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Confucius or Mozart? Community Cultural Wealth and Upward Mobility Among Children of Chinese Immigrants

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Abstract Most studies of Chinese upward mobility focus on how immigrant community institutions sustain ethnic culture to foster educational success. In contrast, I analyze how community-based music schools develop a cultural strategy to guide immigrants to pursue enrollment in prestigious colleges by utilizing high cultural capital in classical music. Chinese immigrant families take advantage of information networks in these schools to develop a bonding form of social capital that allows not only middle-class families but also working-class families to redefine the meaning of ethnicity. This is theoretically surprising, because some theory predicts that middle class status is needed to benefit from such cultural capital. Through competence in Western classical music, Asian students signify their well roundedness, an achievement that goes beyond rote learning. Chinese families pursue this musical cultural strategy to incorporate themselves into mainstream educational institutions. Research on the strategic use of nonoppositional musical culture for educational mobility suggests the limitation of segmented assimilation theory.

Keywords Cultural capital · Social mobility · Chinese Americans · Immigrant community · Music education

Around 8:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning, Mr. Wu walks into the Mozart Music School with his four-year-old daughter Emily. It is the first day of the children's group music lesson. Mr. Wu grabs a newspaper on the chair, sits down, and reads. Emily nervously paces around in the lobby where her six classmates are waiting to begin class. Mr. Wu calls her over. "See! What's this word? (He points at the newspaper). Confusion runs across Emily's face. Mr. Wu says, "It is Da [大(Mandarin) big]. This is Da Xue [大學(Mandarin) college]; it means college. You will go someday." Sitting near Mr. Wu, I ask him, "What do you think about your daughter's music education?" He replies,

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"Every family around me says learning music is important for children to go to a good college."

While "Tiger Moms"[1] like Amy Chua, are committed to employing "Chinese parenting" to cultivate their children's music education, for Mr. Wu learning music is not just about cultivating a hobby or a sustaining his ethnic cultural roots. Music education is a way to acquire extra-curricular "credit" for his child's college admissions package. With the support from community music schools, Mr. Wu and other parents from a variety of class backgrounds have high expectations that musical achievement will assist their children's quest for acceptance to prestigious colleges.[2]

This study analyzes how information networks in these music schools help new immigrants navigate the routes to prestigious colleges. It describes the process by which music schools convert social and economic capital into cultural capital in the form of difficult-to-acquire classical music competence and illustrates shifts in immigrant perceptions of being Asian American through the practice of this musical cultural strategy. This empirical case explains how Western classical music competence rather than the retention of their parents' native culture becomes "Asian American" in a particular context.

This study also follows a research trend in the field of educational sociology that addresses a new approach to a community's cultural wealth. It spotlights cultural elements that originate within local communities and assist ethnic-minority groups in accessing resources in mainstream educational institutions. This approach focuses on community effects on children's educational mobility (Villalpondo and Solorzano 2005; Yosso 2005; Yosso and Garcia 2007). This particular study documents how the community's music schools form a music cultural strategy, transmitting information and providing resources pertaining to mainstream education to Chinese immigrant families.[3]

This ethnography is conducted in a classical music school that serves a predominantly Chinese community in Flushing, a neighborhood in the New York City borough of Queens. The number of classical music schools has risen in the Chinese communities of New York City: from two in 1986 to more than ten by 2010. In contrast, during the same period, only two or three schools have focused on teaching traditional Chinese music. These schools—with a curriculum steeped in Western classical music that encourage immigrant

[1] Amy Chua's memoir, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, describes how she employed tough love parenting strategies. She defines her strategies as Chinese parenting style, where parents set up clear, rigid rules and apply them consistently so that the children can master difficult-to-acquire classical music competence at a young age. Her book launched a heated debate about the strengths and weaknesses of though love strategies for child rearing.

[2] Does participation in music education improve academic performance? According to Hodges's systematic analysis of prior research (2007), evidence suggests some music experiences have a positive impact on academic performance under specific circumstances. For example, music education is related to preschoolers' phonological awareness and reading skills. The focus of my research, however, is on how parents interpret the impact of music education on their children's academic achievement.

[3] In this paper, "Chinese [華人]" refers to people of Chinese descent, including those from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other Chinese diasporas. Because Taiwanese immigrants owned most ethnic music education enterprises in Flushing in the 1980s, I use "Taiwanese-owned music schools" to distinguish this unique historical development. In the 1980s, there was a wave of Taiwanese who came to New York City as international students, high-skilled workers, or business migrants (Tseng 2000). With their relatively higher socioeconomic status, many settled in neighborhoods outside traditional immigrant destinations such as Manhattan's Chinatown (Kwong 1996). These highly skilled immigrants were not only less dependent on traditional immigrant support structures (enclaves), they often brought various resources to their newly settled communities (Zhou and Kim 2006). This study highlights the function of music schools not only as an instrument of survival for highly skilled Taiwanese immigrants but also as a resource for ethnic groups arriving in these communities.

children to learn Western classical music instead of ethnic traditional music—have harnessed music education resources from the community's social networks.

