

## **School Performance of Second-generation Chinese in the EU: A Comparison of the U.K. and France**

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### **Introduction**

This paper covers second-generation Chinese in the United Kingdom and France in the 1990s, and, while considered to be high academic achievers in scholastic performance, first, it will clarify their actual educational achievements, and then, based on interviews with second-generation Chinese in both countries who are primarily in their 20s, it will explore the reasons for their strong academic record from the viewpoint of a “folk theory of success”. This study will then compares the situations in the U.K. and France, taking particular notice of the “folk theory of success” that refers to how people perceive school education in mainstream society as a means of success.

In the field of educational anthropology, issues surrounding the underachievement of minority students have been raised since the mid-1960s. Gibson organized earlier studies on the underachievement of minority students and pointed out two approaches [Gibson 1988].

One approach to show the academic underachievement of minority students attempts to explain the cause of underachievement through “cultural discontinuity” and a “cultural conflict” between the school culture of mainstream society and the cultural background of the minority group. Studies that take this approach are microethnographic studies that focus on cultural differences primarily in the classroom in such areas as the communication between

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students and teachers [e.g. Erickson and Mohatt 1981].

The second approach tries to explain the scholastic failure of the lower classes and immigrants' children through structural inequalities in society and schools. It is a sociocultural reproduction theory [e.g. Bourdieu 1974]. Essentially, these two approaches discussed the causes of school failure among immigrants' children in terms of culture or structure, respectively.

Later, Ogbu and Gibson proposed a cultural model approach that could also explain school success, transcending the existing debate over culture versus structure drawn from studies up to that point that had focused solely on school failure of minority children [Ogbu and Gibson 1991]. The "cultural model" refers to how the members of the group see themselves and their institutions, and how they perceive their own standing in society. This approach attempts to explain school adjustment through differences in cultural models focusing on a distinction between minority groups within the same structure.

Ogbu distinguishes between two types of minorities – involuntary minorities and immigrant minorities – as having two different cultural models. Involuntary minorities are absorbed into mainstream society against their will, are historically subject to discrimination and job ceilings, and form a rebellious identity and cultural model characterized by a distrust of mainstream society's culture and education. They believe that no matter how successful they are in school they will be unable to escape their marginal status in society or menial labor employment – an attitude that invites maladjustment to school [Ogbu 1991].

In contrast, immigrant minorities, even if they are subjected to discrimination and job ceilings, because of their historical background as "voluntary" immigrants, do not compare themselves to the existing majority but to conditions in their home country and see themselves as better off. They also see themselves as guests who should not complain, and believe that they can succeed in society if they work hard and lead a frugal life. Accordingly, they feel that pursuing success in mainstream education is a means of upward mobility in society – an attitude that leads to success in school [Ogbu 1991].

In this way, Ogbu explained success or failure in school according to differences in the cultural models of involuntary minorities and immigrant minorities. Ogbu arranged the cultural model into five key elements: (1) a frame of reference that compares present status with future potential; (2) a folk theory of success attributable to education; (3) identity awareness; (4) a cultural framework for judging desirable actions and confirming belongingness to and solidarity with the group; and (5) degree of trust in the members and system of the dominant group.

This paper focuses on the second element – a folk theory of success attributable to

education – and, based on interviews with second-generation minorities, aims to clarify the parents' attitudes toward education and the second-generation's occupational choices and perceptions of school education. Pieke pointed out that the folk theory of success concept enabled Ogbu to analyze the interdependence between the macro power structure and cultures of the minorities and majority within a society as well as the differential educational achievement between these groups [Pieke 1991: 163].

Many debates have arisen regarding the original statement of Ogbu's theory. Among these, the key criticism is that Ogbu's theory is limited as a static interpretive frame using classifications that do not account for how a folk theory of success is formed by individuals as they are constantly coping with the circumstances in which they find themselves. Nor does it account for diversity within the group or human agency [Pieke 1991: 164].

Based on 31 second-generation Chinese in the U.K. and 21 in France conducted in English in London, the U.K. between 1993 and 1997, and in Paris, France, in October 2005, March and September 2006, and March 2007.<sup>1)</sup>, this paper addresses the shortcomings of Ogbu's theory as expressed by Pieke and other critics through a study of how a folk theory of success gets formed over the course of the individual's daily life, as well as how the generational differences between the first and second-generations. In addition, by looking at and comparing second-generation Chinese in the U.K. and France – immigrants with the same cultural background but in different educational environments – I will further examine the applicability of a folk theory of success as a concept to explain the school adjustment of immigrant minorities.

## **I The Academic Performance of Chinese Students**

### **1. In the U.K.**

Issues concerning school failure of immigrants' children from the West Indies have been raised and discussed in the U.K. since the early 1960s. In 1981, the Rampton Report<sup>2)</sup> was issued with the title *West Indian Children in Our Schools*, to encourage prompt and special attendance to the needs of West Indian children. Also, many studies have been conducted on academic performance by individual ethnic minorities.

