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Challenges and Strategies for Promoting Children's Education: A Comparative Analysis of Chinese Immigrant Parenting in the United States and Singapore

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Abstract: Confucian heritage culture holds that a good education is the path to upward social mobility as well as the road to realizing an individual's fullest potential in life. In both China and Chinese diasporic communities around the world, education is of utmost importance and is central to childrearing in the family. In this paper, we address one of the most serious resettlement issues that new Chinese immigrants face—children's education. We examine how receiving contexts matter for parenting, what immigrant parents do to promote their children's education, and what enables parenting strategies to yield expected outcomes. Our analysis is based mainly on data collected from face-to-face interviews and participant observations in Chinese immigrant communities in Los Angeles and New York in the United States and in Singapore. We find that, despite different contexts of reception, new Chinese immigrant parents hold similar views and expectations on children's education, are equally concerned about achievement outcomes, and tend to adopt overbearing parenting strategies. We also find that, while the Chinese way of parenting is severely contested in the processes of migration and adaptation, the success in promoting children's educational excellence involves not only the right set of culturally specific strategies but also tangible support from host-society institutions and familial and ethnic social networks. We discuss implications and unintended consequences of overbearing parenting.

Keywords: Confucian heritage culture; transnational family; new Chinese immigrants; education; Chinese parenting

1. Introduction

Confucian heritage culture values education and holds that a good education is the path to upward social mobility as well as the road to realizing an individual's fullest potential in life (Lam et al. 2002). In both China and Chinese diasporic communities around the world, education is of utmost importance and is central to childrearing in the family. In ancient China, the strong belief in learning is well illustrated in an old saying, "There are houses of gold in books." The traditional *keju* (科举) civil examination system, implemented in ancient China for more than two millennia, had enabled hundreds of thousands of individuals of rich or poor family backgrounds to succeed in attaining positions of power in the imperial court, which were formal status markers for the individual and a tremendous honor to his family. Abolished in late Qing Dynasty at the turn of the 20th century, the meritocratic *keju* system has a long lasting and persistence effect on contemporary Chinese education. All three levels of formal schooling—elementary, secondary, and post-secondary—emphasize homework marks and

test scores. Students must meet the official standards of academic performance in order to advance grade levels. In the last year of senior high school, most students study hard to prepare for the national university entrance examination, or *gaokao* (高考). *Gaokao* is the most competitive examination that is considered to determine a child's life and career opportunities, earning potential, and even marriage prospects (Ash 2016).

Although it has been a constant source of stress for both children and parents, the exam-oriented educational system in China is widely accepted as a fair system of meritocracy enabling upward social mobility (Liu 2016). Parents prioritize children's education in childrearing. They invest enormous amount of energy and financial resources in children's academics and extracurricular activities to make sure that children excel in school, score high in competitive examinations, and get into the best universities.

In diasporic communities overseas, there has been equal, if not more, emphasis on children's education in the diasporic Chinese family. Chinese immigrant parents are uprooted from their familiar habitats. They encounter challenges in adapting and integrating into their host societies and are, in the process, pressured to restructure their habitus and develop strategies for effective parenting. Many Chinese immigrant parents claim that they have sacrificed for their children's better educational opportunities, career prospects, and life chances through emigration. They strongly believe that education is the *only* predictable and effective way for their children to achieve upward social mobility in a host society. Like their counterparts in China, overseas Chinese parents never hesitate to invest on children's education with their best efforts and resources, expecting that their children achieve the highest level of education possible as a means of helping move the family up to or maintain middle-class status and repaying parents (Zhou 2006).

Research has consistently shown that children of new Chinese immigrants, or *xinyimin*,¹ generally do better in school than their native peers, as measured by GPA, grades, college attendance, and college graduation institutions, in countries such as the United States, Canada, the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore (Abada et al. 2008; Archer and Francis 2006; Chung et al. 1997; Ho 2017; Kasinitz et al. 2009; Lee and Zhou 2015; Seah 2017; Sue and Okazaki 1990; Watkins et al. 2017). And their extraordinary academic success is often attributed to Confucian heritage culture or "tiger mom" parenting, the traditional Chinese way of childrearing of a strict and disciplinarian mother (Chua 2011; Chua and Rubenfeld 2014). However, less is known about how Chinese immigrant parents in different receiving contexts cope with challenges in the processes of immigration and adaptation, and how they overcome structural and cultural barriers in addressing their intense educational concerns and anxieties in the countries of resettlement. To fill this void, our current study examines how contexts matter for parenting, what immigrant parents do to promote their children's education, and what enables parenting strategies to yield expected outcomes.

The United States and Singapore are the two most preferred migration destinations for new Chinese immigrants. These two host societies differ significantly in contexts of reception—one Western and the other Eastern with strong Confucian heritage culture. A comparative study of immigrant parenting offers a unique opportunity to understand how culture is shaped by structure to influence children's educational outcomes. We argue that successful parenting involves not only the right set of culturally specific strategies but also tangible support from host-society institutions and familial and ethnic social networks. In the following text, we first offer a brief overview of new Chinese immigration to the U.S. and Singapore to highlight the variations on contexts of reception. We then examine the changing structure of the Chinese immigrant family. Thirdly, we examine how migration creates new challenges for parents regarding children's education. Fourth, we explain what immigrant parents

¹ Referred to those who emigrated from mainland China after China implemented open-door policy and economic reform in December 1978. *Xinyimin* differ from their earlier counterparts in terms of socioeconomic backgrounds, sending and receiving contexts, and transnational linkages (Zhou 2017).

do in respective host societies to successfully cope with these challenges. We conclude by discussing unintended consequences of over-bearing parenting.

2. Methods and Data

Our analysis is based on data collected from face-to-face interviews and participant observations in Chinese immigrant communities in Los Angeles and New York in the United States and in Singapore. Qualitative fieldwork, which included participant observations in Chinese schools, various afterschool programs, and community events and on-site non-structured interviews with parents, was conducted in Chinatowns and Chinese ethnoburbs in Los Angeles and New York over a period of ten years (2003–2013). In Singapore, 45 in-depth structured interviews with new Chinese immigrant parents were conducted during the period of summer 2018 to February 2019, each lasting about 60 minutes; in addition, observations in after schools and community events and short interviews on site were conducted during a longer span of time from 2014 to 2018 (mostly on weekends). In both the U.S. and Singapore, we employed the purposive snowballing method to recruit interviewees from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds while also participating non-intrusively in social media Wechat group discussions among concerned Chinese parents, including those in China, the U.S. and Singapore. We also conducted content analysis of Chinese language newspaper reports and education-related advertisements. We use pseudonyms when we quote interviewees' narratives.

