

Becoming Bilingual Chinese Americans: Imagination and Chineseness

Yuhshi Lee
University of Washington

Globalization is eroding the borders of nation/states as people are able to move across borders and belong in multiple places (Banks, 2004). With the influx of these spaces, language provides the resources needed to access and function within this global arena. As those who are bilingual and biliterate in both their heritage language and English have an advantage in this increasingly global space (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005), there is a great demand for children to be bilingual. Applying the notion of imagined communities (Norton, 2001) and Chineseness (Chen, 2002) to an analysis of two Chinese immigrant families, this study highlights how parents view bilingualism as a valuable resource for their children in the future and thus employ educational strategies as a way to provide them membership in a global community through the learning of both English and Chinese language.

Introduction

A nation can be regarded as a bounded space in which a group of people share a common identity, language, religion, culture, or history. However, with the ongoing, multidimensional process of worldwide change in economy, trade, technology, culture and politics, the world has experienced globalization. Globalization is the cross-border interaction and integration among people, trade, technology, and education of different nations. With the "intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local

happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa," (Giddens, 1990, p. 64), the principle of an individual being part of just one nation is no longer a reality. A significant number of people are able to move across borders, hold multiple citizenships, and live in more than one country (Castles, 2004).

Research describes how language provides the resources needed to access and function within this global arena (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Dagenais, 2003; Zughoul, 2003). Those who are bilingual and biliterate in both their heritage language and English have an advantage in this increasingly global space (Giambo & Szecsi, 2005). There is a great demand for children to be bilingual. The purpose of this paper is to analyze how, in the face of globalization, two Chinese immigrant families living in the Northwest view bilingualism as a valuable resource for their children in the future and actively maintain learning Chinese at home while also promoting their proficiency in English. First, I will review the literature on globalization, transnationalism, cultural identity, heritage language, and the influence of home culture on student learning. I will then discuss the notions of imagined communities (Anderson, 1991; Dagenais, 2003; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2001; Wenger, 1998) and Chineseness (Chen, 2002; Louie, 2004; Lowe, 1991; Ong, 1999), on which the study is based. The goals are: (a) to describe what kind of imagined communities the two Chinese immigrant families envision for their children and (b) to describe what effects imagined communities and Chineseness have on parents' expectations for their children's education and how these two factors influence the children's learning trajectory.

Literature Review

Globalization, Transnationalism, Cultural Identity, and Heritage Language

We are accustomed to viewing a nation as a space with discrete territorial and cultural attributes. However, the view of the world is dramatically changing in this age of globalization, the proliferation of cross-border movements and transnational communities, as well as the accelerated international flow of goods, information, culture and people. Globalization is eroding the borders of nation-states as the world is changing to a “space of flows” (Castells, 1996, p.378) in which people are able to move across borders and belong in multiple places (Banks, 2004; Castles, 2004; Mitchell, 2001; Ong, 2004). Within these spaces, English has become the “global language” (Economist, 2001) that will open the doors to an international arena as it manifests its widespread use in tertiary education, technology, science, entertainment, and economic affairs (Crystal, 1997; Kachru, 1991). English can be seen as a means and a tool for globalization.

With English as an instrument of power, Asian immigrants who find themselves at a disadvantage in social, linguistic, and economical terms strive to enable their children to acquire English to ensure that they can speak the language that is highly valued in our global world. In addition to promoting the learning of English, many parents are also aware of the importance of cultivating an environment for their children that will preserve their heritage language for cultural and familial reasons. Studies such as those conducted by Hinton (1999), Lao (2004), Li (2000), and Mills (2001) demonstrated that parents felt it was imperative for their children to be bilingual and preserve the heritage language so that they could maintain bonds

with their families and communities and uphold their cultural identity.

To pursue bilingualism, Asian immigrant families take on a transnational perspective (Guerra, 1998; Mitchell, 2001), which is defined as a “dense network of social relations that transcend national boundaries” (Binford, 2000, p.1). Mitchell (2001) examined how immigrant families used different resources from various cultures to not only maintain the family language at home, but also to enroll their children in a bilingual program provided by the public educational system. Martínez-León and Smith (2003) examined how some immigrant parents in the U.S. adopted a transnational perspective on bilingualism by periodically sending their children back to their native country in order to develop and maintain proficiency in their heritage language. By living in one or more cultures and maintaining connections to both, they are upholding the view that language competence in both English and their heritage language can function as a form of capital in particular contexts, whether in a global or cultural and familial environment.