Up until the mid-1990s, most studies on scholastic performance by ethnic minorities set

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1) For details on the attributes of the interviewees, please refer to [Yamamoto 2008].

2) Department of Education and Science, The Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups, *West Indian Children in Our Schools*, London: HMSO, 1981.

up three categories, i.e. West Indian, White, and Asian. In the U.K., “Asian” usually referred to “South Asian”, and, while “Asian” also included those of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi descent, in studies like the one mentioned above, Chinese children were also included in the “Asian” category. Craft and Craft [1983], for example, did a survey of 16 secondary schools in Greater London, and based on the test results of fifth graders, they divided class distinctions into three levels, and showed that West Indian children performed more poorly than White children, who in turn were surpassed by Asian children.

A second report was issued in the mid-eighties by the Home Affairs Committee, along with the Swann Report, which indicated that Chinese children performed well scholastically, particularly in mathematics, and that a high proportion went on to receive higher education [Great Britain. Parliament 1985a, 1985b: 653].

Based on the 1991 census, Owen pointed out that the percentage of ethnic Chinese aged 18-29 holding an A-level qualification or higher was 49.9% (40.4% of Whites), but only 10.7% of ethnic Chinese aged 30-44 (26.2% of Whites), and a mere 1% of ethnic Chinese aged 45 and up (12.4% of Whites) [Owen 1993: 8]. These figures show the contrast between ethnic Chinese aged 18-29 and their parents’ generation, with a higher percentage going on to secondary education than White youth. Of the 31 interviewees for this paper, all had gone to university except for four high school students, and four had completed a master’s degree program.

A survey on middle school dropouts found approximately 155 dropouts per 1,000 students among ethnic West Indians, yet only 30 dropouts among Whites and the least – 10 dropouts – among ethnic Chinese [Gillborn and Gipps 1996].

According to the 2001 census<sup>3)</sup>, those who received five or more grades ranging from A to C on the GCSE<sup>4)</sup> included 69.5% of Chinese boys (1,095) and 79.4% of Chinese girls (1,029) – 74.2% for ethnic Chinese overall, contrasted with 47.4% of White boys (249,797) and 57.5% of White girls (243,672) – 52.3% of Whites overall. According to these statistics, Chinese students received the highest grades of any ethnic minority.

Other factors beside ethnicity, such as gender and class, also affect academic performance

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3) According to the 2001 U.K. census, ethnic minorities comprised 7.9% of a total population of 58,789,194. The figures were: 1,053,411 Indian, 747,285 Pakistani, 283,063 Bangladeshi (with a total population of Asian or Asian-British of 2,332,423), 565,876 Black Caribbean, 485,277 Black African (with a total population of Black or Black British of 1,148,738), and 247,403 Chinese [Office for national Statistics 2001].

4) GCSE stands for the General Certificate of Secondary Education, a public examination that has been held since the summer of 1988. It is taken at the end of five years of secondary education.



in complex ways. In terms of gender, female pupils achieved better results than their male counterparts among all ethnic minorities. In terms of class, Archer and Francis use the index of free school meals (FSM) to study academic performance, overlaying this index onto ethnicity statistics<sup>5)</sup> [Archer and Francis 2007: 10-13]. Those who received five or more grades ranging from A to C on the GCSE among ethnic Chinese pupils who did not get free meals totaled 69.9% of Chinese boys (950) and 80.4% of Chinese girls (906) – 75.0% overall. Of the Chinese pupils who received free school meals, 66.9% of boys (145) and 69.9% of girls (123) earned those high grades – 68.3% overall. High grade earners among White pupils who did not get free meals totaled 51.2% of boys (220,755) and 61.9% of girls (215,129) – 56.3% overall. Of the White pupils who received free meals, 18.7% of boys (29,042) and 25.7% of girls (28,541) – only 22.2% overall earned those high grades. As the figures above indicate, Archer and Francis determined that social class was a more significant factor in academic achievement for Whites than for ethnic minorities [Archer and Francis 2007: 13].

Today, British-Chinese youth are using school education as a means to get white-collar jobs, differing from their parents' generation. Based on the fourth Policy Studies Institute (PSI) survey, Mason noted that 46% of ethnic Chinese men of working age were employed at the professional or managerial level as compared to 30% of White men, along with 30% of Chinese women, in contrast to 16% of White women [Mason 2003: 74-75]. This shows a higher percentage of both men and women of Chinese descent employed at the professional or managerial level as compared to their White counterparts.

## 2. In France

Some countries including the U. K. grant nationality on the grounds of *jus soli* (birthright citizenship), while the nationality laws of France, however, fundamentally grant it on the grounds of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood). The two countries therefore handle statistics differently in regard to second-generation immigrants. In the U.K., the children of immigrants born and raised in the country have British nationality from the time of birth, even if both parents are of foreign nationality, and are statistically considered “ethnic minorities”. But in France, the term “ethnic minority” is not used. The terms “foreign national” and “immigrant” are used instead.