3. Contemporary Chinese Immigration: An Overview

Since the late 1970s when China opened its door to the outside world, massive waves of Chinese emigration have surged onto the shores of all continents of the globe with little sign of subsiding (Zhou 2017). As of 2017, the number of international migrants from China reached 10 million, as estimated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.² Although new Chinese immigrants at the turn of the 21st century are geographically dispersed in all parts of the globe, the majority has been resettled in developed countries of the Global North. While the United States takes the lion's share (25 percent of all *xinyimin*), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., and some developed countries in Asia, such as Japan and Singapore, also experience tremendous influx (Zhou 2017). Why new Chinese immigrants emigrate in such high numbers and how they fare in their countries of destination upon arrival may be understood by multi-level factors pertaining to the context of exit and context of reception (Portes and Rumbaut 1990).

3.1. Context of Exit

In terms of the context of exit, the continually high emigration from China is a direct consequence of China's open door and is perpetuated by several structural factors. First, the economic reform has attracted enormous foreign investment to flow into China, of which more than three quarters of the foreign investment are from the Chinese Diaspora. The injection of ethnic Chinese capital in the 1980s not only greatly propelled China's economic takeoff, but also activated diasporic familial connections that had been dormant for many years and transnational social networks. Second, the Chinese government removed the institutional obstacles to population mobilities, including internal and international migrations, relaxed the requirements for obtaining passports, simplified the procedures for going overseas, and allowed Chinese citizens with diasporic relatives to legally emigrate. Third, China promoted its economic reform and modernization goals by implementing policies to support studying and training abroad. Since 1979, the government has sponsored hundreds of thousands of college students and visiting scholars abroad to study for advance degrees or for academic training and

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.asp> "Total International Migrant Stock," accessed on 22 January 2019.

exchange. It has also allowed individual Chinese citizens to study abroad by self-financing.³ Fourth, overseas investment by Chinese state-owned enterprises and private firms has increased, especially after China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, which has further fueled emigration. These broad structural factors, coupled with the relaxation of immigration policies and economic globalization by many receiving countries, have constituted an important context of exit for Chinese emigration that differs significantly from earlier waves prior to World War II.

New Chinese immigrants in the U.S. and Singapore share the same context of exit. They show similar demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that are distinct from their earlier counterparts. First, new Chinese immigrants have diverse origins and socioeconomic backgrounds. They have arrived not only from traditional hometowns of overseas Chinese, i.e., Guangdong and Fujian, but also different provinces all over China. Second, unlike early immigrants who arrived with minimum education and few job skills, new Chinese immigrants tend to be hyper-selected in many developed countries of destination, which means that their percentage of college graduates is significantly higher than that of the general population both in China and in the country of destination (Lee and Zhou 2015). Highly skilled immigrants with at least 4 years of college education are 51 percent among all new Chinese immigrants in the U.S., and the corresponding statistic in Singapore is above 75 percent. Third, new Chinese immigrants have also shown diverse geographic patterns of resettlement. In the U.S. for example, though a small number of new immigrants cluster in Chinatowns or in the newly established ethnoburbs, the majority is spread out in middle-class white suburban communities across the country. In Singapore, they “melt” into the same neighborhoods as natives with no distinguishable ethnic enclaves. Fourth, new Chinese immigrants are more inclined to resettle abroad, making home in their countries of destination rather than returning home to China. Earlier immigrants were mostly sojourners who worked overseas to earn money with the goal of eventually returning home. Nowadays, though many new immigrants have numerous opportunities to practice transnationalism, they are mostly settlers, seeking to grow roots in their new homeland and integrate into the mainstream host society (Zhou 2017).

3.2. Contexts of Reception

In terms of context of reception, the U.S. is the number one destination for new Chinese immigrants, and Singapore is also one of the most preferred countries of destination in the world. Notably, there are significant differences between the two receiving contexts in immigration and integration policies, labor markets, socioeconomic and cultural environments, and the social position and organization of the diasporic communities vis-à-vis host societies.

The United States concentrates the largest number of new Chinese immigrants, absorbing more than a quarter of the total emigrants from China. The history of Chinese immigration in the U.S. dates back to the late 1840s. Early Chinese immigrants were mainly peasants from the ‘*siyi*’ (四邑) area of the Pearl River Delta region in Guangdong Province, China. They first arrived in the U.S. as laborers, working first in mines and then in building the most difficult part of the transcontinental railroad west of the Rockies (Chan 1991). Poor economic conditions in the late 1870s and the fear of the yellow peril made Chinese laborers targets of nativism and racism (Chan 1991; Saxton 1971). Exacerbated by anti-Chinese agitation, the Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 to restrict Chinese immigration. Consequently, Chinese immigrants built Chinatowns for self-protection 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 (Chan 1991; Zhou 1992). Within Chinatown, levels of coethnic interaction

³ Self-financed students were mostly college students in the 1980s and 1990s, and their funding mainly came from overseas relatives. Since the late 1990s, many families in China that have achieved upper-middle class status have sent their children to study abroad even at middle school and high school levels.

and solidarity were high. Chinese immigrants, mostly male sojourners, and ethnic business owners were interdependent and were both tied to various family or kinship associations, hometown or district associations, and tong or merchants' associations (Zhou 1992, 2006). Even after the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943 and the U.S. and China became allies in World War II, the diasporic Chinese community and its members were largely excluded from participation and assimilation in American life.

In 1965, the U.S. Congress passed the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, which abolished the national origins quota system and gave priority to family reunification and the importation of skilled labor. The U.S. immigration policy reform, intertwined with the normalization of Sino-US foreign relations in 1979 and China's open door, has led to the continuous and exponential growth of new Chinese immigrants to the U.S. over the past 40 years (Zhou 2017). The influx of new Chinese immigrants has changed the structure and composition of Chinese America. The U.S. censuses show the number of ethnic Chinese population increased from 240,000 in 1960 to more than 1.6 million in 1990, increased further to more than 3.8 million in 2010; it has exceeded 5 million in 2016 (Zhou 2017). Chinese Americans, more than two-thirds foreign born, are the largest Asian ethnic group, but they only account for about one percent of the general U.S. population. However, their socioeconomic backgrounds are much diverse, with nearly half of the foreign population attaining at least a bachelor's degree and more than 40 percent holding a professional occupation.