The parents’ push to pursue bilingualism sets up a tension among the children as they are faced with having to define who they are culturally and linguistically. Hinton (1999) pointed out that children of Asian immigrants perceive being bilingual and keeping old ties with the native country as having negative connotations. They believe the only way to assimilate fully into American society is to abandon their heritage language and culture and assimilate into the mainstream. Research has shown that in the early stages of entering the mainstream school culture, children of Asian immigrants begin decreasing the use of their heritage language at home because of the influence of their English-speaking peers and school environment (Caldas & Caron-Caldas,

1999; Hinton, 1999; Li, 2000; Mills, 2001). With the influence of the school environment, the home no longer holds the “mother tongue dominance” and serves as the battleground for “competing languages” (Kuo, 1974).

Home Culture and Student Learning

Since the Immigration Act of 1965, a remarkable influx of Asian immigration to the United States has occurred. According to the 2000 Census, about 10 million Asian Americans now live in the United States (U.S. Census, 2002); which is about 3.6 percent of the total U.S. population (Louie, 2004). With the academic success of a large number of Asian American students, there are various explanations about what factors influence their learning. Because they are perceived by others as successful, law-abiding, and high-achieving minorities, Asian-Americans have been called “model minorities” (Feng, 1994, Lee, 1996). Regarding their academic success, the dominant explanation has been that the home culture is conducive to their high levels of educational attainment as Asian immigrant families hold higher expectations and use more resources to enhance their children’s education than parents of other ethnic groups (Lee, 1996, 2005; Li, 2002; Louie, 2001).

As family’s educational aspirations is an effective means of motivating students to learn and succeed, Park (2003) points out that it is imperative to take into account the Confucian tradition, which has influenced many Asian cultures for thousands of years. The Confucian tradition (Park, 2003) emphasizes discipline and value educational achievement and respect for authority, especially for teachers and elders who take responsibility for their families. Families hold pragmatic attitudes towards their children’s learning and perceive

education as a way to achieve social mobility in American society and a pathway to good employment, wages, and benefits (Lee, 1996, 2005; Li, 2002; Louie, 2001). These aspirations towards their children to do well in schools are based on the assumption that education is the key that opens the gates to social mobility and the American dream. This belief in which education is viewed as “the single significant avenue to status mobility in the new land” (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. 11) is played out in how these families negotiate their children’s education which in turn influence student learning.

Research suggests that with the proliferation of cross-border movements in trade, investment, migration, and education of different nations, Asian immigrant parents view language competence in English as a form of economic capital while also maintaining their heritage language for cultural and familial causes. Few researchers have examined whether parents are promoting the maintenance of the heritage language, such as Chinese, for economic and global reasons. In addition, while the literature has established that Asian Americans are perceived by others as “model minorities” and that being Asian immigrants is relevant to the educational aspirations the parents hold towards their children, it remains unclear whether it is a consistent experience across all Asian American groups. In this study, I will examine the educational aspirations of two Chinese immigrant families in order to contribute to and extend the existing research.

Theoretical Framework

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of *situated learning* is that learning should not be seen as the acquisition of knowledge by

individuals, but that learning is a process attained through social participation within a community; the nature of the community in which one is situated significantly influences the learning process. The communities Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to are relatively concrete in that they are describing the learning of the individuals that take place as a result of the individual's participation in a tangible community. Wenger (1998) suggests that not only can individuals see themselves as participants in communities through engagement, which is "the active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation and meaning" (Norton, 2001, p. 163), but that people are also capable of participating in communities through their imagination. Imagination in this sense is the extent to which people are able to conceive new images of the world and self and envision their present practices as holding unlimited possibilities in the future (Wenger, 1998).

Anderson (1991) first used the term *imagined communities* to theorize how people are able to use imagination to envision their communion with others beyond their social networks. By drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of learning, Norton (2001) expands this concept to examine how the present learning practices of individuals can be influenced not only by the concrete communities in which they are situated, but also communities one imagines being able to have access to in the future.