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5) Using the index of “poor” as designated by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCS) to determine school lunch costs are to be free or charged is controversial. For example, ethnic Chinese may be reluctant to rely on the government by receiving free lunch services, or they might not know about such services to begin with [Archer and Francis 2007: 10].

According to a 1999 census in France, of a total population of 55.2 million, 4.31 million were immigrants – 7.4% of the population. They were classified as “foreign-born foreign nationals”, “foreign-born French nationals”, and “immigrants”<sup>6)</sup>. If second-generation immigrants whose parents are foreign nationals fulfill certain conditions<sup>7)</sup>, they do not need to apply for citizenship, but become French nationals on their 18th birthday. Consequently, these children of immigrant parents who are foreign nationals are classified statistically under the age of 18 as “foreign-born foreign nationals” and “foreign students”<sup>8)</sup>, but upon turning 18 become “foreign-born French nationals”. Sonoyama asserts that of children under the age of 20 who can be counted statistically as foreign nationals, 64% are born in France (and 80% of children under the age of 9) [Sonoyama 1996: 29].

Ikeda notes that in general most immigrant families try to support the education of their children amidst extremely disadvantageous environments, and that many children of immigrants experience failure as students [Ikeda 2001: 50]. Moreover, exceedingly few immigrant laborers have received basic education, and immigrant parents have poor new country’s language skills and little ability to assist their children. Nearly half of all Algerians, for example, experience difficulties in reading and writing a letter [Ikeda 2001: 50]. Hayashi observes that a large number of children of immigrants cannot satisfactorily read and write even after completing compulsory education [Hayashi 1984: 10].

Miyajima notes, based on 1999 data from the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) related to educational attainments by country of origin for immigrants aged 30-49, that the “no diploma” segment, which can be called academic failures, included a proportionately high number of people from Turkey, Portugal, and the Maghreb countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. At the same time, over 20% from each origin were

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6) Immigrant origins are diversifying, with the number born in the European Union declining (from 1.6 million in the 1990 census to 1.5 million in the 1999 census). The number of immigrants from Spain, Portugal, and Italy decreased by 210,000 from 1990. In contrast, there were 1.3 million immigrants from the Maghreb, up 6% from 1990 figures (three-quarters of whom were from Morocco) [Miyaji 2004: 49-60]. The population of ethnic Chinese in France is approximately 120,000 [Yu-Sion 1998: 106].

7) Those born on or after September 1, 1980, who reside in France on becoming of age, and who have a record of residence in France for a minimum of five years from the age of 11 on, obtain French citizenship upon turning 18. Those five years of residence do not need to be consecutive.

8) The number of foreign students receiving school education in France in the 1999-2000 school year was approximately 372,000 at the primary school level and 275,000 at the middle school level – 5.9% and 5.1% of the overall student population, respectively. The largest numbers by nationality were Moroccan (23.1%), Algerian (14.5%), and Portuguese (10.0%), while students from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam comprised 3.2% of the student population [Ikeda 2001: 46-47].

high academic achievers with a “baccalauréat degree or higher,” excluding Portugal and Turkey. Those from “other African countries” gained higher educational attainments than the French national average [Miyajima 2006: 111]. In addition, Miyajima emphasizes that approximately half of these immigrants from the Maghreb have low academic and professional qualifications, owing to their parents having poor educational experience and there being virtually no culture of reading and writing French in the home. He also cites academic underachievement among Turkish and Portuguese immigrants [Miyajima 2006: 112-113].

In regard to the academic performance of immigrant children in France, Sonoyama limited the focus of his study to data comparing educational achievement according to the profession of the parents. He observes that the advancement rate is higher among foreign-born pupils than the average for France overall when comparing households of the same profession [Sonoyama 1996: 35].

In the studies mentioned above concerning the academic performance of immigrant children, none mention the performance of Asian, Southeast Asian or Chinese children<sup>9)</sup>. It is therefore not possible to cite statistical evidence of the high academic performance of Chinese children in France. It is possible, however, to point to a widespread, general image of Asian children as “good students”. Barouh notes that the Asian children included in the “good student” stereotype include Cambodian, Vietnamese, Lao, Chinese, and Japanese pupils, among whom there are wide-ranging academic disparities [Barouh 1995]. Of the 21 second-generation Chinese whom I interviewed in France, excluding the five high school students, all had gone on to university. The five high school students expressed their intention to go on to university. About half said they “were happy” that they “studied hard in school and got good grades”. One interviewee even said that he had “failed an exam at the end of junior high school and decided from that point on to study very hard”.

In September 2006, I visited a high school in the 13th arrondissement of central Paris, a residential district with a high population of immigrants from Southeast Asia. While there, a White teacher at the school stated, “You could say that a characteristic of Chinese children is their very good attitude.” Although it is not possible to cite statistics to substantiate the strong academic performance of Chinese children in France, based on the successes of the interviewees mentioned above, unlike children from the Maghreb, Portugal, or Turkey, there are few problems

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9) Categories such as “Asian”, “Southeast Asian” and “Chinese” in France are related to the historical background of Chinese immigration. For more details, see [Yamamoto 2008].

in regard to academic underachievement or dropout rates among Chinese children. Many of them adjust to their school environment, have a good attitude, and reach high scholastic achievements.

