership in, and achieving a prominent position within the particular peer social group. In

this way, further social networks are built. CACL provides unique opportunities for Chinese American children to form different peer networks.

In addition, parents provide a lot of financial, material and strategic support to CACL and their efforts were acknowledged through a regular end-of-semester program, in which all members of CACL get together to see children's performance, including traditional Chinese dance, Chinese songs, and instrument play. Another important part of this event is the award to teachers and volunteers (parents) in cash or in material. However, the cash is usually returned to treasurer for school supply purchase. Through this event, members' efforts and worthiness as an individual and as a member of a social group sharing similar interests and resources are acknowledged, which in turn provide them with not only emotional support but also public recognition of one's value. This reinforced social credential is essential for the entitlement to more resources.

Thus, local social capital flow within CACL has functioned as information channel, social control and social norm consolidation, social credential building, and social capital reinforcement. All these combined with cultural characteristics foster children's Chinese language and cultural maintenance.

2. Transnational Social Capital

Apart from local social capital, Chinese parents also make use of the transnational social capital to facilitate Chinese language and culture education among their children. One parent said that she often asked her friend, a Chinese language teacher in China to send her learning materials for her children to learn Chinese. They also encourage children to talk with their relatives in China on the phone or send them to China for short visit during holidays.

We send her back to China every other year and each time after she came back, I can sense the improvement in her spoken Chinese.

We plan to send my daughter back to give some violin concerts since she does a good job playing some traditional Chinese music. So I would always say to her, “you have to learn to speak Chinese well in order to give concerts in China, or else you wouldn’t be able to communicate with your audience.”

The use of the transnational social capital helps Chinese American children develop first-hand knowledge of the cultural norms, traditions, and social and political structures of the home country. In addition, these children develop a dual frame of reference, with which they compare and contrast their personal experiences in the cultural contexts of the US and in China. In so doing, the Chinese American children start to reconstruct their identity as Americans of Chinese heritage. This positive reconstruction of ethnic identity, in turn leads to an orientation toward higher interest and motivation in learning and developing HL and culture, more active participation in the ethnic community cultural activities, and higher cultural appreciation.

However, social capital is not the only factor that impact parents and children’s HL maintenance efforts. Chinese cultural characteristics also play a role in facilitating the maintenance of HL among generations of Chinese immigrant. Prior to migration, Chinese lived in a country of origin where education is the single most important means of attaining social mobility; where access to quality education is fiercely competitive and highly restricted; and where families invest a disproportionate amount of their resources in regular school education and supplementary education in order to improve their children’s future life chances. Direct involvement in or exposure to institutionalized supplementary education in the homeland adds to the cultural repertoire with which Chinese immigrants carry with them when they migrate in the U.S.

Upon arrival in the United States, Chinese immigrants encounter a relatively open education system and abundant educational opportunities on the one hand, and “blocked”

mobility on the other. This reality not only reaffirms their belief in education but also fosters a perception of education as the only possible means for social mobility (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Asian immigrants also encounter the “model minority” stereotype frequently imposed on them, which on the surface is a positive image but in fact sets Asian Americans apart from other Americans and hold them to higher than average standards (Zai, 2000). In this paradoxical situation, the value of education is heightened not merely as a means to enrich the self and honor the family, as Confucianism dictates, but as the most effective means for getting ahead in American society. The value of education and the means for achievement have been accepted by Chinese Americans of all levels of social class. Chinese immigrant parents, with high educational achievement are also aware of the importance of keeping HL among their children to not only guarantee them with more career opportunities, but also prevent the “Americanization”, which means disrespect of authority and elders, the devaluing of education, and glorification of violence. Becoming Americanized is perceived as detrimental to the children’s achievement and their overall mental health (Steinberg, Brown & Dornbusch, 1997). Chinese language and Chinese language school thus become counter forces for “Americanization.” Parents are also worried about children’s “identity confusion” which appeared among immigrant children in their adolescent years, when they tend to question their identity. As one mother remarked,

“I’ve heard my friends saying that when their children grew older, they would experience ethnic identity confusion. They would question who they are and where they are from. So I think I should provide my daughter the basic means to explore these questions and avoid identity conflict as early as possible. I want to let her know that she is a Chinese, with virtues of hard-working and intelligent. This way she would not feel lost.”