This study builds on Anderson's (1991) notion of imagined communities and applies it to examine parental aspirations for their children. While Norton (2001) uses this notion of imagined communities to examine how learning may be shaped by the imagination of the individual learner, this study uses this perspective to examine how learners may be influenced by the imagination of others. Dagenais (2003)

describes how the education of children is structured by the future affiliations parents envision for them. Through this vantage point, the notion of imagined communities can help me examine the kinds of aspirations parents have for their children's future and how parent aspirations influence their children's learning.

While the notion of imagined communities offers a lens to view parent aspirations and children's education, the concept of Chineseness is used in this study (Ang, 1998; Chen, 2002; Louie, 2004; Ong, 1999) to examine parent aspirations and the education of children. Meanings of Chineseness are diverse as Chinese identities are formed on various levels. Like all axes of identity, it is always situated, under negotiation, and flexible (Hall, 1990). The meaning of Chineseness becomes relevant as people use it as a way to define themselves in relation to others. In the past, people were defined as Chinese according to their ancestral origins in China as mainland China was constructed as the symbolic center of Chinese identity (Louie, 2004). Chinese people abroad took on a transnational perspective as the constructions of a shared Chinese heritage brought them together. China was no longer "limited to the more or less fixed area of its official spatial and cultural boundaries" (Ang, 1998, p.225). Ideas about Chineseness also took on the form of ethnic identification, as those who no longer lived on Chinese soil were still considered to be Chinese through the markers of physical characteristics, such as black eyes and yellow skin (Chen, 2002; Louie, 2004). Chineseness also embodied a set of reified, essentialized values and traditions; the discrete practices, customs and traditions were symbolic in that these elements were used to measure the authenticity of one's Chineseness. Within this context, Chineseness was "a measurable and

commodified form of cultural capital” (Louie, 2004, p.106). As a concept with multiple meanings, Chineseness will help me to examine the aspirations Chinese immigrant parents hold for their children and how parent aspirations influence their children’s learning.

Methods

This study describes the aspirations two Chinese immigrant families have for their children and how parent aspirations influence their children’s learning. The ethnographic methodology presents the best tool for examining humans within their social and cultural environment because it requires the researcher to immerse within the communities and cultures being studied (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Geertz, 1973; Wolcott, 1997). Ethnography also enables the researcher to observe, document, and analyze the different ideas, values, and beliefs of the participants as well as their behaviors and actions within a social context. Thus, the data collection for this study is focused on how parents connect their children’s future affiliations with their current learning.

Selection

The target participants for this study were first generation Chinese immigrant families who had school-age children. The participants were selected using the snowball method (Biemacki & Waldorf, 1981). In this method, informants use their social networks to refer to the researcher other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study.

The criteria used in this study to select potential subjects were: (1) The parents had to be first generation immigrants to the U.S. from Taiwan, China, or Hong Kong, and

(2) the children had to be of elementary school-age and were currently enrolled in the American school system. A total of five families were referred to for this study. All potential participants were interviewed over the phone and were given descriptions that described the study and conditions for their participation. The conditions for the study were: (1) To be able to allow the researcher to conduct home observations in the subjects’ homes once to twice a week, each time for about two hours for 12 weeks, (2) to allow the researcher to take part in the subjects’ family activities, e.g., do schoolwork with their children, (3) to be able to interview the parents once for about 60 minutes regarding their thoughts on family values, cultures, and educational goals, and (4) to allow the researcher to record the interview. Four of the families that were interviewed over the phone agreed to participate in this study. Ultimately, two Chinese immigrant families were chosen on the basis of their availability and accessibility.

Study Participants

The Chen family emigrated from China seven years ago because they perceived America as providing better job opportunities and higher standards of living. Lucy Chen and Hal Chen have white collar jobs and two daughters, Angela and Cassie. Angela was seven years old and Cassie, the younger one, was three years old. The Chens lived in a large three bedroom house in an affluent neighborhood in the Pacific Northwest. They had purchased the house in this neighborhood because the school district had a good reputation in which they wanted their daughters to receive their schooling.