This study explores three arguments about community cultural wealth. First, the concept of community cultural wealth better explains Chinese immigrant upward social mobility than a traditional ethnic culture approach. Earlier studies of Asian Americans have overemphasized the function of supplementary educational institutions and their curriculum of Chinese language, martial arts, and fan dancing in sustaining traditional Chinese culture and values (Zhou and Kim 2006). Ethnic cultural approaches overstate the popularity of Chinese language instruction and folkloric subjects. They wrongly imply that ethnic cultural approaches imbue students with Chinese culture and values, and they mistakenly suggest that Confucian values are sufficient for Chinese success. Second, community cultural wealth perspectives expand on Bourdieu's theory that cultural capital is primarily an individual determinant inherited from the family (Bourdieu 1972, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Instead, community cultural wealth emphasizes collective agency in the creation and accumulation of cultural capital. In this study, the musical cultural strategy is established mainly in community-based music schools. These schools function as a platform/place in which parents can exchange information about their children's music education. More than network nodes, the schools create a Western classical music infrastructure through instruction, credentialing, and support for orchestras that individuals can use instrumentally in pursuit of higher education and symbolically in defining what it means to be Asian American. They enable children from a working-class background to access musical cultural capital. Third, the community cultural wealth approach corresponds with Neckerman and her colleague's (1999) elaboration of a minority culture of mobility, which contests segmented assimilation's emphasis on explaining Asian children's success as solely rooted in homeland traditions and practices (Portes and Zhou 1993). The minority culture of mobility proposes that over time upwardly mobile minorities develop new cultural elements to manage their encounter with the dominant white environment while at the same time, without being confrontational, maintain their own ethnic traits. The music cultural strategy provides an alternative perspective to understand why immigrants believe that music achievement leads to mobility within American educational institutions. It explains as well how music achievement empowers immigrant families to give their ethnicity new meanings.

Theorizing the Community Cultural Wealth Model

Ethnic Culture and Studies of the Model Minority

Explanations of Chinese immigrant educational success commonly attribute causal primacy to ethnic culture, especially Confucian culture (Siu 1992; Watkins and Biggs 1996; Wason-Ellam 2002). Other social scientists point out structural factors to modify this cultural argument. For example, Zhou mentions that the establishment of educational institutions in Chinese immigrant communities supports the maintenance of such ethno-cultural resources as Confucian values and the Chinese language (Zhou 2007; Zhou and Kim 2006). These social scientists assume community resources such as educational institutions provide mainly an Asian-centric Confucian culture, but they do not explain what valuable resources the culture provides for success in American school settings, where social distinctions are different from Chinese cultural norms.

Furthermore, attributing Chinese immigrants' educational success to the maintenance of Chinese culture is problematic because Chinese immigrant children are less likely to emulate their parents' culture than the children of other immigrant groups (Kasinitz et al. 2008).

Among immigrant groups, Chinese immigrant children are, for example, some of the least likely to understand their parents' language or maintain their parents' religious traditions (Tran 2010). What has become apparent is that the concerns of social scientists and pundits about the transmission of ethnic culture to the next generation has led to a neglect of other important forms of cultural capital provided by ethnic communities.

Class, Cultural Capital, and Educational Mobility

Bourdieu and his associates developed a concept of cultural capital that explains how the possession of high cultural capital affects educational outcomes (Bourdieu 1972, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Their work emphasizes that French public school students with high cultural capital fare better than peers who lack such valuable cultural capital. They argue that unequal access to dominant cultural codes, behaviors, and practices at home leads to the social reproduction of inequality in future generations. Cultural capital typically accrues to individuals, is transmitted via the home environment, and functions to exclude those who do not know its cultural codes.

Most empirical studies done in the United States point out that the possession of "high culture" is less important in terms of social stratification than in France. Lamont (1994) finds that when drawing the boundaries between upper-class Americans and others, social positions and moral systems take on greater importance than the possession of cultural codes. Johnston and Baumann (2009) argue that the American elite is more interested in engaging members of a variety of groups and thereby promote a more democratic approach. Digging deeper into the grooming of American elites, Khan (2012) suggests that omnivorously consuming culture and bridging various social groups to produce new forms of cultural capital are relevant to the persistence of social inequality in this global era. Khan's case study shows that prestigious private high schools channel elite adolescents to prestigious colleges by highlighting the breadth of cultural capital they possess. In a globalized world, cultural capital that bridges cultural differences trumps forms of capital that exclude on the basis of heritage.

Lareau (2011) focuses on class-based parenting styles in explaining children's chances for success in education. Middle-class parents, even though they don't possess adequate cultural resources by themselves, engage in a concerted-cultivation style of parenting in which they organize children's various cultural endeavors, activities not limited to high culture. Through active participation in cultural activities, parents establish connections to local institutions, such as schools, afterschool programs, and other families. Its counterpart is a style Lareau describes as natural growth, wherein parents leave leisure activities to children themselves. Working-class parents are unaware of and unable to activate resources in social networks focused on their children's educational achievement in the same way as middle-class parents. Prior research similarly suggests that cultural capital also provides social connections in the US educational system.

Immigrants and the Minority Culture of Mobility

Understanding how continuous streams of immigrants incorporate in America and its diverse ethnic groups has given rise to varied theories of immigrant mobility. Earlier theories of assimilation predicted that the children of immigrants would experience upward social mobility and move into the American mainstream. They would be less like their immigrant forebears and more like any number of hyphenated ethnicities (Alba and Nee 2003). Nothing that the children of post-1965 immigrants were unlikely to assimilate in such a straightline

manner, theorists suggest newcomers and succeeding generations would experience a segmented assimilation with some taking advantage of parents' store of human capital to move ahead while others more likely to see their mobility hampered by racial discrimination and diminished opportunities occasioned by a changing economy. Portes and associates (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Hao 2004; Portes et al. 2005; Portes 2008) have formalized a theory of "segmented assimilation," which states that immigrants experience a delayed or selective assimilation that relies on moral and material resources from their ethnic communities. Those resources prove useful when immigrant children face choices between mainstream, white middle-class culture and the oppositional culture of the minority underclass. Immigrant parents whose children attend public schools with poor African American students fear they will absorb an inner-city oppositional culture and resist academic efforts and dropout of schools (Gans 1992). Under these circumstances parents who stress their ethnic culture and emphasize the value of education may circumvent discrimination and define themselves as different from their less successful neighbors. Thus, the role of education looms large in explanations of immigrant success and assimilation. The studies of educational mobility explore how upwardly mobile minority groups blend culture to secure educational opportunities. However, the micro-level analysis on the educational mobility of immigrant minorities conducted in this study is lacking in most segmented assimilation theories.