Therefore, parents make efforts to provide children with HL proficiency early on in order to give them language background as means to search for their identity.

In sum, a combination of nonprofit ethnic-language schools with its closely-knit social capital and the distinct Chinese culture characteristics play an important role in maintaining Chinese HL and culture among CICA children.

V. Conclusion and Implication

This study illustrates the importance of social capital in heritage language and culture maintenance among immigrant children. Parents make use of the local social capital generated within a certain ethnic institution to obtain social support, social control, social credential and to reinforce the existing social capital. While transnational social capital was taken advantage as a cultural bridge between the home land and the host country by providing immigrant children with first-hand knowledge of the cultural norms, traditions, and social and political structures of the home country, and as a basis for reconstruction of ethnic identity, which in turn leads to an orientation toward higher interest and motivation in learning and developing HL and culture, more active participation in the ethnic community cultural activities, and higher cultural appreciation.

Implications of this study include further involvement of the ethnic community in maintaining HL among immigrant children and more frequent transnational communications to foster immigrant children's understanding of and appreciation for the heritage language and culture.

Therefore, social capital plays a positive role in HL learning as indicated by the above-mentioned instances. However, we cannot deny the negative effects social capital might have in other cases. A case in point is my encounter with a family from Canton, in southern China at the Mid-Autumn Festival gathering. The family has two children of 2 and 4 years old. The 4-year-old daughter used to be in CACL for one semester, but she dropped out because of difficulty in

catching up with other Mandarin speaking children in the class, which was resulted from various factors such as lack of home language support (*the mother was the only one who speaks Cantonese with very limited ability in Mandarin. The father speaks English only at home due to the “less utility” of Cantonese*), short of peers who speak Cantonese (*there aren’t many Cantonese families in Columbia, and none of them are interested in enrolling children in Chinese language school or getting children together to play*), and no media support (*all the TV programs and Chinese learning CDs are Mandarin Chinese*). Thus, in this case the characteristics of the “exclusivity” of social capital was lack of a strong local social network of Cantonese speakers in Columbia leads to the loss of heritage language among younger generations of Cantonese in a faster pace. Putnam’s components of social capital provide a clearer explanation of why this happened. Putnam proposed two types of social capital, bonding social capital and bridging social capital. The former refers to the value assigned to social networks between homogeneous groups of people, in this case Mandarin-speaking Chinese immigrant families; bridging social capital on the other hand, refers to that of social networks between socially heterogeneous groups. Typical examples are that criminal gangs create bonding social capital, while choirs and bowling clubs create bridging social capital. Bridging social capital is argued to have a host of other benefits for societies, governments, individuals, and communities. However, social capital may not always be beneficial for society as a whole. The exclusive gangs and hierarchical patronage systems that operate at cross purposes to societal interests can be thought of as negative social capital burdens on society. In this case, the Chinese community of Mandarin speakers had naturally excluded speakers of other languages, be it Cantonese or other languages. As Bourdieu maintains that language to be not merely a method of communication, but also a mechanism of power. The language one uses is designated by one’s

relational position in a field or social space. Different uses of language tend to reiterate the respective positions of each participant. Linguistic interactions are manifestations of the participants' respective positions in social space and categories of understanding, and thus tend to reproduce the objective structures of the social field. This determines who has a "right" to be listened to, to interrupt, to ask questions, and to lecture, and to what degree. Thus, the very few Cantonese speakers in Columbia was rendered powerless in the social context and Mandarin becomes the social norm and power in the Chinese community in Columbia.

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