When entering their house, one could see that toys, books, and DVDs were scattered across the living room floor and

kitchen. In the basement, there was a piano where Lucy could practice her piano lessons. Both of the girls' rooms were decorated in pink and their own worksheets, drawings, and pictures adorned the walls. Lucy, who had received a bachelor's degree in French in China, now worked for a computer company. Her husband worked in communications in a neighboring city and commuted 60 minutes one way each day to work.

The Li family lived in a secluded neighborhood in the Pacific Northwest. They had a small garden in the backyard where they planted vegetables and herbs and a small stream cut across their property. The children would often throw bread crumbs to feed the ducks and fish. Alice Li was a full-time housewife who spent her days tending to the children and keeping the house in order. She came to the United States from Taiwan six years ago after marrying her husband, Mike. Her favorite pastime was to browse through Chinese cookbooks to see what kind of food her family would enjoy. Mike had come to the United States from Taiwan more than fifteen years ago and now worked as a mechanic at a car shop. They had two daughters, Annie (five years of age) and Jessie (three years of age). Since most of Mike's relatives lived nearby, they would often drop by to play mahjong, sing songs on their karaoke machine, or gather together for a big family dinner.

Data Collection

The data for this study consists of field notes and interview transcripts. The field notes include participant observations of the contexts in both homes. Home observations were conducted in the two families during the 2005-2006 academic year. They focused on how each family provided bilingual resources and

participated in their children's daily activities. The interview transcripts consist of in-depth qualitative interviews with the two families. The data set consist of two parent interviews and participant observation field notes.

Observations of the two focal families were typed up as field notes immediately afterwards in order to record the details accurately (Emerson et al., 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 1995) and to contextualize the interactions between the parents and children. The approximate one-hour interviews were conducted to elicit the family's perceptions towards learning. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Interview data consists of the full transcripts and the notes that were taken during the interviews. The field notes included the occurrences that were observed during home observations. Upon completion of the two interviews, full readings of the transcripts were conducted several times. Data were tagged around categories, themes, or patterns that related to the two principal analytic questions that framed the study: (1) What kind of imagined communities do the two Chinese immigrant families envision for their children? and (2) what effects do imagined communities and Chineseness have on parents' expectations for their children's education which ultimately influences the children's learning trajectory?

The analysis process of "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 145) was on-going and took place during the data collection process rather than after the data collection.

Following the themes that arose from the data began the process of clarifying and coding the data. Coding was part of the process towards inductive analysis, which is how patterns, themes, and categories of analysis "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1990, p. 390) and theorizing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding are "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to "chunks" of varying size – words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting." (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The initial codes (Emerson et al., 1995), which provided a starting point for my analysis, were checked through a second time and modifications were made during the interaction with the data as further emergent themes became clear (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). This process helped me link the data to the theoretical framework and research questions.

Findings

Excerpts from the two focal families that describe language as capital, the learning of Chinese as a link to Chineseness, and the social mirroring of educational aspirations are presented below.

Bilingualism as Capital and Family Aspirations

The Chen family spent a lot of time focusing on their children's language competence in both English and Chinese. Their weekly trips to the library were focused on borrowing both English and Chinese books and DVDs for their two children, a Chinese-only rule was enforced

in their home and Angela's mom spent many evenings reading Chinese traditional stories to them before bedtime.

During the home observations, I noticed that Angela's room was adorned with papers and drawings that were plastered on the walls. Most of them had Chinese vocabulary words that she had traced and Chinese traditional poetry or songs printed on them. "I did most of these during Chinese summer school," Angela explained nonchalantly to me one time while reading an English storybook, "My mom wants me to learn Chinese because she says it is important." It was interesting to note that most of the papers taped to the wall were bilingual in terms of the content; English translations for the Classical Chinese poems, songs, and vocabulary words were printed or written beside the Chinese version.

Angela's parents described the power of the economic gain they saw in their children being bilingual in English and Chinese. As Angela's mom said:

I am very well aware of the importance of both English and Chinese. English is used internationally and used in all areas of education and business. When we were in China, we had to learn English and I am thankful for that, because how else would we have been able to come here and find better jobs? Right now, Angela and Cassie are more advantaged than the children in China, they have this environment presented to them that enables them to be proficient in English. They have access to all these kinds of books and information. But of course, I also feel it is imperative for them to maintain their Chinese. China's economy is growing so rapidly, soon it will be an influential country in global business and everything. If Angela and Cassie

are able to speak both languages fluently, they will be ahead of the game. So, if you ask me which language is more important, I will tell you both.