## II Folk Theories of Success

The “folk theories of success” employed here refers to how people perceive school education in mainstream society as a means of success.

In this chapter, based on interviews with second-generation Chinese in the U.K. and France, I will examine the first-generation and second-generation folk theories of success in terms of: 1) the parents’ attitude toward education, and 2) school education as seen by the second-generation.

### 1. The Parents’ Attitude toward Education

(1) In the U.K.

Most of first-generation Chinese immigrants to the U.K. came from the Hong Kong New Territories; their level of education is low and over 80% work in the catering trade, including Chinese food<sup>10)</sup>. Of the 31 interviewees, the fathers of all but two – employed as civil servants in the local government – managed a Chinese restaurant or takeaway shop<sup>11)</sup>, or were employed as a cook or waiter. The mothers did sewing at home as a sideline job or worked at the Chinese Community Centre<sup>12)</sup> doing cooking or cleaning. If the mother ran a shop, she worked together with the father. One can get a sense of the parents’ attitude toward education from a statement like the following made by a member of the second-generation Chinese interviewee pool:

My parents worked all year round without holidays at a takeaway, sacrificing themselves so that their children would be able to get good jobs and have a future as long as we studied hard. They laid their hopes and dreams on my brother and me, and told us to

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10) For the historical background of Chinese immigrants in The U.K. and France, see [Yamamoto 2007a: 177-179, 184-185].

11) A type of Chinese restaurant where the food can be taken away to eat at home. This type of shop became popular in the 1970s as it matched British eating habits, especially among the working class. Most of these shops are run by family labor.

12) The Chinese Community Centre is run with funding provided by the London borough and donations from various sources. Currently it is the association with the deepest connection to the daily lives of Chinese immigrants in the U.K. For more details, see [Yamamoto 2002: 75-82].

study. (25-year-old woman: company employee)

Archer and Francis, addressing the question of why Chinese children in the U.K. perform well in school from the perspective of educational sociology, conducted interviews with 30 Chinese parents (nine fathers and 21 mothers, all from Hong Kong) and observed that all of the interviewees believed that education is important [Archer and Francis 2007: 75]. Moreover, they noted that the parents' own lack of education did not in any way decrease their determination for their children to become well educated [Archer and Francis 2007: 76]. Behind this ambition for their children to be educated, as Archer and Francis point out and as can be discerned from the interviewee statement above, lies the parents' wish for their children not to work in the same trade, i.e. in restaurants and takeaway shops, which is all they themselves could manage [Archer and Francis 2007: 76].

Gender issues in the immigrant population in the U.K. have been discussed primarily in connection with second-generation Muslim women. In discussing Pakistani women, Kasama observes that their options for societal participation and leading independent lives are limited, as their place is considered to be in the home, which means that they can only find self-fulfillment through their status as a mother and wife [Kasama 1993: 114]. Thus, with gender norms based on the Pakistani immigrants' Islamic values of the parents' backgrounds, it was not desirable for the women to receive higher education. As these second-generation women had internalized the Western values of male-female equality, they experienced conflict and clashes with their parents, whose views were rooted in Islamic values.

In the case of the second-generation Chinese immigrants interviewed for this study, while many interviewees spoke of a general tendency for their parents to want their sons more than their daughters to study and achieve a stable career, and to have their daughters marry rather than work, none were denied the opportunity for higher education because of being female. Of those interviewed for this study, two women in particular had experienced conflict with their fathers<sup>13)</sup>, but even including them, none were denied the opportunity for higher education simply because she is a woman. In the remarks above by the 25 year-old company woman, it is of particular note that the woman's parents not only wished for their son to become educated, but for their daughter as well, further indicating the parents' desire for all their children to have a better life, which included being better educated.

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13) Regarding the conflict between these two women and their parents, see [Yamamoto 2006: 180-181].

Elsewhere I have discussed in more detail the gender restructuring seen in the gap between first- and second-generation women. Briefly stated, first generation women worked as housewives and put their hopes and dreams in their children, while the daughters use the education of British society as a means of upward social mobility, find jobs, and pursue a path toward self-fulfillment as individuals in the public sphere [Yamamoto 2006]. From the description of her mother's life given by the second-generation woman below, one can understand how the mother wished for her children to get an advanced education, and how the daughter considers her success as a success for her mother.

My mother's life is really different. When she was little she worked on a farm and then at a factory. She was really a laborer, in the laborer class, and very poor. Even now my mother still doesn't work at a proper job. She might go to someone's house and do cleaning – just work for low wages. I was raised here, got an education here, went to university, and now work in a profession. But I think my mother did a good job of establishing a family and raising children. Both my brother and I graduated from university and have jobs. Born as a peasant, coming to a foreign country, and raising a family here must have been very difficult, but I think she succeeded in that respect. She worked hard in her life within the environment in which she found herself. (26-year-old woman: company employee)

It can also be observed that the parents feel having children who earn high academic achievements preserves their prestige and honor. Below are the remarks of a woman studying in a doctoral program.