Kathryn Neckerman and her colleagues (1999) have conceptualized a minority culture of mobility, a set of cultural elements that provide strategies for mobility. They expand on theories of segmented assimilation by bringing attention to minority group reactions to broader structural factors, such as economic restructuring, neighborhood context, and discrimination. They proposed a theory of various kinds of minority cultures, whose elements may be oppositional or not. Smith (2006, 2007) argues that a minority culture can promote nonoppositional strategies for educational mobility in certain local contexts. He cites examples of how affirmative action programs and community development programs benefitted groups of the black population in the post Civil Rights era (see also Perry et al. 2003; Kasinitz 2008). This historical context encouraged the minority culture of mobility in urban public schools (Conchas and Noguera 2004; Akom 2003; Gibson et al. 2004; Water 1999, 1994; Cater 2008). Smith's (2007) study also finds a group of "black" Mexican youth who prefer to hang out with upwardly mobile black peers in urban public schools and identify themselves as black. They, too, aspire to upward mobility but have chosen to do so by embracing successful black strategies for mobility.

Furthermore, the minority culture of mobility is a set of strategies that upwardly mobile minorities apply to manage their problems of interracial and inter-class relations. When middle-class African Americans enter into majority-white schools, institutions, labor markets, or neighborhoods, they need to cope with subtle forms of bias and exclusion, such as linguistic and interactional styles. In response to those situations, they work hard to signal their class status to whites. For example, they emphasize the use of Standard English (Anderson 1990). At the same time, upwardly mobile African Americans also have to manage their relationships with poor co-ethnics. When highly motivated African American students go back to their neighborhoods, they may "switch" to lower-class linguistic and interactional styles and use their familiarity with black street culture to manage encounters with their neighbors (Anderson 1990; Carter 2006). In other words, they develop flexible cultural codes to manage interracial and inter-class relationships.

Although Asian Americans are more integrated with whites than are African Americans (Massey and Denton 1993), many remain tied through jobs and residence to ethnic enclaves. The minority culture of mobility offers an option for Asian Americans who feel life in those enclaves

thwarts the expectations they have for their children. Facing subtle isolation in predominantly white contexts and having to cope with relations with their disadvantaged co-ethnics, Asian Americans may adopt the minority culture of mobility to achieve upwardly mobility.

Information Networks and the Community Cultural Wealth Approach

Community cultural wealth reflects a theoretical attempt to shift cultural-capital analyses of social mobility from an individual to a social level. In this approach, community institutions provide nodes in an information network. These nodes are spaces/platforms where participants experience a sense of membership and social integration so that families can engage in local communities (Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2003; Stanton-Salazar 2001). Such information nodes enable individuals who possess little cultural capital at home to pursue social mobility. For example, Small (2009) found that the participation of low-income parents in daycare provided them with rich information about public school options for their children. Within this information network, parents foster greater aspirations for their children's education (Gándara 1982, 1995). Utilizing community institutions, they accumulate skills to navigate the bureaucracy of urban school systems (Arrellano and Padilla 1996). These local institutions convert social and economic capital into cultural capital, which in turn facilitates efforts to enroll in high-quality, public educational institutions.

Community cultural wealth also provides a new lens through which to examine social resources in minority neighborhoods. Unlike prior scholars' focus on the lack of access to dominant cultural resources that poor minorities experience in their communities (Lewis 1966; Moynihan 1965), recent scholarship draws attention to different types of cultural resources and their role in facilitating upward mobility. Putnam's (2000) concept of bonding social capital describes the increasing number of multiethnic neighborhoods where heterogeneous groups can develop pan-ethnic or multiethnic identities. In these neighborhoods, local residents define the meaning of ethnicity through cultural activities and negotiate ethnicity in everyday life.

Lacy (2007) finds suburban, middle-class black communities develop new models of black identity through mixed cultural resources such as consumption, space, and religious participation. Families negotiate their identity, encouraging their children to participate in high cultural activities that facilitate success in suburban schools while children simultaneously engage in hip hop culture. Patillo's (2003) ethnography of black suburban living shows that aspirations for upward mobility notwithstanding, African Americans return to inner city neighborhoods to visit friends and relatives, attend church services, and take part in black social and cultural gathering. Ethnic institutions in the inner-city still function as an important place for information exchange cross class-lines.

No single pattern holds for how community cultural institutions affect the pattern of mobility among children of Chinese immigrants. Some scholars still focus on the importance of sustaining ethnic culture, in particular Chinese language schools, such as those Zhou and Kim (2006) studied in suburban California. Louie (2004) finds that children in such schools often report this experience as an isolating one. She questions whether such community institutions explain the educational achievement of Chinese students in Manhattan's Chinatown. These inconsistent findings imply that educational institutions located in different Chinese communities have contextual specificity, a discussion that is lacking in current Asian American studies. The community cultural wealth model provides a framework to explore how local institutions support the minority culture of mobility, how they aid middle-class Chinese in suburban schools and lower-class Chinese whose children attend city public schools with inner-city minorities, and how they assist immigrants as they negotiate their ethnicity.