When asked about their aspirations for their children, Hal replied:

We are both educated, so I hope for them to at least find white collar jobs in the future. That is why I think they should learn both languages. They may not always stay here in the United States; there is the chance they may move in the future. So many people are learning a second language now; it is competitive out there. A lot of companies in the United States are doing business with Chinese people, so there will be a need for people who can help translate. We want our children to do well when they grow up and receive the best education possible.

In this sense, bilingualism is given an economic value and serves as capital for the future. Both Lucy and Hal understand this view and thus hope that their children can acquire the skills to become bilingual in society.

Very similar to the Chen family, the Li family also believed bilingualism was related to both local and international economies. As Alice stated:

Simply put, English is the international language right now, but who is it to say that Chinese will not be the second international language in a few years? Look at Shanghai and Beijing, it is scary to think how much has changed; to do business with them, even Americans are learning Chinese! It is competitive out there and I think so many more opportunities will be available to Annie and Jessie if they know how to speak two languages. It

will be easier for them to find good paying jobs here and all over the world.

While Alice and Mike did not enforce a Chinese-only rule in their house, they provided an environment that cultivated their children's Chinese skills. They bought many CDs and DVDs from Taiwan and would play them at home or in the car. "We want them to feel that it is natural to open their mouths and sing those Chinese songs." Alice said, "While these songs are not very educational, at least they are not rejecting this language." During home observations, I noted that Annie and Jessie would speak to each other in Chinese and the words they used seemed mature for children their age. A case in point was when they were playing a tea party and Jessie, the customer, was inquiring about the menu. In a singsong voice, Annie replied in Chinese that green tea, jasmine tea, and oolong tea as well as various little tea snacks were available that day. As Annie's mom explained:

Me and my husband think that the best way for them to learn Chinese is if we do not treat them as babies, we do not use babyish words such as "peepee" or "dada." We do not communicate differently around them so they are able to pick up a lot of words from us.

Regarding their future aspirations for their children, both Alice and Mike replied that:

They are still young, so we are unable to really know what their interests are. Our responsibility as parents is to provide chances for them to try out many things and to meet other people. When we came here, we found it hard to communicate with other Americans because of this language barrier. We do not want this for our children when they go back to Taiwan. So,

we hope for them to learn different languages. In addition to this, it is important for their future and makes it easier for them to find jobs.

These excerpts indicate that both the Chen family and the Li family drew on their knowledge of the markets in the United States and abroad to describe why it was important for their children to be bilingual. Economic value is attributed to bilingualism and by reflecting on their position as immigrants, the parents envision that the acquisition of more linguistic capital will enable their children to secure a better job and place in this increasingly competitive world.

Maintenance of Chinese as a link to Chineseness

While both the Chen family and the Li family attributes economic value to bilingualism, they also regard the maintenance of Chinese as a link to Chineseness and want that their children to maintain their heritage language. The Chen family articulated their belief that the maintenance of Chinese is the most fundamental way of defining their children's cultural roots. Therefore, in their home, they implement a Chinese-only rule as the primary agent for the preservation of the heritage language. Many times, Angela would be reprimanded when she did not abide by these rules. Below, Angela questions her mother about why she has to speak Chinese at home.

I was sitting in their kitchen enjoying a small slice of cake and conversing with Angela's mom when suddenly, Angela excitedly pulled at my sleeves and told me that they had a contest at school today. She was eager to share the details of that event.

Angela: (In English) There was a contest in our....

Mom: (Staring at Angela sternly) Angela, what did we tell you before about using English at home?

Angela: But I don't know how to say it in Chinese.

Mom: Try. If you try harder, it will be easier for you.

Angela: (In broken Chinese) Well...yah...in school today...yah... (mumbling) How come I have to speak in Chinese?

Mom: Well, I don't want you to forget where you are from. You are Chinese, so we do not want you to forget this language. How else would you be able to talk with grandma?