My parents were happy when I got good grades; they valued education and wanted me to receive an advanced education, but they didn't put any pressure on me. They don't want me to work in the restaurant business like they do. But I didn't study because of pressure from my parents. I pursued the field of chemistry out of personal interest. I figured that if I got good grades my parents would also be happy. At first, my parents were worried when I told them I would go for a doctorate, but I explained that I would receive a scholarship and grants, so it was like having a job and that there was nothing to worry about. Now they are very proud that their daughter is studying for a doctorate. That's because Chinese people are concerned about their honor. (24-year-old woman:

Ph.D candidate)

A Chinese-language newspaper published in the U.K., the QingDao News, lists the names of children who receive high marks on the GCSE, and one female interviewee spoke of how her parents had often shown her that article and encouraged her to get high grades since she was little. From the listing of names of high achievers in the newspaper and parents showing that to their child it can be understood how a child's achievement of good grades is connected to the parents' prestige. In reality, even as the parents instructed their children to study hard, their own English language abilities were poor and prevented them from helping their children with their studies.

Moreover, the parents had no knowledge of the school system in the U.K. One interviewee said she had to select a secondary school on her own. Similarly, attendance rates at school functions for parents have been low for parents over the age of 60, whose level of English is low and who are busy with work, but have gone up among young parents in their 40s and younger.

At the same time, one characteristic of second-generation Chinese in the U.K. is that if their parents ran a restaurant or takeaway shop, as children they helped their parents after school or on weekends from the age of 10 or so on, without exception. About half of the interviewees had this experience of working with their parents to help out. When asked about the inconsistency of parents telling their children to study but also to help in the shop, one person said, "It was the same message in that they told us to work hard at both and be serious about whatever we do." Another replied, "My parents placed a priority on my school studies over helping in the shop." Parker performed a study of young Chinese women in the U.K. and notes that women felt more constrained by family labor than men [Parker 1994: 625]. There were women among those interviewed by this writer who said that they felt constrained by family labor, but none said that it interfered with their studies. The experience of helping in the shop, as described later, may have actually strengthened their desire not to work in the catering trade as their parents did, instead serving as motivation for engaging in schoolwork.

So, for the first generation, with their low level of education and limited English, whose only available path was to work long, hard hours at a Chinese restaurant or takeaway shop, success was defined by having their children get steady jobs and earn money, and by gaining prestige in the Chinese community, which they believed could be achieved by their children earning good grades in school. It was common to find displayed prominently in the living room of every household a university graduation photo of a child in the graduation gown, holding a

diploma. On the other hand, the parents did not want their children to forget the Chinese language, so most parents sent their school-age children to Chinese school<sup>14)</sup> on weekends.

(2) In France

Of the 21 people whom I interviewed in France, four had parents from mainland China, while the parents of the remaining 17 were from Southeast Asia, having emigrated from mainland China in the grandparents' generation. The immigrants from Southeast Asia are said to have a higher level of education than the immigrants from mainland China, but after immigrating to France they were unable to find work equivalent to their level of education, and virtually none of the first generation became white collar workers.

The fathers of the interviewees in France had more diverse occupations than in the U.K., Their occupations are managing or working as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant, preparation of Chinese food, automobile factory work, running a fruit and vegetable shop, running a home appliance store, fabric dealer, furniture store employee, TV company staff, leather product dealer, shoe repair, and unemployed. The mothers' occupations included: grocery store employee, dressmaking sideline work, patissier, nanny, clothing sales, civil service, and supermarket cashier.

Many interviewees reported that their parents "always told us to study and wanted us to get good grades" or "they wanted me to get a full university education, not to go to a junior college". Parents held this sentiment as much for their daughters as for their sons. None of the women were denied the opportunity for higher education because of being female.

When I was little, my parents often told me to study. They said that studying now is for my own good. Especially with mathematics, which 'belonged' to the Chinese, they told me I should try to memorize everything. [omitted] I got good grades and my teachers also told me that I did a good job, but that was not enough for my mother. To her, if I could achieve a score of 10 points now, then when I go to high school I will only be able to get 9 points and in university only 8 points. The further ahead I go, the more difficult it will get, so she says what will happen if I don't do better? (17-year-old female: high school student)

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14) Regarding Chinese schools for supplementary language study, see [Yamamoto 2007a].



When I was in primary school I would get slapped with a stick and told to study. That's Chinese culture. From about secondary school on I started going out to have fun, like my friends did. To go out at night I had to use all of my energy. Because my parents didn't understand. Especially around the age of 13 or 14, I had big fights with my parents. (20-year-old male: university student)

The two narratives below indicate an interpretation of the parents' urgings to study as motivated by "not wanting their children to have hard lives like their own" and necessitated by "the fact that we are foreigners."