New Chinese immigrants arrive in a much more open American society with all forms (racial-ethnic, gender, age, etc.) of discrimination outlawed. At the group level, Chinese Americans have also made tremendous inroads into mainstream America, showing extraordinary socioeconomic achievements with average levels of education, occupation, and income higher than non-Hispanic whites (Pew Research Center 2012). The rising enrollment of ethnic Chinese students in elite schools, Chinese American academic excellence, and their overrepresentation in professional occupations in the labor market have led to a new stereotype of "model minority," which goes hand in hand with the familiar stereotypes of the "unfair competitors," "unassimilable aliens," and "forever foreigners" (Saito 1997; Tuan 1998; Zhou 2004). The diasporic Chinese community is thriving with a strong ethnic economy and ethnic pride; it has, however, evolved into an ethnic American minority group. Despite its seeming success, it is still marginalized in American's racial stratification system, given that mainstream American society is still heavily influenced by Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture and dominated by European-origin white majority group.

Unlike the U.S., the history of Chinese immigration to Singapore is longer and much more complex; it originated from the maritime trade to Southeast Asia conducted by Chinese merchants and traders from Guangdong and Fujian provinces, who had been there long before the European colonists set foot in the region (Wang 1993). In 1819, Sir Raffles landed in Singapore on behalf of the British East India Company, and planned and rapidly developed Singapore into a free trading port in Southeast Asia. During this period of time, the Chinese started to migrate to this island off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. From the establishment of the British colony of Singapore in 1819 to the beginning of World War II, the British colonial government adopted a free immigration policy, which led to a continuous increase of Chinese immigrants. According to statistics, the number of Chinese immigrants in Singapore increased from about 3000 in 1820 to 50,000 in 1860, accounting for 60 percent of the total population in Singapore (Meagher 2008, p. 134). After World War II, the Chinese population in Singapore increased to 730,000, accounting for more than three-quarters of the total population. But from the end of World War II to 1990, immigration from mainland China ebbed to a trickle.

Singapore became an independent nation-state in 1965. After independence, Singapore only took three decades to transform itself from a "third world" country to a fully industrialized and modernized country. In the late 1980s, the city-state encountered two daunting demographic challenges—the shortage of scientific and technological talents and the sharp decline of natural growth rate of the population, which threatened the country's competitiveness in economic globalization (Zhou and Liu 2016). Therefore, the government urgently adjusted its economic and

immigration policies to attract high skilled immigrants. A direct policy outcome was the sudden, rapid, and continuous growth of the total population, due primarily to international migration. According to 2018 statistics, it had a population of 5.64 million, of which 62 percent were citizens, 9 percent permanent residents (PR), and 29 percent foreigners holding temporary work visas ([Singapore Department of Statistics 2018](#)). The proportion of immigrants would be much higher if the number of naturalized citizens was taken into account.

Xinyimin is a term that Singaporeans, in particular, use to distinguish themselves from the new Chinese immigrants arriving in the country after 1990. While Singapore does not explicitly prefer any one ethnic group when it comes to attracting foreign talents and international students, it is believed that the government does prefer Chinese immigrants in order to replenish the potential decline of the ethnic Chinese population due to the extremely low fertility rate among Singaporean Chinese women ([Tan 2003](#)). One way was to directly recruit Chinese students who have received advanced degrees in Western countries, and the other was to offer generous scholarships to high school students in China to study in Singapore in the hope that those Chinese students would stay in Singapore after receiving college or advanced degrees at Singapore universities ([Zhou and Liu 2016](#)). Singapore's mainstream newspaper, *The Straits Times*, reported that the number of new Chinese immigrants rose from a couple of thousands in the early 1990s to more than one million in 2008. The new Chinese immigrants in Singapore include both skilled professions and low-skilled workers. Those who have obtained permanent resident (PR) status or Singaporean nationality are mostly students, professionals, and business migrants ([Zhou and Liu 2016](#)).

Singapore is a multi-racial nation-state, in which ethnic Chinese constitute the majority, at 74 percent of the total population with Malays and Indians at 13 percent and 9 percent, respectively ([Singapore Department of Statistics 2018](#)). The government designates English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil as the official languages, but English is most commonly used in the government, international business, science and technology, and education. English is preferred and emphasized, as the government believes that the English language will improve the country's international competitiveness, while playing a bridging role between different racial and ethnic groups.

Singaporean society is deeply influenced by the British colonial heritage and the history of international migration, where Western and Eastern cultures blend with each other. Singapore's political system is established based on the British parliamentary democracy, which places emphasis on meritocracy in the selection and appointment of government officials and civil service personnel ([Bellows 2009](#); [Quah 2010](#)). Meritocracy is also very much emphasized in the recruitment of professionals and managers in the private sector. Although it claims to be multicultural, however, the government deliberately constructs a "Singaporean" national identity based on ethnic equality, which inadvertently excludes new immigrants. In addition, it is noticeable that native-born Chinese Singaporeans dominate the country's political, economic, and social arenas and implicitly constitute the core ethnic group of the mainstream society ([Zhou and Liu 2016](#)). Members of this core group, though sharing the same cultural heritage and tradition, often distinguish themselves from the new Chinese immigrants culturally in language,⁴ values and norms, and behavioral patterns. Despite proactive government policy to promote immigrant integration, the rapid growth and visibility of new Chinese immigrants has caused widespread anxiety, discontent, and even xenophobia among native Singaporeans, especially Chinese Singaporeans, as they view these newcomers as the different "other"⁵—unfair competitors taking jobs away from natives and a cultural threat to the cohesiveness of the "multicultural" society ([Yeoh and Lin 2013](#); [Liu 2012](#)). It is noteworthy that this particular "other" identity imposed upon

⁴ While most new Chinese immigrants speak standard Mandarin (*putonghua*), Singaporean Chinese speak Chinese with a heavy local accent, influenced by Malay, and Chinese dialects of Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, and Hainan.

⁵ In government statistics, the "other" is an official racial category, referring to Eurasians, Europeans, and other nationalities who are natives or are rooted in Singaporean society. The CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others) model makes up the dominant organizing framework of race.

new Chinese immigrants in Singapore, where the dominant group is ethnic Chinese, is by nature the same as the “other” identity imposed on Chinese Americans in the U.S., where the dominant group is non-Hispanic white. In both cases, “othering” serves as a key mechanism of social exclusion.

4. Changes in the Chinese Immigrant Family

4.1. *The Changing Chinese Immigrant Family in the United States*

Migration breaks up the traditional Chinese family, which has a multi-generational structure with extensive networks of social support and control, and weakens parental authority to guide and discipline children due to language and cultural barriers. The immigrant family tends to be restructured in the form of the two-generation nuclear family.