Participant Observation in Music Schools

From October 2009 to April 2011 I carried out participant-observation fieldwork at the Mozart Music School, a Taiwanese-owned music school in Flushing, Queens. I observed interactions among parents, children, and teachers and how information was transmitted within these networks. I also became a student and took piano lessons at the school. Most of my observations were made in the school's lobby, when parents were waiting for their children to finish classes. During this period, I amassed around 1,000 pages of field notes. I collected documents, curricula, flyers for music exams and student music concerts, print ads, and Chinese-language newspaper articles to contextualize the music education network that families enter when enrolling a child.

In addition, I conducted 38 interviews with parents whose children were enrolled in the music schools, transcribing the interviews and then translating them into English. Most of the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, but occasionally I used English. The interviews generally lasted 20–30 minutes, though some were longer. I occasionally chatted with these families during my observations. I asked interviewees about participation in Chinese cultural activities and educational institutions, individual demographics, immigrant histories, and individual cultural capital.

The Setting: A Music School in Flushing

The Mozart Music School, founded in 1986, was the first Taiwanese-owned music school in New York City. Mrs. Wang and her husband owned the business. She had received a family music education business in her homeland, had studied piano for many years, and tutored students privately. Her husband had been a piano tuner. After a few years working part-time jobs, the couple launched a music school, a store importing musical instruments from Asia, and a bookstore specializing in music books to serve the needs of local families.

Over the next 20 years, the school expanded. In 1986, there were three classrooms providing lessons on weekends in downtown Flushing. By 2010, the music school had expanded considerably. The school now occupies two locations: one in Flushing and the other in Brooklyn. The main branch in downtown Flushing moved to a larger facility with over 20 classrooms. Teachers who had taught at the school opened competing music schools in neighborhoods such as Flushing, Elmhurst, and Forest Hills, all neighborhoods with a high percentage of Chinese immigrant families. Keeping instruction affordable is an important ingredient of the school's success. The Mozart school charges less for private instrument instruction than do mainstream music schools such as the Brooklyn-Queens Conservatory of Music (BQCM) ($25 versus $48 for 30-minute lessons in 2013).

Parents: Occupations, Immigrant Trajectories, and Residences

I interviewed 38 parents whose K-12 children were attending the Mozart Music School. Although the majority of the parents were of Chinese heritage, they had diverse backgrounds, immigration trajectories, and residential locations. The occupations of the parents fell into categories representative of the ethnic economy. Some of the parents had employment-niche jobs (Logan et al. 2003), working as computer software engineers, computer programmers, accountants, or bank employees. Some parents were entrepreneurs in the ethnic economy: owners of gift shops, ethnic supermarkets, travel agencies, real estate

brokerages, or beauty salons. Other parents held down working-class jobs in the ethnic economy, such as restaurant workers, cabdrivers, and in the mainstream economy, such as post office workers. Among the Mozart School parents, about 40 % have post-graduate degrees. About 52 % graduated from college, and 8 % finished schooling with high school degrees from their home countries. Census data for the New York-New Jersey area indicate that 40 % of Chinese immigrants do not have high school diplomas. The educational attainment of Chinese immigrants in Mozart includes the two poles. On one end, there is a group of Chinese immigrants from peasant backgrounds, and on the other, there are Chinese immigrants with advanced degrees.

The Communities and Chinese Supplementary Educational Institutions

The Mozart Music School is located in Flushing, where one of New York City's largest communities of Chinese immigrants resides. In general, the socio-economic status of Asian residents in Flushing is higher than the corresponding status of residents in other Chinese communities in New York City. According to the 2005–2009 American Community Survey, the median household income of Asian residents, (the majority of whom are Chinese) in two communities, Manhattan's Chinatown ($21,071) and Sunset Park in Brooklyn ($43,147), is lower than that of Asians citywide ($53,173). The median annual household income of Asians in Flushing/Whitestone is $60,274.

Educational services have traditionally been an important resource in Chinese communities. Unlike older types of educational institutions, such as Chinese-language schools, whose goals have been to maintain cultural heritage and which have usually been run as non-profits, most new types of supplementary educational institutions are for profit and are primarily concerned with helping parents navigate the public school system (Louie 2004). Supplementary educational services, including those institutions offering childcare services and various types of afterschool programs, have become important among ethnic-enclave businesses in New York City's Chinese communities. Table 1 presents an analysis of educational institutions catering mainly to people of Chinese heritage. These supplementary educational institutions are heavily concentrated in Flushing. Of the 246 ethnic supplementary educational institutions in New York City, 156 are located in Flushing. Moreover, in Queens, 90 supplementary educational programs provide academic services and 38 provide extra-curricular activities, while programs that concentrate on Chinese traditional culture account for the smallest numbers of institutions. The supplementary institutions are comprehensive, offering not only strategies for children's academic performance but also extra-curricular activities. Western classical music schools are the most popular among various types of extra-curricular activities.

A Musical Cultural Strategy for Educational Mobility: When Confucius Meets Mozart

Immigrant families in New York City confront a system in which elite colleges admit students by weighing the varied, ambiguous, and amorphous attributes of "character and well-roundedness," rather than academic performance alone (Karabel 2005, 177; Khan 2012). Coming from countries where standardized exams are the sole screening mechanism for entrance into higher education, Chinese immigrant families are unfamiliar with the role that children's extra-curricular activities play in elite college admissions. This is where Mozart comes into play.