I helped my parents around the house, but they wanted me to study. They put pressure on me. They often told me to study in order to succeed. That's because they didn't want us to struggle the way they did when they came here. I haven't thought about it much up to this point, and I didn't know why my parents told me to study, but now I understand very well. (24-year-old male: job seeker)

My parents are always telling me to study. If they find me lounging around on the sofa they immediately tell me to go study. Maybe, I think my parents would say that since we're foreigners in this country, we have to study a lot in order to succeed. (18-year-old male: high school student)

On the other hand, one interviewee said, "My parents never tell me to study. I do it myself." (17-year-old female: high school student) Another stated that:

My parents didn't force me to study and hardly ever told me to study. My two other siblings and I all were good in school, so there was nothing for my parents to say. (25-year-old male: company employee)

In general, my parents didn't take much interest in their children's school lives. As long as there weren't any problems and our grades were good, normally they didn't take much interest. Now, I'm going to art school at the same time as university. My parents didn't feel I had to go and weren't happy about it, but in the end they let me go. (19-year-old female: university student)

The 13th arrondissement of central Paris, which I visited in September 2006, is a residential district with a high population of immigrants from Southeast Asia, 60% of whom are ethnic Chinese. The principal of a primary school in the district spoke of how the Chinese parents are extremely strict regarding their children's school grades, and though not all parents react in this way, if the teachers tell the parents that their child is getting bad grades in school the child will be punished at home, so the school is careful what they say to these parents. The school also pays careful attention to the fact that Chinese parents will feel shame if they hear rumors that their child is unable to do well in school.

One interviewee said, "If I didn't succeed it would bring shame to my parents, but now with my going to university they are proud." (19-year-old male: university student) This same primary school principal also remarked, "The Southeast Asian parents are respectful of the school and cooperative. For example, even if their French language ability is poor, they always attend Saturday gatherings for parents". For the children, just having their parents come to the school is the important thing, he said. But because of the parents' poor French, they were unable to help their children study.

## **2. School Education as Seen by the Second-generation**

(1) In the U.K.

First, we will look at the career choices of second-generation Chinese.

Parker conducted a survey of young Chinese people, based on which he found that 149 of 172 selected math, chemistry, or physics as their A Level subject choice, and 43 of 81 selected science as their major at the university level [Parker 1995: 119-120]. He also points out a trend among young Chinese people to choose subjects that will lead to a secure vocation and cites as the main reason the desire to escape the "trap" of the catering trade in which their parents work [Parker 1995: 121]. In the introduction to an anthology of Chinese writers in Great Britain, Zhao writes:

Chinese communities everywhere have perhaps the highest proportion of computer programmers or civil engineers among the young, but the proportion of students in the humanities going to become artists and writers is small [Zhao 1994: x].

Although this is consistent with many of the men interviewed for my study who said they work in the computer field or as engineers, for both men and women the tendency was not to

choose a course of study that would lead to a secure vocation but rather to select subjects that they enjoyed studying and to progress along a path of their own choosing. Other career choices were varied, including working in the field of art, design, social welfare, and business.

The remark below is from a woman whose father died when she was young and whose mother approved her choice of becoming a speech therapist.

I think my mother would have been happy if I had become a doctor or lawyer or something like an accountant. At first I thought about going into the field of law, thinking that my mother would be happy about it. But my Indian friend said to me, 'If I were you I wouldn't do that. You'll lose your own way.' So at university I chose English, which I really wanted to study. My mother accepted this and wanted me to become a speech therapist. She shows me that she understands what I want to do. Sometimes she worries, saying things like, 'After I pay taxes there's not enough left to raise the family.' My mother thinks that the purpose of working is to earn money and is just a means of supporting our family. She tries to persuade us that 'If your work is laborious, that's not such a big deal. You work to be able to raise a family.' But even with that point of view, she let me choose what I wanted. (22-year-old female: speech therapist)

One can see from the comment above that a generation gap exists in terms of approaches to work. While the mother sees a job as a way to earn money and support the family, the daughter is studying in a field of her own interest, and trying to make it into a career. After working as a speech therapist for one year, she felt the need to study more, so she is thinking of enrolling in graduate school, she said. This indicates an approach that uses school education as a means to go into a profession of one's choosing. Because of taking such an approach, among interviewees there were some who had switched faculties or departments several times in order to find a field that suited them. Conversely, there were none who did not use formal education as a means of pursuing a path of their own liking.

At first I went into a business program, but that was to gain the consent of my parents. Because I thought they would agree if I chose business. But in my second year of university I started to think about what I wanted to be when I graduated, and so I switched my major to sociology. (27-year-old female: government employee)

In the U.K., school education was seen as means of establishing one's position in society, as it provides an equal chance of failure or success regardless of one's ethnic origins.

Education here treats you as a person, and doesn't ask what your background is. In that sense, everyone is equal, and nothing is stopping you from doing what you want.  
(23-year-old female: company employee)

The strong academic performance of Chinese youth can be considered related to this perception of school education as a means of entering a career of one's choosing, moreover, it is linked to the desire not to engage in the catering trade in which their parents work. These feelings were especially strong in those who had experience of helping in the restaurant or takeaway shop run by their parents and are connected to their motivation to study hard in school.