In the U.S., Chinese immigrants were segregated in bachelors’ societies in Chinatowns prior to World War II. Because of the restriction of female migration, the male to female sex ratio was seriously imbalanced, showing 110:1 in 1900, and 6:1 in 1940 (Zhou 1992). Many Chinatown “bachelor” workers were actually married but left their wives, children, and parents behind in their home villages in China, leading to a distorted structure in the Chinese immigrant family—the split household (Glenn 1983). In old Chinatowns, whether in split household or nuclear families, individuals and families were well connected to the ethnic community and highly dependent on it for social, economic, and emotional support while subject to its control. Children grew up in a quasi-extended family environment and were surrounded by and under the watchful eyes of many “grandpas” and “uncles” who were not related by blood (Zhou 2006). They lived segregated lives in the ethnic enclave, speaking fluent Chinese, mostly in local dialects such as Cantonese, going to Chinese schools, working in Chinese-owned businesses, and interacting intimately with other Chinese. The larger society looked down on the Chinese and set barriers to keep them apart, such as segregated schools and workplaces. Many children wished to become like other American children but faced resistance from the larger society as well as from their own families. The Chinese families tied their children to Chinatown and its ethnic institutions, with the Chinese school being the most important one, to shield them from being harmed by overt discrimination. The children conformed to the values and behavioral standards prescribed by the community. They were considered either “good” kids—loyal and *guai* (obedient)—or “bad” kids—disrespectful and *bai-jia-zi* (family failure). 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. Although there are potential intergenerational and cultural conflicts within the family, the ethnic social environmental and social relationships of the ethnic community helped mitigate these conflicts (Zhou 2006).

In the 1960s, the U.S. civil rights movement resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended segregation in public places, outlawed employment discrimination, and ensured equal opportunities in education, employment, and housing for socially marginalized groups. And in 1965, Congress relaxed and reformed the immigration law to prioritize family reunification. The gradual opening up of the larger society is crucial for Chinese immigrants and their children to integrate into the mainstream society and achieve upward social mobility. New Chinese immigrants arrived in a more favorable context of reception than their earlier counterparts. Since the 1980s, there has been a significant change in the Chinese immigrant family, in that the nuclear family has replaced the split household family to become the dominant structure. Moreover, new Chinese immigrants are no longer trapped in Chinatown and confined to jobs in the ethnic enclave economy. They are able to resettle in white middle class suburban communities and obtain employments in the mainstream labor market.

However, unlike many white middle class families where fathers are the main breadwinners and mothers homemakers, the majority of Chinese immigrant families are two-wage-earner families. Because of disadvantages associated with immigrant status, many Chinese immigrant men experience downward mobility and have difficulty 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. Regardless of socioeconomic background, most children of new Chinese immigrants live in families with both parents working full-time and some at several jobs on different shifts. Without the help of grandparents, relatives, and other close friends, some of these children become latch-key children, staying home alone after school hours. 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 the home and the outside world, which severely curtails parental authority (Zhou 2006).

4.2. *The New Chinese Immigrant Family in Singapore*

The early Chinese diasporic community in Singapore also experienced the similar situation of the “bachelor society” of Chinatowns in the U.S. Throughout the 19th century and the 20th century prior to World War II, the Chinese diasporic community was dominated by the able-bodied male. The male-to-female ratio was 14:1 in 1860 and 4:1 in 1901, despite the fact that women were allowed to immigrate by law (Saw 1969). Since the end of World War II, the Chinese community started to transition from sojourning to long-term settlement and from diasporic (with a homeland to return to) to native community (Zheng and Hu 2018). As the ethnic population grew, the sex ratio was gradually balanced, at 113 men per 100 women in 1947, and thereafter the number of native nuclear families gradually increased (Freedman 1957, p. 25). In the mid-1950s, nuclear families made up one third of all households and single-person households made up another one third; and the average household size was estimated to be 3.7 (Goh 1956; Kaye 1960; Tan 1965). During the 1950s, many Chinese families, native or immigrant alike, lived in poverty and in overcrowded housing (Warren 1986).

Since independence in 1965, Singapore has aggressively pursued modernization and promoted family cohesion as a core value for nation-building and economic development (Chua 1995; Hill and Lian 1995). In 1965, the natural population growth rate fell from 3.4 percent in 1957 to 2.5 percent (LePoer 1989). The government since then has adopted an interventionist strategy in formulating population and family policies. For example, in 1972, the government promoted a family planning policy of “stop at two.” And when the fertility rate dropped further in the 1980s, the government revamped the family planning policy to “have three or more, if you can afford it.” In 2004, the government introduced new incentives and economic benefits to increase the sub-replacement fertility rate, which was at a rate significantly lower than the natural population replacement rate of 2.1 (Yeung and Hu 2018). To resolve this grave demographic problem, the Singapore government considered bringing in young and highly skilled immigrants. New Chinese immigration to Singapore, which began in the early 1990s and accelerated in the 2000s, was a direct outcome of the government’s deliberate policymaking to deal with sub-replacement fertility while strengthening the nation-state’s global competitiveness. Unlike the U.S., Singapore’s immigration policy leaned heavily toward highly skilled immigration without giving preference to family reunification nor birth-right citizenship to the children of immigrants born in Singapore. However, it was relatively easy for Chinese immigrants to obtain permanent residency and naturalized citizenship, and their relatives to obtain short-term and temporary visas.

Influenced by Singapore’s immigration policy, new Chinese immigrants are composed primarily of international students, highly educated professionals, and investment migrants. The age structure is skewed toward younger cohorts of either those at working age or those born to new immigrant families at very young ages. Within the new immigrant family, members may be on different immigrant statuses, some are naturalized citizens, others are PRs, and still others hold temporary visas. Those holding temporary visas face uncertainty in resettlement, which is often the reason for postponing marriage and childbearing. With time, the majority of new Chinese immigrant families transform from couple-only families to nuclear families with young children. However, many families with young children soon become extended families, as the parents of *xinyimin* come to Singapore on temporary visas to take

care of their grandchildren. Some *xinyimin* also send their infants and toddlers back to China to be taken care of by their parents, and then bring them back when it is time for them to be enrolled in kindergarten or first grade, hence forming the split household family of a different kind.

In sum, new Chinese immigrant families in Singapore show some distinctive characteristics compared to their counterparts in the U.S. First, both husband and wife tend to be highly-educated and salaried professionals, and thus have a higher socioeconomic status than native families. Second, a significantly high proportion of new Chinese immigrants hold PR or temporary (work) visas with an uncertain future in permanent settlement in Singapore. Third, in families with children, most of the children are still in their infancy and early childhood. Fourth, for families with young children, many are quasi-extended families with grandparents present either in Singapore on temporary visas or in China.