Table 1 The numbers of ethnic-supplementary educational institutions in Chinese communities in New York City*

	Queens (Flushing)	Manhattan	Brooklyn	Total
Total	156	48	42	246
Academic activities				136
Preparatory school/tutoring[1]	34 (23)	13	11	58
Preschool/Day care[2]	37 (23)	7	9	53
ESL/ESOL	19 (16)	5	1	25
Extra-curricular activities				64
Western classical Music school	15 (11)	3	5	23
Dancing[3]	8	8	3	19
Art	11 (6)	2	4	17
Swimming	4	1	0	5
Chinese traditional culture				46
Chinese	17 (11)	3	7	27
Martial arts	9 (7)	6	2	17
Traditional music	2	0	0	2

*Author's compilation from the 2009 Chinese Yellow Pages and 2009–2010 Chinese Business Directory

[1] Preparatory schools include preparation for SATs and the New York City Specialized High School Admission Test (SHSAT), which is the entrance exam required for acceptance into one of the NYC selective high schools

[2] Many preschools and daycare centers prepare students for NYC public schools

[3] Most dancing schools offer ballet or ballroom lessons. A small number of schools offer one or two classes in traditional Chinese dance

The Adoption of the British Music Credential Program

The Mozart Music School spends about six thousand dollars annually on advertisements in the Chinese community newspaper *World Journal*. These advertisements, rather than just touting the importance of music education for child development, frequently convey the message that music education is a promising cultural investment and a practical strategy for college admissions. This connection is wrapped nicely around a narrative of successful music students. According to one advertisement in the newspaper:

> Since the school opened its doors in the 1980s, we have helped many students pass the Royal Music exam [exams of the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music, ABRSM exams][4]…Our music school suggests that parents need to pay attention to children's extra-curricular activities; otherwise, their children might miss out on openings at good schools simply because these children lack adequate extra-curricular accomplishments. Here is a pertinent story: a student who had passed the eighth level of the Royal Music exam was accepted into a prestigious college, which—to promote her ongoing involvement with music—offered her a piano on which to practice. (advertisement, World Journal, 1991, 20)

[4] In the 1990s, the Mozart School became a local affiliate for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). The local affiliate advertises ABRSM exams in area newspapers, registers exam takers, and offers exam-taking sites. Over the years, the number of students taking the ABRSM exams in the New York metropolitan area increased markedly—from 50 students annually in the mid-1980s, to almost a thousand students by 2010.

Ethnic media, such as *World Journal,* allow immigrants to share information about children's education in the new land. Of the 38 parents I interviewed, 15 told me that they knew the Mozart school from *World Journal.* The rest learned about the school from relatives, neighbors, or friends at work. When I asked why they bring their children to this music school, 25 of the 38 parents I interviewed stated that cultivating their children's interest in music was important. Yet, my observations from attending the school for several years and from interviews with Mrs. Wang, who complained about unceasing phone calls from parents a few days before the results of the music exam were released, suggests that parents were as concerned with credentials as much as cultivating interest. One music teacher, Miss Yun, once shared with me the frustrations she felt as an educator. Though she wants to inspire children's love of music she said,

> Most Chinese parents have asked me about the music exam [ABRSM exams] after their children have taken piano lessons about a year or even less. Some parents also ask about the possibility of skipping the beginning level of music-exam preparation and taking the more advanced level of the exam. The preparation of music exams constantly overrides the ideal of cultivating children's music interests.

For most young children, passing the music exam requires painstaking work. Thus, learning music could become a great pressure for children as they prepare for the test.

When Mrs. Wang explained why she established the connection to the British music credential program as opposed to other programs she maked the point that, "the Royal Music Exam is globally recognized. American educational institutions take it more seriously than the Yamaha exam".[5] She also brings to light the difficulty of obtaining cultural capital for families who lack formal education or other resources.

> Acquiring music competence takes more than 5 years on average … It is a long journey. Parents [usually don't have musical skills and] also need guidance to help their children. Especially parents from peasant villages in southern China who are not so well off economically. The results of children's scores and a promising reward can insure their investment on children's music education.

The music school embraced British music credential program and, when facing the process of ambiguous and uncertain college admissions, these families hope this European credential can signify their children's cultural competence. For immigrant Chinese families without abundant resources, obtaining the British music credential rarely comes with ease.

The Hierarchy of Educational Institutions

Parents of long-term students at the Mozart school promote the importance of music education. The stories they tell deliver information about the ranking of US higher educational institutions. Mrs. Hsieh's story is typical. Every Saturday morning, she and her husband bring their two daughters from New Jersey to Flushing. When I asked her whether learning music was important for children's education, Mrs. Hsieh displayed an unusually aggrieved look on her face, a look inconsistent with her elegant manners, always sitting properly, quietly reading, and waiting patiently for her daughters. Reflecting on her own life—moving to Flushing with her family in the 1980s and having two much younger sisters who were well-known music achievers in the community—she couldn't overemphasize how important music education is for children's education in the United States.

[5] Yamaha is a Japanese corporation offering music-related products and services. Its music schools have a more than 50-year history in East Asia. These schools offer music education with a standardized curriculum and exams.

> When my family moved to Seattle…I had to give up my piano lessons. There were huge disadvantages in this…As a result, I only went to Queens College [CUNY]. However, my younger sisters went to better destinations. One went to NYU and the other went to MIT.