Afterwards, when I asked Angela's mom why they persisted on the maintenance of Chinese, she replied:

I don't anticipate that Angela and Cassie will be able to grasp the essence of the Chinese culture or know how to read and write in Chinese. It is impossible for them to do that without living and growing up in a Chinese environment. We tell them all about Chinese New Year and all that, but they are unable to understand it. However, I think as Chinese people, we have to at least know how to speak the language. What would it look like, a Chinese person not being able to speak Chinese? I don't want them to forget their cultural roots, their heritage as a Chinese and speaking Chinese is the only way to do that here.

These two excerpts reveal that Angela's mom associates Chinese not only with culture and a means of communication with the elders, but also links language to a sense of Chineseness. The Chens' imagine that the knowledge of the heritage language will serve as an authentication of their children's Chinese legacy.

The Li family also invested in the maintenance of the heritage language in order to secure their children's identification as Chinese. Not only did they use strategies to let their daughters practice Chinese at home, they also regularly took their children back to Taiwan for long periods of time so that they could practice their Chinese with other family members. When their grandfather visited them in March, Alice and Mike told their children that they had to be interpreters for their grandfather. The two children would listen to what they heard in English and translate it into Chinese so that their grandfather could understand. The grandfather was pleased that they were able and willing to communicate with him in Chinese. When asked about why they hope to maintain the heritage language at home, Alice replied:

Let me ask you, if you go back to Taiwan and all these relatives come over to talk to you and you cannot respond, do you think they will want to communicate with you after a while? They might be able to understand your English, but that is never the same as talking to each other in Chinese. One of the reasons their grandfather is willing to play and talk with them is because Annie and Jessie are able to respond in Chinese. I am sure their grandfather will be less interested in them if they answer him in English. You see lots of those ABCs(American born Chinese) who cannot speak Chinese. People view them as rejecting their Chinese identity. That is why being able to speak Chinese is so important. It is impossible for them to learn those Chinese words and read them; those require memorization skills and constant learning. We often tell them, although they live here, they are still

Chinese, and the least they can do is be able to speak it.

In this excerpt, Alice is speaking of the heritage language as not only a means of communication with family members but also as a way to secure their children's legitimacy as Chinese.

The Chen family and the Li family both attribute symbolic value to the heritage language and believes it is functional as a mode of communication. They also view their heritage language as being able to help their children transcend spatial and cultural boundaries and identify themselves as Chinese.

The "Social Mirroring" of Educational Aspirations

In my home observations, I observed that both the Chen family and the Li family often evaluated their children's actions and education in relation to other Chinese immigrant children with whom they associated. There was a sense of competitiveness and comparison as they vied to see who performed the best. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) describe the notion of "social mirroring" to examine how the individuals' behaviors and actions often reflect the messages they receive from the environment regarding how they are expected to be and act. As they perceive the message around them that there is high priority regarding academic success, the Chen family and the Li family internalize and interpret these messages by motivating their children to be academically successful among their social circle.

In the beginning of February, Angela took a test to determine if she would be able to transfer to another school in their school district that had a gifted class and offered accelerated courses. When the test results came back negative, her mother petitioned for her to be assessed again.

Angela's parents could not believe that their daughter would fail the test. The second time around, Angela also did not pass the test. Her parents showed me the test results and said:

How is this possible? Jessie passed this test and so did Joshua (they are Angela's friends from preschool). Their reading level and math skills are not as good as Angela's. They were still reading those easy books while Angela was already reading chapter books. I will have to ask them about their scores."

I was intrigued and asked them why they wanted Angela to enter that gifted class. Lucy said:

A lot of her friends are enrolled in these classes. We do not want her to be left behind. Angela needs these kinds of courses in order to push her to learn more. In a more competitive class, she will be motivated to learn and this will help her attain better knowledge and skills. This is the kind of education she needs.

Similarly, the Li family also often used their children's friends as a frame of reference. Mike and Alice had many friends who had the same background as theirs. They all had children in the same age group. Mike and Alice often compared their children to their friends'. As they put it:

We compare all the time. When we see them playing together, we observe who is always the leader in the group, who has the best personality and who is the one that always follows other people's instructions. They are all about the same age, so of course we are concerned with how the other children are learning. It is important to know if our children are doing well or lagging behind others.