5. Challenges Faced by New Chinese Immigrant Parents

To raise children in new sociocultural environments, new Chinese immigrant parents often face daunting challenges, including not only the language and cultural barriers, but the institutional and socio-structural constraints.

5.1. The Language Barrier

The first challenge is the language barrier. In both the U.S., where English is the dominant language, and in multilingual Singapore, where English is the most commonly used official (and working) language, new Chinese immigrants themselves encounter discrimination in the workplace and society either because of a lack of English proficiency or because of accented English (Wang and Lo 2005). When it comes to childrearing, lack of English proficiency creates communication barriers. It limits immigrant parents' access to urgently needed information such as health, daycare and school, and other available public services. It also weakens parental authority as children often act as cultural brokers and translators for their parents (Zhou 2006). For example, Tom, a father of two teenaged children, who worked in Los Angeles Chinatown, lamented, "I don't know how my children are doing in school because I cannot help them with homework and never show up to their school activities, nor the teacher-parent meetings. Even if they joined gangs or ditched school, I wouldn't know it. I just pray to God, wishing that they are okay." In Singapore, even for many new Chinese immigrants who are highly educated and have good English proficiency, their distinct accent can be a problem. For example, Lynn had received a PhD from the best university in Singapore and had lived there for 15 years with two local-born children (10- and 1-year-old). She commented, "at work, it is very important to master not only good English, but also good Singlish (accented English by locals). When we open our mouths to speak, they [bosses or coworkers who are Chinese Singaporean] know we are *xinyimin*. Our Chinese accented English would create problems for developing good relationships with both superiors and peers at work and even for promotion because we are outsiders. So I'd make sure that my children grow up speaking good English. I also encourage my older child to learn Singlish and make friends with different groups of local children, Chinese, Malays, and Indians . . . "

The children also encounter language difficulty, which is inadvertently created by the immigrant family. Raised by immigrant parents and/or grandparents who speak only Chinese at home because of their lack of English language ability, the children often enter school without proficient English. Although parents would want their children to learn English as quickly as possible, they still insist on speaking Chinese to their children at home and take every possible opportunity to push their children to maintain Chinese language proficiency and Chinese identity. In the U.S., Chinese immigrant parents send their children to Chinese schools after regular school hours, even when they are aware that making their children learn Chinese may be a losing battle (Zhou and Li 2003). In Singapore, some parents reported that helping their children learn Chinese and maintain Chinese identity is not only a cultural need of parents, but also a pragmatic choice. They believe that their children's future employment opportunities may be beyond the small island-state and that mastering bilingual or multilingual skills

would increase one's competitiveness in the global job market. Many parents with children in higher grades of primary school or in secondary schools worry about their children's Chinese proficiency; they think that the children's mastering good English would weaken their Chinese learning ability. Indeed, the children often resist speaking and learning Chinese since English is used in schools and in their social life outside the family.

5.2. Cultural Barriers

Cultural difference is another challenge that immigrants face. New Chinese immigrant parents emphasize the Chinese cultural traditions and practices of filial piety, deference to parents and elders, respect for authority, and "family first." They tend to impose strict rules on children while overlooking their children's privacy and individuality, which is incompatible with Western cultural values of individualism, freedom, equality, and critical thinking. In the U.S., such differences in cultural values and practices often lead to intense intergenerational conflict. In Singapore, where the mainstream society is said to be dominated by Chinese culture, new immigrant parents face similar issues associated with cultural differences. This is because native Singaporean Chinese tend to distinguish themselves from both their own parents, who were earlier immigrants, and the new immigrants. Younger Singapore Chinese also strongly adhere to their national identity as "Singaporean" and have little sense of belonging to China or anything Chinese. They also lack proficiency in Chinese language. Although new Chinese immigrants in Singapore are hyper-selected with higher than average levels of education, occupation, and income, they are still at a disadvantaged position in the process of adapting and integrating into Singapore's uniquely East–West blended culture.

5.3. Institutional Barriers

In addition, new Chinese immigrants in the U.S. and Singapore are subject to different extents of structural and institutional discrimination. Although larger social environments gradually become more equal, open, and inclusive in both the U.S. and Singapore, new Chinese immigrants still encounter institutional constraints, but in different ways. In the U.S., new Chinese immigrants come into contact with a racial hierarchy, in which their disadvantaged racial status, which subjects them to overt or covert prejudice and discrimination, trumps relatively advantageous class status. Upon arrival in the U.S., many experienced under-employment because their China-acquired education and professional credentials and skills are either non-transferable or unappreciated. They also lack the kind of social capital that would link them to the mainstream labor market and society. These structural constraints not only pressure immigrants to work harder and perform better in the workplace and in society, but make them educate their children about circumventing institutional and racial barriers by working twice as hard and being twice as good as their American peers (Schneider and Lee 1990; Siu 1992).

In Singapore, state policies and institutions, such as immigration policies, rules and regulations, and government agencies, have intentionally or unintentionally engendered a social hierarchy, where immigrants are distinguished along the lines of education, occupation, and class statuses. This hierarchy is consequential for newcomers, as they are offered different types and levels of opportunities and welfare benefits. Christine, a 42-year-old naturalized citizen who had migrated to Singapore more than 10 years ago, said, "Once *xinyimin*, always *xinyimin*! Your naturalized citizenship status wouldn't change that. We especially lack the useful social connections and close circles of friends to help support our children's education. In order to ensure that my son gets into the current school, I had to serve as a volunteer at the church a few years before my son's primary school enrolment, just so I could obtain a referral letter from our pastor ... Otherwise you would not know for sure which school your child is allocated to until the last minute. Children of new citizens and PRs do not have equal chance in school allocation, and some of them are subject to lottery for allocation to better schools." The changing immigration policy in Singapore also makes a distinction between different categories of immigrants and citizens. John, an IT engineer holding a PR, said, "If we were citizens, my son's monthly childcare fee would be SG\$500. But we have to pay more than double that amount.

So I have to say the current immigration policy does exert heavy burden and pressure on people like me.” Lily, the wife of an Employment Pass holder and a homemaker, was frustrated when she talked about her experience. “We wanted to settle down here, but our PR application was rejected twice in the past 3 years. Our family is in good standing financially, and we emphasize on children’s education very much. We don’t understand why the government rejected our PR application. Without PR, it would be difficult for us to make long-term plans for our children’s education.”