Only "failures" attend CUNY; high achievers enroll in prestigious colleges.[6] This knowledge of hierarchy of college rankings is commonly circulated in Chinese communities. In Chinese parents' minds, music education is crucial to reaching the top of the educational hierarchy. In particular, Mrs. Hsieh mentioned that one of her sisters enrolled in the New York Youth Orchestra. She explained, "I've always believed that her outstanding achievements in playing the violin helped her gain admittance to MIT." After years of urging their children to earn music credentials, many parents learned a credential is but a starting point. According to Mrs. Hsieh, music credentials are not enough; only winning a seat in a prestigious orchestra helps in college admissions. With her students achieving higher levels of skill, Mrs. Chen prefers hiring graduate student instructors from the city's prestigious conservatories: Julliard School, Manhattan School of Music, or Mannes College-The New School for Music. She regards these tutors as better suited for assisting children for pre-college program entrance exams for these conservatories. She has also established ties to local children's orchestras in Chinese communities, the Youth Orchestra, Chinese Youth Corps of New York (CYCNY), the Children's Orchestra Society, and pre-college programs in the city's prestigious conservatories.[7] Efforts to increase accomplishments in music may have diminishing returns, however. Khan (2012) finds that once a credential becomes widespread among college applicants its value as a sign of distinction declines. As a result a process of credential ratcheting ensues.

Bowling Together: Bonding Social Capital in a Class-mixed Community

In the Mozart Music School, the class status of parents is mixed. Immigrant families from different class backgrounds share the same space. As the previous section illustrated, a musical cultural strategy is developed in the Mozart Music School among the highly-educated parents of long-term students and the owner. In this section, I further detail how the strategy of mobility through music is shared with immigrants from a broader background. Mario Luis Small (2009) notes community organizations play broker roles to develop ties between institutions and individuals. When community residents from various class or ethnic backgrounds come together they can take advantage of bonding of social capital to promote social mobility within the communities (Putnam 2000).

Unanticipated Gains and Cross-class Social Ties

In the Mozart Music School, not all working-class parents befriend their middle-class counterparts. Nonetheless, working-class parents are privy to the conversations other parents

[6] As a researcher from CUNY, I was not surprised by Mrs. Hsieh's statements. When I introduce myself to Chinese immigrant families, they are always disappointed. I need to make an effort to convince them that I am capable of conducting research.

[7] On May 22, 2010, the Youth Orchestra, CYCNY, held a concert in conjunction with the Taiwan Center and the Taiwanese Association at Carnegie Hall (reference from http://www.youthorchestra.com/).

have, and they learn through these networks about British music credentials and how music education relates to children's college admissions.

The first time I met Mr. Fang, he was sitting in the corner listening to Mrs. Hsieh and me chatting. After Mrs. Hsieh talked about the importance of music education for enrolling at a prestigious college, Mr. Fang stood up and walked to the owner, Mrs. Chen, and asked the price of a second hand piano and how long it takes to pass all eight music-level exams. When Mr. Fang walked back, I asked him why he brings his daughter to Mozart.

> My daughter asked to learn music. Her friends in school are learning [piano]… Paying tuition for music lessons and buying a piano is a lot of money for me. I will let her try a few lessons and buy practicing time at the music school first. I told her I don't know music. If she wants to have a piano, she has to study harder by herself… One of my neighbors hired a music tutor for their daughter. But, the daughter didn't like it and locked the teachers out of the house. There is no reason to waste money like that.

Mr. Fang's experience illustrates the importance of local institutional support for his daughter's music education. Mr. Fang is from Fuzhou, a town in southeast China, from where many peasants migrate. After more than 15 years working as a cook in Chinese restaurants, he moved away from East Broadway in Manhattan and brought his extended family to live together in the Fresh Meadows area near Flushing. Chinese immigrant families, even working-class families like Mr. Fang's, share information and experiences about afterschool music education. Mr. Fang quickly learned about music credentials and how music related to his daughter's academic performance, information he could not have been expect to know before his daughter enrolled at the Mozart Music School. Mr. Fang felt uneasy interacting with parents in the beginning, but while sitting in the school lobby he soaked up details of music education and children's academic learning. After four weeks of trial lessons, he purchased his daughter a $3,000 second-hand piano. That summer, she attended weekly lessons and progressed quickly. His experience echoes Small's (2009) finding that working-class parents who participate in community institutions have greater access to child-relevant information, an unanticipated gain for parents.

Mentorship and Strong Ties

The incorporation of music credentialing into schools ties families to the schools since the learning and testing process usually takes more than five years. It is a long journey learning classical sonatas and concertos, but along with musical expertise come social ties between teachers and parents, parents and parents, and students and teachers. Louie's research (2004) stresses the resources advantaged upper-middle-class Chinese bring to education. Working-class parents, including those in the Mozart School, cannot provide the same resources of time and musical knowledge or emotional support as their upper-middle-class counterparts. Consequently, students from working-class families are more likely to start music lessons late. Without as much parental support, student ties with teachers are crucial for learning.

Music teachers played an important role in David's music education. I met David on the ABRSM examination day. His parents worked for a travel agency and were busy at their jobs. Even on the exam day, his parents were unable to accompany him. Usually, his grandmother brought David, his sister, and their cousins for music lessons, but she could not that day so David's uncle called off from work and brought him and David's sister to the exam at the Mozart Music School. The uncle said,

> Without his parents at home, David sets up his piano practice schedule by himself… We know nothing about music… David tries by himself and needs to rely on himself to figure out how to play… Mostly, when he has difficulties, he asks teachers in the music school and practices again and again at home.

David, in his sophomore year at New York City's elite Stuyvesant High School, took the highest level of music credential. Before the exam, he practiced piano for an hour and a half every day and continued this practice for about four months. David's tie to his teacher motivated him to learn. He told me, "The teacher I have now is amazing. I intend to stick with her 'till I get to college… Before, the teacher I had was not that good. I went to another school. But I quit because the teacher there had a bad temper."

To obtain the music credentials, students have to adhere to a structure of long-term music learning and practice. This structured learning requirement corresponds to the development of social ties between teachers and students. In David's case, his teacher's positive mentorship made up for his parents' lack of cultural knowledge of classical music and encouraged him to work for a long time to obtain his music credential. According to Stanton-Salazar (2001), for working-class immigrant youth, mentorship in afterschool programs provides a crucial influence on educational achievement.