I had to help in the takeaway and couldn't go out after school like my classmates did. My parents took the position that I had to manage my affairs by myself, and they were really tough on me. I wondered why I couldn't go out, and it made me hate being Chinese. I wanted to study hard at school. I felt that if I did that I wouldn't have to listen to what my parents said. So even though this is what my parents had always said, I felt that I could become independent. (27-year-old female: company employee)

This woman's way of thinking can be said to be shared by the young generation of Chinese in the U.K.. She also said that by studying hard in school and getting good grades she felt she could get the attention of her parents and make them happy, as they wanted her to earn good grades. In regard to the question of from whom they received advice when deciding on a career path, most interviewees said that they had decided by themselves, as their parents could not understand English very well and had next to no knowledge of the British educational system or society. They said that teachers who provided career guidance would support the students' choices but were not much help when it came to finding out what they themselves wanted to do.

What about cases in which a conflict or potential conflict existed between the career that second-generation interviewees wanted to pursue and the career that their parents wanted for them? In most cases, the parents eventually accepted the wishes of their children.

My parents were not happy with my choice to study art, but once I had made my decision they didn't say anything against it, and actually provided encouragement. Because it is a field that I chose, they want me to work hard at it and succeed. So I always feel that my parents are supporting me. (21-year-old male: university student)

One woman who had become a clothing designer said that even after several years working, her parents still didn't accept her profession, saying that it was not a secure vocation. This conflict with her parents was ongoing. Still, there were only two such examples, and none of the interviewees said they had given in to their parents' wishes and had as a result changed their career path.

Based on a survey of Korean-American university students, in regard to their career choices, Kim states that they choose careers and professions more according to what their parents want than according to what they themselves want [Kim 1993]. And because academic success adheres to the parents' values, it is considered to be "the essence of being Korean" [Kim 1993: 244]. But second-generation Chinese in the U.K., while motivated by the awareness that their parents wished them to achieve academic success and that such success would make their parents happy, do not alter their own wishes to follow their parents' values. They see educational achievement as something that leads to a job in a field of their own choosing in British society.

## (2) In France

As far as I know, there is no literature on career choices among Chinese youth in France. Of the 21 interviewees, excluding the five currently in high school, all had gone on to university. The fields they chose were diverse and included law, economics, finance, computer science, material engineering, electrical engineering, and Asian studies. Most did not receive advice from anyone, but made their choice of career by themselves.

I liked physics and chemistry, so I went into electrical engineering. (25-year-old female: company employee)

My parents don't know much about the French educational system, and I liked economics, so naturally I went in that direction. I didn't get advice from anyone; I decided on my own. My parents were strict up to high school and I studied very hard,

but I'm enjoying myself more at university. (22-year-old male: university student)

And in most cases the parents respected their children's wishes.

At first I didn't know what I wanted to do. A lot of Asians go into science, and in my family we have a lot of doctors, engineers, and pharmacists. But I don't like that kind of science field. It's difficult and I had a lot trouble with those subjects, so I chose finance, which was my favorite subject. My parents respected my choice and never once tried to force me to change it. (25-year-old female: bank employee)

My parents told me to do what I like to do. If there's something I want to do, they said they would put up the money and support it. (25-year-old female: company employee)

My parents didn't say they wanted us to have a specific type of job. If we said we wanted to do something, they always encouraged us. My brother, for example, is going to commercial school, which costs more than university, but they're paying for it. (29-year-old male: university student)

When I was little my parents wanted me to be a doctor or an engineer, or different things, but they never once gave me any pressure. I gave myself pressure. (25-year-old female: bank employee)

Below are three cases where a disparity existed between what the young person wanted to pursue and what the parents wanted.

Originally, when I said that I wanted to do a vocational program that ended in two years, my parents were against it. They recommended a five-year program. Now I'm studying material engineering. It's a difficult job market right now, so I'm glad I listened to my parents. (24 male: job seeker)

My parents told me they wanted me to be an engineer no matter what, so for my career path I chose industrial and electrical computer science, but it's different from the idea my parents have. I don't want to be an engineer like the image my parents have. I want

to do something bigger, like sell things on the Internet. (19-year-old male: university student)

I chose literature in high school, but my parents forced me into the sciences. I listened to them and chose the sciences, but I really wanted to be a teacher. But my parents said I couldn't be a teacher. Now I somewhat regret having followed my parents' choice, but I received a good education and completed a master's degree in computer science. I also got a good job abroad in Japan, so I guess it isn't so bad. Money is everything to my parents, and they say that you can earn more and the salaries are better in the hard sciences. (25-year-old male: company employee)

At a private high school in Paris that I visited in September 2006, the teacher talked about Chinese parents, saying that they forced their children to study the sciences even if their grades in those subjects were poor. If they got high grades in literature classes but poor grades in math, they could get a baccalauréat<sup>15)</sup> in literature and have a bright future, but the Chinese parents forced them to go into the sciences. If the child still chose the humanities, they would be forced to select economics, not languages, the teacher said.