Moreover, the rapid influx of new immigrants from mainland China, in particular, has aroused local Singaporeans’ dissent and resentment. The fear that new immigrants would drain public resources and intensify competition for employment, housing, education, and health services has deepened the social discrimination against new Chinese immigrants. Such hostile public reception creates high uncertainty about long-term resettlement for new Chinese immigrants and generates a keen sense of urgency in pushing their children to do well in school while strengthening their bilingual and bicultural skills for future educational and career prospects outside Singapore.

5.4. The Generation Gap in the New Chinese Immigrant Family

The “generation gap” is caused by differences in age, experience, and environment of growing up, which is not a unique phenomenon but is more likely to lead to intergenerational conflicts in immigrant families than native families. In the United States, the generation gap is shaped and exacerbated by a cultural gap between the immigrant family and the larger society as well as by the different paces of acculturation between immigrant parents and their children born or raised in the receiving country. 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 (Zhou 2006). The children, in contrast, want more. They aspire to be American like everyone else, and hope to be able to do whatever their hearts desire rather than what their parents tell them to do. This cultural gap sets the parents and children apart, and often dampens the already strained parent–child relations. Children tend to regard their immigrant parents as *lao-wan-gu* and parental ways as outdated or old-fashioned, and they consciously rebel against parental ways. 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. The parents experience difficulty in communicating with their Americanized children and in mediating between their expectations 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 (Zhou 2006).

In Singapore, since the children of many new Chinese immigrant families are still young, an intergenerational gap has not yet been visible. There are, however, cases where there is an intergenerational gap between new Chinese immigrants themselves and their parents who come to Singapore to take care of grandchildren. As discussed earlier, new Chinese immigrant families are usually made up of married couples or couples with young children with the latter in need of additional help. Although it is customary for middle-class families to hire domestic helpers, new Chinese immigrant couples tend to seek support from their parents in China. This is a rational, pragmatic family arrangement, not only relieving the couple’s financial burden, but also ensuring that their young children are in good and reliable care. The practice of childcare by grandparents is the same as that in China. Such practice by new Chinese immigrants in Singapore has now become a type of transnational grand-parenting, where grandparents come to Singapore to take care

of their grandchildren. This three-generation, transnational living arrangement complicates family relations and the nature of the generation gap. From the grandparents' perspective, transnational grand-parenting involves a sacrifice. They have to give up their leisure time in retirement to take up grand-parenting responsibilities. In Singapore, they also have to deal with language and cultural problems in an unfamiliar environment on a daily basis. Moreover, they often differ with their immigrant children in parenting philosophy, style, and practices, which often lead to disagreements and intergenerational conflicts in the family. When conflicts occur, they tend to complain and worry that their own children are being too assimilated into the Western culture to be filial or that their own children may not provide them with the needed and expected care when they become old and frail.

6. Expectations, Strategies, and Support

6.1. Extremely High Educational Expectations

Findings from our comparative study indicate that despite the different social positioning of the Chinese in these two host societies, Chinese immigrant parents in the United States and Singapore show little difference in their expectations for children's education. They share the belief that education plays an instrumental role in individuals and families' prosperity and upward social mobility. In fact, a primary reason for migration among many Chinese immigrant parents is to seek better educational opportunities for their children.

In the United States, new Chinese immigrant parents have extremely high expectations for their children's academic excellence because many view education as the *only* effective way for their children to circumvent structural barriers and move ahead in society (Lee and Zhou 2015; Sue and Okazaki 1990; Zhou and Kim 2006). Their counterparts in Singapore have similarly high expectations, not only because Chinese Confucian culture values education, but also because the nation-state's meritocratic system judges and selects individuals for jobs and positions of power based on educational excellence. The Singapore government takes education as an important mechanism to develop, plan, and reserve human capital for Singapore's economic development and globalization. The pragmatism of education, intertwined with the experience or exposure to competitive parenting practices in China, further reinforces immigrant parents' belief in meritocracy while intensifying their own concern and anxiety for their children's educational success. For many new Chinese immigrant parents, their children's educational success not merely ensures better career prospects and life chances, but also brings honor to the entire family, and also justifies their decision to migrate. David, who migrated to Singapore 10 years ago through the investment path, showed satisfaction and a sense of pride when he told us that his daughter got into Raffles Institute, the oldest and one of the best pre-tertiary schools in Singapore. He explained, "I used Lang Lang [the famed Chinese pianist] as a role model for my daughter. When she was at Primary 6 [at age 12], I sent her to 20 different tuitions each week for the purpose of preparing her to do well in the PSLE. For us first generation, as pioneers, we sacrifice our lives and everything to make sure that our children achieve the highest level of excellence in education. This would benefit them for life."

6.2. Outcome-Driven Strategies

Having high expectations is one thing and realizing these expectations is quite another. New Chinese immigrants tend to design unique strategies that are outcome-driven. These strategies are practiced by Chinese immigrant parents of both middle class and working class backgrounds. The first strategy is to construct a narrowly defined success frame, which is carried over with some modifications from urban middle-class parenting practices in China. This success frame is based on measurable academic outcomes, such as grades and GPAs, exam scores, and enrollment in elite programs and prestigious schools at different levels. Parents believe that, by working hard, their children can achieve success (Lee and Zhou 2015). A second strategy is to guide children into specific subjects of study, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as medicine, finance,

accounting, and other subjects that can be quantitatively measured. Again, parents believe that their children can score high in these subject by working hard and that having educational qualifications and credentials in these subject areas can presumably lead to well-paying jobs. A third strategy is to invest in afterschool academics and develop particular talents or skills through extracurricular activities. This strategy is supplementary to the other two and consistent with overbearing parenting. Last but not least, the parents' goal is to help children get into the best schools or universities, ensuring that children "win at the starting line."

Our comparative study indicates that in both the United States and Singapore, new Chinese immigrant parents of middle class backgrounds tend to widely adopt these outcome-driven strategies, which are quite different from the class-based childrearing techniques of concerted cultivation or natural growth in America (Lareau 2003). In the case of the United States, immigrant parents of relatively low socioeconomic status also tend to do so.

These strategies seem to be effective. In the United States, the average academic achievement level of the children of Chinese immigrants, regardless of family socioeconomic backgrounds, is higher than that of other racial minorities as well as that of non-Hispanic white (Chao 1994; Lee and Zhou 2015; Yao 1985; Zhou and III 2016). In Singapore, however, it is still too early to make conclusions about outcomes since the children of Chinese immigrants are still quite young.