Redefining Ethnicity: Western Classical Music Goes Asian American

Is learning Western Classical music related to Asian ethnicity? Recently, news of Tiger Moms and Chinese mothering styles has brought attention to music education. Amy Chua used her daughter's mastery of the piano and Western Classical music as an opportunity to explain this mothering style is in her book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. In the book, Chua recalls a conversation she had with her daughter: "Remember, LuLu, you're only six. Sophia won her first Performance Prize when she was nine. I think you can win it earlier" (Chua 2011, 43–4). This mothering style includes deploying strict discipline at an early age and inculcating hard-to-accomplish goals in children. Chua regards this strict mothering style as part of her Chinese identity. She contrasts it to her American husband's parenting style, which she regards as emphasizing fun during childhood.

Chua mixes her upper-class identity with her Chinese identities. Her claim to the Chinese parenting style associated with music education is rooted in her upper-class family heritage, an individualistic experience of having been raised by a Berkeley professor. Her parenting style is not solely the result of discipline and patience. Her considerable accumulation of cultural capital allows her to choose music teachers, help her children master skills for music performance, present their individualities, and engage them in educational advantages.

Unlike Tiger Mom stories, the music cultural strategy in the Mozart School is a collective strategy that reflects local community contexts. The Mozart owners and parents of long-term students deploy British music credentials to signify class status with the hope that they will assist in elite college admissions. The music school located in a mixed-class community with strong ethnic ties is open to working-class children so that they, too, can cultivate educational advantage via a code of high culture. In this particular community context, the music strategy is not simply the acquisition of high culture. It also has an ethnic component meant to circumvent cultural distinctions. It is a minority culture of mobility—a set of nonoppositional cultural elements—that helps families manage their inter-class and interracial relationships.

An Asian Minority Culture of Mobility: The Game of High Achievers

Many parents expect their children who are learning music to be seen as well-rounded students. This is particularly true of parents whose children attend the city's special schools or programs. Among the 38 parents I interviewed, 20 families had children who attended the city's special programs. For children surrounded by highly motivated achievers, academic success is a basic requirement everyone has met. They need other characteristics to make their children outstanding. This quest to be the best is particularly called for when children start attending select high schools. After Mr. Chen's son Harrison enrolled in Stuyvesant High School, he fell behind. Chen's family has lived in a neighborhood next to downtown Flushing for more than 20 years; going to school in Manhattan was a big transition for Harrison. Mr. Chen expressed his concern:

> He got help [to get into Stuyvesant] mostly from the after-school program of MECA [a program to prepare students for the Specialized High School Admissions Tests]. He was taught to practice testing skills again and again. This was how he got a high score. However, he has a hard time in school now…I've tried to encourage him to take interest in new things… I am really worried about him. His way of learning seems inflexible… [He's not like] my friend's son [Jackson], who is a child with broad interests and keen musical skills.

After sending their children to test prep classes parents worry that managing high school life surrounded by city's high achievers will prove difficult for their children. Mr. Huang and Mr. Chen are friends and both work as computer programmers. Their friendship dates back to when they went to the same college in China 25 years ago. Their children, Harrison and Jackson are good friends, too. The two have quite different high school lives, though. Mr. Huang explains Jackson's smooth transition to high school.

> Musical talent in some ways helps my son's learning in high school. My son was selected to provide piano accompaniment for the school chorus… This experience helped him build up confidence so that when he starts his new life in his high school it gives off a positive effect on his academic learning.

Jackson successfully avoided the label of bookworm, a stereotype that hard-working Asian students frequently have to bear. Having a difficult-to-acquire music talent helped him stand out among a group of high achievers.

Mr. Chen and Mr. Huang's stories partially correspond to segmented assimilation theory. They suggest that by attending ethnic institutions immigrant families retain stronger ties to each other. In particular, Mr. Huang explains that he could only afford to rent an apartment in Jackson Heights, Queens, where local schools offered students few supports. When Jackson was in preschool, Mr. Huang feared Jackson might fall into the lower performing range in the class, where students were less successful in academic pursuits and received less support for extra curricula activities. To compensate for the local schools, he insured that his son participated in different afterschool programs in the Chinese community. Mr. Huang brought Jackson to music school when he was at age four. Later on, he also scheduled swimming, tennis, and test preparation schools.

At the same time, their transition from local junior high school to elite high school supports Neckerman's argument on segmented assimilation theory. Over time, when upwardly mobile minority groups access mainstream education, the minority groups usually develop strategies to manage their new environments. In David's junior year at Stuyvesant, he still spent at least an hour every day for about three months preparing for the ABRSMs.

Before his music credential exam, he remarked, "Of course I want to pass the music exam. It will be great to add a line in the extra curricula column to show I am not one dimensional." Children in high school are already aware of the negative stereotype that Asian high achievers know only how to cram. They fear the stereotype will hinder their opportunities to gain admission to elite colleges. Many Asian students try to balance the negative stereotypes attributed to Asian students by obtaining difficult-to-acquire music competence, which they hope will signify their well-rounded characteristics.