Of the 21 young people I interviewed, only one young man above mentioned (25-year-old male: company employee) chose to follow a career path that his parents wanted for him instead of a career of his own liking. Regardless of the trend for Chinese parents to force their children to go into the sciences based on their beliefs, as the interviewee above stated, they were convinced that more money can be earned with a science degree, most young people did not follow their parents wishes, instead choosing a career path on their own. As the statement "I gave myself pressure" indicates, rather than being forced by the parents it can be said that the second-generation Chinese youth were encouraged in the studies that they chose themselves, which led to high academic achievement. Although interviewees held a few negative opinions of the French schooling system, such as "the teachers don't give the students close enough attention" or "time schedule is too busy", like the U.K. interviewees, they felt the system treated them fairly. This factor should not be overlooked in explaining, in part, the academic success of second-generation Chinese in both countries."

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15) A baccalauréat is an academic qualification that allows a student to go on to university, received when the student passes a standardized national exam taken at the end of secondary education.

### III Drawing a Comparison

In both the U.K. and France, second-generation Chinese demonstrate high academic achievements. In the previous section I looked at the reasons for this from the viewpoint of folk theories of success. In this section I would like to draw a comparison, both similarities and differences, between the folk theories of success in the two countries.

Let us start with, the similarities. First, in both the U.K. and France, the first generation's level of education and language ability were low and they only worked in the catering trade or as blue-collar workers. For them, success was defined by having their children get good jobs and earn money, as well as by gaining prestige in the Chinese community, which could be achieved, in their view, by their children getting good grades in school.

The success of their children affects the parents' sense of "face". If the children get good grades the parents will be proud, but bad grades are considered shameful. Parents also wanted their daughters to get good grades as much as their sons, and none of the women interviewed had been denied the opportunity to receive higher education because of their gender. That is because parents were also proud when their daughters achieved good grades.

Second, in both the U.K. and France, whether the second-generation had been forced to study or not, by virtue of being raised by parents who were proud of good grades and considered academic achievement a success, they had internalized the values of equating success with studying hard and getting good grades, and also felt that by doing so they would make their parents happy. Where their folk theories of success differ is that the parents believe that good grades are important in that they lead to a high-earning profession, whereas the second-generation does not always adhere to the parents' values in this regard, instead considering good grades as a means leading to a job they will enjoy in mainstream society.

Majority of the second-generation Chinese chose their careers on their own. They pursued subjects enjoyable to them in the formal education of mainstream society and saw this as a means for enabling them to establish a profession. When there were intergenerational differences over career choices, in most cases the parents abided by their children's wishes and respected their choices.

Further differences include that, in France, there was one case where the young adult went against his own wishes and chose a career that his parents wanted for him, while in the U.K. there were stronger feelings among the second-generation interviewees that they didn't want to work in the same trade as their parents – feelings that propelled them to pursue academic



studies. Such feelings are likely due to the fact that many of the second-generation in the U.K. had experience working in their parents' shop to help out.

In conclusion, from the above it can be observed that in the differing educational environments of the U.K. and France, the folk theory of success that Chinese immigrants formed, which gives weight to academic achievement, is by and large shared by both the first generation and the second-generation, and explains the scholastic success of second-generation Chinese in both countries. Regarding differences in the educational environments surrounding the Chinese in the U.K. and France, I have already done comparative studies of Chinese supplementary schools [Yamamoto 2007a] and formal school education [Yamamoto 2007b]. Regardless of those differences in educational environments, the folk theory of success is commonly shared. It also became clear that the folk theory of success of the first generation came into existence through living as immigrants, and the second-generation's folk theory of success was influenced by that of their parents and came into existence through the process of going through the educational system in mainstream society. Having explained school success in terms of a common folk theory of success shared by Chinese in different countries shows that school success cannot be reduced solely to values within the "Chinese" cultural background. It is possible for immigrants of any cultural background to share a common folk theory of success, and, conversely, it is also conceivable that within the same cultural background folk theories of success differ. In fact, the many children from mainland China who have come into France and the U.K. in recent years differ from second-generation Chinese, and are having maladjustment problems in school.

In other words, by explaining the high academic performance of Chinese of the same cultural background in different countries in terms of a common folk theory of success, this paper shows that adjustment or maladjustment to school cannot be solely reduced to Chinese cultural values.

### **Epilogue**

This paper is a comparative study of the high academic performance of the children of Chinese immigrants in the U.K. and France from the perspective of folk theories of success. The results showed that the Chinese immigrants in both countries shared a common folk theory of success, along with the applicability of this concept to explain academic performance. However, the survey material for this paper was based on interviews with the second-generation only, and because the first generation was not interviewed directly, there are limits to how well the

thoughts of the first generation have been grasped. For upcoming research I would like to remedy this aspect, and continue to study the Chinese community in both countries from a wider perspective. A folk theory of success is formed in the process of immigrants leading their lives in the new country, and a cultural anthropological perspective is needed that approaches the lives of immigrants in the new country holistically.

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