6.3. Interaction with Host-Society Institutions

While Chinese immigrant parenting strategies may be influenced by culture, we find that these unique strategies are shaped by contexts of reception and host-society institutions and supported by familial or ethnic resources. Both the United States and Singapore are developed countries, and their education is superior in dollar-per-student investment, training, and quality. However, the two countries fundamentally differ in their educational philosophy and institutional setup with the U.S. system being open, liberal, and skill-based and the Singaporean system being competitive, meritocratic, and exam-based. In either country, Chinese immigrant parents do not blindly design and adopt strategies that they think effective. Rather, they make sure that their parenting strategies are closely tied to, and modified to fit, the requirements of the formal education system of the host country.

In the United States, kindergarten-to-high school (K-12) education is compulsory and is provided by public and private schools, as well as home schools. The federal government guides education through laws, guidelines, and funding subsidies, but there is no uniformed curriculum, teaching materials, pedagogy, and assessment system at the federal level. State governments formulate policies, set overall standards, mandate standardized tests, administer assessment, and provide support with funds and grants. Within each respective state, local (county and city) governments establish school districts to make day-to-day decisions about all aspects of schooling. Because public schools are supported by local tax revenues, the quality of schools is vastly different by socioeconomic standing of the neighborhood. Public school enrolment is usually tied to one's residential address. Thus, the first step to ensuring a smooth educational trajectory is to enroll children into good schools either by buying into, or by renting in, good school districts (or even by using relatives' addresses). For new Chinese immigrants, the saying about "school district properties" in the ethnic real estate market reflects the primary consideration in home purchase decisions.

Student assessments at each grade level are determined by basic pass-or-fail rather than best scores in state-mandated standardized tests and GPAs. In other words, students having a straight C or a straight A have the same chance of advancing grades, graduating from high school, and getting into a college. However, there is a wide range of school choices and educational opportunities. For example, there are different tracks within regular schools for academic driven students to get into GT (gifted and talented) and honors classes, and enroll in AP (advanced placement) courses and school organized extracurricular activities, such as music, theater, and sports clubs, which add to students' profiles for eventually getting into prestigious universities. There are also different opportunities to enroll in a wide range of post-secondary schools, e.g., junior colleges. And there are many second chances

for those who want to return to school to receive degrees or professional certifications at later times. The availability of these institutional opportunities provides clear roadmaps and benchmarks for parents to design strategies to ensure their children aim high and do best.

Comparatively, the Singaporean society appears to be more favorable for new Chinese immigrants than the larger society in the United States, in that Singapore is deeply influenced by Confucian culture, and the Chinese occupy a relatively high social position in the multicultural society. However, Singapore has a centralized education system based on meritocracy. The government has full control over education's direction, quality, and standards. Students are screened, streamed, and selected by different levels of examinations, which especially happen in early years of school, leading to highly competitive education. For example, the Gifted Education Programme (GEP) at primary 3 and the Primary School Leave Examination (PSLE) at primary 6 are two important exams in deciding students' educational opportunities and the resources to be obtained.

Although the Singapore government has deliberately reformed the education system by moving away from the narrow focus on grades, e.g., through the 2018 test-free policy, such change has not eased parental worries and anxieties. Chris, a naturalized citizen, who worked as a part-time tutor at a tutoring center, explained, "The education reform did not ease the pressure of competition since high-stake examinations, e.g., PSLE, are maintained. Moreover, the reform aimed for reducing contents in the already crowded curriculum to make learning more fun, meaningful, and reflexive. But what is being tested in examinations has become much deeper and wider than what the children learn from school. Therefore, parents, native or immigrant alike, must invest additional economic resources and time heavily in afterschool work." We observed in Wechat discussions that parents complained that they had to spend more money and time in the realm of academics after school now than before. This situation has consequentially led to increasing demand for supplementary or shadow education (Bray and Lykins 2012; Wise 2016).

Although Singapore's education system offers some opportunities and flexibility for "late bloomers", high-stake examinations and streaming are accepted by the public as benefitting the country's human capital and economic developments, resulting in an excessive involvement of the whole society in education competition (Gee 2012). The country has become a tuition nation,⁶ characteristic of a well-developed, sophisticated private tuition industry to help students boost their grades so they can keep up with their peers and get into top-tier schools, and to meet the urgent needs of anxious parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In Singapore, 90 percent of all families (1.2 million families) send their children to afterschool tutoring, including about 40 percent of preschoolers and 80 percent of primary school students. Attending private tuition sessions has become regular for most students at all grade levels on a daily or weekly basis. For example, about 85 percent of children aged 13–19 have to study after school for more than 4 hours a week (Wise 2016).

As educational success is highly valued by the society and educational attainment along with school performance scores are key to getting into good universities or good jobs, new Chinese immigrant parents align their education practices and strategies with the institutional environment, just like the majority of native Singaporean parents. They invest heavily in their children's academic studies and other extracurricular and enrichment activities. Even at pre-school ages, children's lives are highly structured and cramped with activities to improve their literacy, reading, writing, and mathematical learning abilities before they enter regular school. Native Singaporeans refers to parental anxiety over fierce competition as *kiasu* (fear of losing out).⁷ Both immigrant and native parents actually compete with one another in their children's education to make sure that their children "do not lose at the starting line." Such educational competition not only leads to tremendous pressures and anxieties from high expectations and heavy investment but also intense native resentment of new Chinese immigrant

⁶ See "Tuition Nation." *The Straits Times*, 4 July 2015. Available online: <http://www.asiaone.com/singapore/tuition-nation> (accessed on 25 January 2019).

⁷ "Kiasu" is a Hokkien term used by Singaporean Chinese to mean the "fear of losing out".

parents who tend to be more highly educated and economically resourceful. Our data indicated that such fierce education competition led some new Chinese immigrant parents to hold unrealistic expectations of their young children, make their children follow a well-planned, rigid schedule, and inculcate their children with strict self-discipline and self-control. Some parents even accompanied their children to be trained in effective time management and study habits (but not always successfully). Parents often showed intense emotions, such as irritation, anger, frustration, etc., when children could not perform to their standard and satisfaction, and vented their negative emotions on their children.

6.4. Familial and Ethnic Support

It is not easy to raise children in a foreign land, whether in the West, like the U.S., or in the East, like Singapore. The challenges that new immigrant parents face add to the level of difficulty. Thus, to actualize a strong pragmatic value on education and to make outcome-driven strategies effective, new Chinese parents, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, must also rely on available support from familial and ethnic social networks.