In this sense, for the Chen family and the Li family, the message that the environment conveys serves as templates that frame their actions and their aspirations for their children.

Discussion

In this study, the notion of imagined communities can be seen in light of Norton's (2000) definition of investment as she states that the motivation for people to invest in a language is based on the idea that "they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will increase their value in the social world" (p.166). The imagined communities the two families envision for their children are very similar. Both the Chen family and the Lin family invest in bilingual education because they believe that language holds economic capital. During both home observations and interviews, the parents expressed their views that English was the international language used widely in tertiary education, technology, and economic affairs. Bilingualism, in their minds, had economic benefits because it would secure both national and international markets for their children. Both families believed that the acquisition of more linguistic capital, i.e., strong language skills in both English and Chinese, will enable their children to have an edge over other competitors and allow them to function successfully in the global market.

In terms of the Chinese language, in addition to viewing it as a way to acquire more capital in the local and international communities, they foresee their children having access to it in the future, as well as regard the maintenance of their heritage language as a link to Chineseness. Both families attribute symbolic values to Chinese as they imagine that it will help

their children transcend spatial and national boundaries and serve as an authentication of their children's Chinese roots. Through imagination, the Chen family and the Li family form imagined attachments to their Chinese roots through language and the maintenance of the heritage language embodies not only economic and global values, but also cultural and filial connotations.

Moreover, as imagination also involves "some degree of fantasy, idealization, stereotyping, and reification" (Dagenais, 2003, p.280), it enables the two focal families to visualize a community that lays emphasis on educational attainment. By hoping that their children will be academically successful within this community, this sense of "social mirroring" influences their expectations, educational strategies, and investment in their children's education.

Therefore, the Chen and Li families' view of imagined communities and Chineseness is to build on economic, educational, and cultural capital which they envision will guarantee their children's membership in local and international communities.

Conclusion

In applying the notion of imagined communities and Chineseness to an analysis of two Chinese immigrant families, I have highlighted how parents envision imagined communities for their children and try to provide them membership in a global community through the learning of both English and Chinese language. Their visions of imagined communities exert much influence on the expectations, educational strategies, and investment they put into their children's education. First, through imagination, both the Chen and Li families view language as

holding multiple capitals. They view bilingualism as linguistic capital convertible to economic capital as their children are able to access local and international markets. In addition, they view their heritage language as holding cultural and symbolic capital which will allow their children to transcend spatial and cultural boundaries to ensure their identity as Chinese. To ensure that their children will be able to capitalize on these benefits, they provide numerous resources and environments for their children to learn both English and Chinese. Secondly, imagination provides a mirror which enables the two focal families to visualize a community that lays emphasis on educational attainment.

While research on Chinese American students have traditionally focused on how their family's past aspirations and actions influence their present accomplishments, little research has examined how the future their parents envision for them influences the educational trajectories in which the children partake. The notion of imagined communities and Chineseness presents an alternative way of observing how the future influences the present which in turn influences the educational practices and actions of Chinese American students.