Advantage Creating: My Children Can't Play Baseball But They Play Music

Since music resources have been accumulation in the community for years, many families have begun to regard music as an advantage-creating strategy, many families begin to regard music as an advantage-creating strategy. Stories like Mrs. Lai's circulate and show how music helps Asian parents who live in white-majority suburbs signify their class cultural code but also avoid simply being regarded as conforming to white, middle-class culture. Mrs. Lai, a mother with three school-age children, told me about her experiences in raising her children's early music education. After Mrs. Lai graduated from a master's program in computer science, she got married and became a stay-at-home mother in Long Island.[8] Like many stay-at-home mothers in Long Island, Mrs. Lai stays in touch with other parents and teachers in her children's schools, engages in most of her children's school activities, and assists her children with school work. Raising children in an environment where Asians are not the majority, she is aware of the role ethnicity plays in her children's education. Mrs. Lai thinks that choosing music is as an advantage-creating strategy.

> Children in the Asian families around me learned to play piano or violin when they were young. My children learned when they were young [her son learned at the age of four; the two daughters started lessons at six], and this means that their music-performance abilities are much more advanced than their classmates… So, although my children can't play baseball as well as their classmates, they can say to themselves, "I can play music. It is fine that I can't play baseball. I still have my piano."

She chose to accumulate knowledge about Western classical music. When her daughter, Christina, was in junior high school, she scheduled regional music competitions for her. The successful experiences made her consider Western classical music to be an Asian matter, more so than sports.

Christina, David, Harrison, and Jackson use a music cultural strategy to negotiate the negative stereotypes that Asian students face and that hinder their educational mobility. With support from local music schools, Chinese students in the city's selective high schools seek to avoid being seen as one-dimensional. Embracing music achievement suburban families eschew totally identifying with white, middle-class values and norms. While Amy Chua touts a Chinese parenting style, which she sees as an ethnic, cultural root to Chinese children's musical success, this article provides a different perspective to explain how classical music becomes Asian American. For Chinese immigrants, difficult-to-acquire music competence is part of a minority culture of mobility. Western classical music signifies

[8] Many well-off Asian parents decide to move to the suburbs to avoid the city's public schools. New York's average public schools are not of particularly high quality, and admission to its specialized schools is highly competitive.

characteristics of well roundedness and replaces the negative stereotypes of Chinese students as unimaginative rote learners.

The Mozart School tells parents how important their role is in early music education, and that parents should instill patience and discipline in their children. This parenting style, however, demands resources, such as time and knowledge. This style is also one means by which children can acquire the cultural capital associated with classical music training. The music strategy, however, is not simply a cultural code; it is also a negotiation strategy by which families are able to redefine the meaning of their ethnicity to incorporate successfully in the educational system. In other words, the significant goal of the music strategy is to gain new characteristics of well roundedness rather than maintaining traditional ethnic traits.

The Magic and Limitations of the Musical Cultural Strategy

The image of Asian music achievers complicates popular theories about model minorities by showing that Confucian culture is not the sole causal factor in explaining educational mobility. This popular theory downplays the importance of dominant forms of cultural capital in promoting social mobility. Cultivating the children of Chinese immigrants to be sophisticated practitioners of Western classical music is also a strategy for channeling them toward academic success. This channeling, though, relies on community institutions and collective action. In this study I applied a community cultural wealth approach to detail the contextual specificity that the cultural strategy entails in the Chinese community of Flushing, New York. By applying this approach I show how the image of Asian music achievers is developed and delivered through information networks, whose nexus is located in Taiwanese-owned Western classical music schools. My ethnographic research illustrates how information networks in community-based institutions produce a musical cultural strategy from social and economic capital and subtly change of the meaning of Asian ethnicity.

The community cultural wealth model shows that although music cultural capital is brought by highly educated immigrants from the homeland, the formation of a musical cultural strategy, in particular, for children's educational mobility is constructed in local communities. Within information networks, stories of successful music students hold a place of pride, circulating among established and new immigrants. Owners of music schools strategically wrap these stories into a seamless narrative that points to the collateral rewards—admission to and success at prestigious educational institutions—of a devoted course of classical music study. The local music schools operate as bridge institutions that provide instruction and well regarded credentials. In addition, they provide practical knowledge about how to navigate the city's elite public education institutions and extra-curricular opportunities; for example special high school programs and community orchestras.

The community music schools provide their services across class boundaries. Children from working-class families can also access musical cultural capital through the conversion of social capital acquired at the music schools. This finding challenges Bourdieu and his associates' argument that cultural capital is inherited at home. Music schools establish bonding social capital among immigrant families from varied class backgrounds. The schools inspire hope and encourage parental investment in their children's music education regardless of any previous exposure to classical music. Mentorship provided from teachers in music schools enables children whose new immigrant parents work long hours to obtain music cultural capital for their children.

In detailing the messages that the schools' information networks circulate, this research traces the subtle changes of meaning that ethnicity has taken on for Chinese immigrants.

While segmented assimilation assumes ethnic culture is firmly maintained among immigrants to cope with inner-city environments, my data show an evolution of ethnic components in a local context. Over time the music owners and parents of long-term students develop a nonoppositional musical cultural strategy to assist children in managing their encounter with vague elite college admissions. Significantly, these are working-class Chinese youth who learn these upper-middle-class cultural norms via their immersion in classical music. Chinese immigrants painstakingly practice the high culture of classical music to become successful students in the model taught in these music schools. They also differentiate themselves from the negative stereotypes of Asian students as bookworms and rote learners. By representing music achievement and embracing positive characteristics, such as well roundedness, families are able to redefine the meaning of their ethnicity. They also improve their human capital through much discipline and hard work. This research is an attempt to chart a nonoppositional strategy for working-class and middle-class immigrants to incorporate into mainstream society. This musical cultural strategy explains the flexibility of ethnicity and the complex causality of merging images of Asian music achievers and their academic success. It is neither a purposeful rejection nor retention of parental culture but the use of ethnicity to adapt to a subculture that offers keys to academic success in the United States.

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