In the U.S., the ethnic Chinese community has become an important institutional basis from which immigrants rebuild their social networks and build new ethnic institutions that function as mechanisms of support to influence the social mobility of group members and their children (Zhou and Li 2003). Because of immigrant selectivity, the Chinese immigrant community, lodged in old Chinatowns or ethnoburbs, has developed an ethnic enclave economy and a range of ethnic social and cultural institutions to support the long-term settlement needs of Chinese immigrants. The children- or youth-oriented enterprises, both nonprofit and for-profit, range from weekend Chinese schools to a wider variety of afterschool academies and learning and enrichment centers, such as daily afterschool classes that match formal school curricula, English language classes that help improve reading and writing skills, exam cram schools, college preparation programs, music/dance/sports studios, and other talent training and extracurricular activities. These private enterprises are owned and run by Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs as part of the ethnic economy, which forms the ethnic system of supplementary education to serve primarily Chinese immigrant families (Zhou and Li 2003). The ethnic system of supplementary education is quite unlike the private tuition industry in Singapore. This particular industry has been incorporated into the mainstream economy in Singapore that caters to all Singaporean families, not just the Chinese.

The intended functions of the ethnic system of supplementary education in the Chinese community in the U.S. are to create tangible educational resources and facilitate access to these resources. Participation in these ethnic institutions helps Chinese children and youths improve in learning ability, study habits, and academic performance in school because it adds academic contents, study hours, and learning intensity to students, which indeed yield desirable school outcomes. In addition, intangible resources are also generated. First, Chinese traditional values and a sense of ethnic identity are nurtured among children through participation in these ethnic institutions. For example, young children recite classical Chinese poems and Confucian sayings about family values, behavioral and moral guidelines, and the importance of schooling. Second, ethnic participation nurtures ethnic identity and pride among Chinese youths who may otherwise reject Chinese culture due to pressures to assimilate. It also provides unique opportunities for immigrant children to form a different set of peer group networks, giving them more leverage in negotiating parent–child relations at home. Third, ethnic institutions not only provide important sites where Chinese children and youth meet other co-ethnicity peers, but also allow parents to meet with other parents who share similar concerns and problems and work out strategies to deal with them (Zhou 2006). In sum, ethnic 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 them. Involvement in different types of ethnic institutions also helps families and children alleviate the pressure for achieving while meeting familial and community expectations. For families lacking economic resources, the support of the ethnic community is even more important.

If new Chinese immigrant parents in the U.S. rely on ethnic institutions and social support networks in the broader Chinese immigrant community to promote their children's education, their counterparts in Singapore address the challenges of increasingly competitive education and its related problems primarily through strong individual human capital, which is associated with economic resources and cultural and social capital. Thanks to immigrant selectivity, most new Chinese immigrants are highly educated and in professional occupations, holding an Employment Pass and S Pass with paths to PR or citizenship or eligibility to apply for dependents' passes for immediate family members.⁸ The nation-state's immigration policy makes it possible for them to access familial resources transnationally when in need, such as sending their parents to Singapore to provide care for young children.

In response to Singapore's fierce educational competition, which is similar to that in China, new Chinese immigrants readily transfer parenting practices from China to Singapore when it is time to raise children. To ensure their parenting strategies are effective in yielding expected outcomes, new Chinese immigrant parents in Singapore are very much like their middle class counterparts in urban China in concentrating on deploying resources wisely. First, they use a good amount of economic resources to tap into public education resources, e.g., selecting good public schools. Specifically, they invest in education through purchasing property in proximity to good schools, by which they claim to gain a competitive advantage for their children through having an edge in the formal education competition, and many do so even before they have children. Second, they invest heavily in good services from the well-established shadow education industry, choosing programs that aim to improve children's school performances and exam scores. Moreover, they also arrange various enrichment programs that are considered crucial in developing and nurturing children's talents such as in music and arts. Third, they not only invest economically in their children's education, but also engage with their children's learning by closely supervising their children's homework and examination preparation and by providing healthy diets, a quiet home environment, and rich cultural goods such as toys, books, and theater and museum visits. Thus, the education competition becomes one that is primarily based on parents' human and cultural capital and economic resources. Although many new Chinese immigrant parents are stressed by their own intense "social-engineering" and educational investment, they strongly believe that their children will become competitive when they grow up.

7. Conclusions

In the paper, we address one of the most serious resettlement challenges that new Chinese immigrants face—children's education. We find that, despite different contexts of reception, new Chinese immigrant parents in the United States and Singapore hold similar views and expectations on children's education, are equally concerned about children's achievement outcomes, and tend to adopt overbearing parenting strategies. We also find that, while the traditional Chinese way of parenting is severely challenged in the processes of migration and adaptation, the success in promoting children's academic excellence involves not only the right set of culturally specific strategies but also tangible support from host-society institutions and familial or ethnic social networks.

Chinese immigrant parenting strategies seem to be working, given the fact that the children of new Chinese immigrants in the U.S. and Singapore have achieved academic excellence and that they performed at levels higher than native-born children. In the U.S., even those of low socioeconomic family backgrounds adopt the overbearing parenting strategies, which goes against the class argument by Lareau (2003), and fare better than middle class non-Hispanic whites (Kasinitz et al. 2009; Lee and Zhou 2015). The media and the public jump to the conclusion that there is something unique about the Chinese, Chinese culture, or the "tiger mom" style of overbearing parenting, that explains

⁸ See "Eligibility for Dependent's Pass." Ministry of Manpower, Singapore. Available online: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/dependants-pass/eligibility> (accessed on 2 January 2019).

the extraordinary educational achievement of immigrant Chinese children. Our comparative analysis suggests that culturally-specific parenting strategies matter, but culture should not be understood as something inherent to an immigrant group. Rather, culture interacts with structure; successful parenting involves not only the right set of cultural values and strategies but also tangible support from host-society institutions and familial and ethnic social networks, in addition to parental human capital and economic resources.

Overbearing parenting strategies practiced by new Chinese immigrants in the U.S. and Singapore, as we have shown, have presumably led to the desirable outcomes expected by parents. However, there are unintended consequences that may affect children negatively in the long run. For example, research in the U.S. has shown that the extraordinary academic achievements of second-generation Chinese Americans has negative effects on Chinese Americans (e.g., Qin et al. 2008; Cherng et al. 2014). At the individual level, overbearing parenting stifles individual drive for learning based not only on interest but also on ability, while depriving children of their intellectual curiosity and critical thinking in subject areas beyond the narrow success frame. At the group level, extraordinary achievement reinforces the “model minority” myth, holding the group up to different (higher) standards while setting it apart from other Americans for prejudiced views and treatment (Zhou 2004; Chou and Feagin 2008). In Singapore, negative impacts of overbearing parenting at the individual level may not pertain to only the children of new Chinese immigrants. However, negative effects at the group level are similar, in that new Chinese immigrant parents who are predominantly highly educated are perceived as posing a real threat to natives in education competition. Thus, future research should pay attention to determinants of these unintended consequences.

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