References

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso.
- Ang, I. (1998). Can one say no to Chineseness? Pushing the limits of the diasporic paradigm. *Boundary*, 2, 223-242.
- Banks, J. A. (Ed.) (2004). *Diversity and citizenship education: Global perspectives*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Biemacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Social Methods and Research*, 10, 141-163.
- Binford, L. (2000). *Accelerated migration between Puebla and New York*. La Vitrina. Retrieved June 1, 2006, from <http://www.lavitrina.com/html/back/frameset.html>
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, K. B. (1982). *Qualitative research for education*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Caldas, S. J., & Caron-Caldas, S. (1999). Language immersion and cultural identity: Conflicting influences and values. *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*, 12, 42-58.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Castles, S. (2004) Migration, citizenship and education. In J. A. Banks (Ed.), *Diversity and citizenship education: Global perspectives* (pp. 17-48). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cenoz, J., & Genesee, F., (1998). *Beyond bilingualism: Multilingualism and multilingual education*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Chen, S. (2002). *Being Chinese, becoming Chinese American*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a global language*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Dagenais, D. (2003). Assessing imagined communities through multilingualism and immersion education. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 2 (4), 269-283.
- Economist. (2001). *A world empire by other means*. Retrieved June 1, 2006, from http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displayStory.cfm?Story_ID=883997
- Emerson, R., Fretz, R., and Shaw L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic field notes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Feng, J. (1994). *Asian-American children: What teachers should know*. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Washington, D.C. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED. 369 577).
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giambo, D.A., & Szecsi, T. (2005). Parents can guide children through the world of two languages. *Childhood Education*, 81(3), 164-165.
- Gibson, M.A., & Ogbu, J.U. (1991). *Minority status and schooling: A comparative study of immigrant and involuntary minorities*. New York: Garland.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Guerra, J. C. (1998). *Close to home: Oral and literate practices in a transnational Mexicano community*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222-237). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hinton, L. (1999). *Involuntary language loss among immigrants: Asian-American linguistic Autobiographies*. Retrieved October, 16, 2006, from <http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/involuntary.html>
- Kachru, B. (1991). *The alchemy of English: The spread, functions, and models of non-native Englishes*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kanno, Y., & Norton, B. (2003). Imagined

- communities and educational possibilities: Introduction. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 2 (4), 241-249.
- Kuo, E.C.Y. (1974). Bilingual pattern of a Chinese immigrant group in the United States. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 16 (3), 128-140.
- Lao, C. (2004). Parents' attitudes toward Chinese-English bilingual education and Chinese-language use. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 28 (1), 99-121.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, S. (1996). *Unraveling the "model minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian American youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lee, S. (2005). *Up against Whiteness: Race, school, and immigrant youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Li, G.. (2000). Literacy and identity: An ethnographic study of a Filipino family. *McGill Journal of Education*, 35 (1), 1-27.
- Li, G. (2002). *"East is east, west is west"? Home literacy, culture, and schooling*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Louie, V. (2001). Parents' aspirations and investment: The role of social class in the educational experiences of 1.5- and second-generation Chinese Americans. *Harvard Educational Review Special Issue on Immigration and Education* 71(3): 438-474.
- Louie, A. (2004). *Chineseness across borders: Renegotiating Chinese identities in China and the United States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lowe, L. (1991). Heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity: Marking Asian American differences. *Diaspora*, 1(1), 22-44.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1995). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Martínez-León, N., & Smith, P. H. (2003). Educating for bilingualism in Mexican transnational communities. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 1(1), 138-148.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mills, J. (2001) Being bilingual: Perspectives of third generation Asian children on language, culture and identity. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 4(6), 383-402.
- Mitchell, K. (2001). Education for democratic citizenship: Transnationalism, multiculturalism, and the limits of liberalism. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71, 51-78.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity, and educational change*. London: Longman.
- Norton, B. (2001). Non-participation, imagined communities, and the language classroom. In P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research* (pp. 159-171). London: Longman.
- Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ong, A. (2004). Higher learning, educational availability and flexible citizenship in global Space. In J. A. Banks (Ed.) *Diversity and citizenship education: Global perspectives* (pp. 49-70). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Park, C. C. (2003). Educational and occupational aspirations of Asian American students. In C. C. Park, A. L. Goodwin & S. J. Lee (Eds.), *Asian American identities, families and*

- schooling*. (pp.135-156). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Smith, P. H., & Martínez León, N. (2003). Educating for bilingualism in Mexican transnational communities. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 1(1), 138-148.
- Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M. (2001). *Children of immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2002). The Asian population: 2000. Retrieved December 29, 2006 from: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf>.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practices: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolcott, H. (1997). Ethnographic research in education. In R. Jaeger (Ed.), *Complementary methods for research in education* (2nd ed., pp. 327–353). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Zughoul, M. R. (2003). Globalization and EFL/ESL Pedagogy in the Arab world. *Journal of Language and Learning*, 1(2), 106-140.
- Education, 110 Miller Hall, Box 353600, Seattle, WA 98195-3600; email: yuhshi@u.washington.edu

AUTHOR

Yuhshi Lee is a doctoral candidate in Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, Seattle. Her current research interests include multicultural education, identity, language learning, culture, bilingualism, and globalization. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Yuhshi Lee, University of Washington, College of