What Strategies Do Chinese Immigrant Parents Use to Send Their Children to High-Performing Public School Districts?

Senfeng Liang

Abstract

This qualitative study examines how Chinese immigrant parents perceive the importance of sending their children to a "good" school district and analyzes their strategies in doing so. Nine families from different economic and educational backgrounds participated in the study. Results show that some parents were not satisfied with children's previous schools and decided to move to higher performing school districts. Parents had different levels of economic preparation and thus used different strategies to achieve their goal. Higher income families chose to purchase homes in "good" school districts. In order to live in a "good" school district, lower income families' strategies included: purchasing a house and renting out a bedroom to reduce the economic burden, renting an affordable apartment, and living with relatives or friends. This study contributes to a better understanding of factors contributing to Chinese American students' educational experiences.

Key Words: Chinese immigrant parents, district quality, public school choice, housing, family perceptions, home selection strategies, neighborhood, income

Introduction

Studies suggest that family income matters for students' education, but it is not always clear in what ways family income matters (Davis-Kean, 2005;

Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). One way family income influences students' education is the family's practices of selecting a neighborhood (and related school district) in which to live. As most U.S. students attend their zoned public school, neighborhood and the quality of schools can deeply influence students' education (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2012). In zoned public school districts, the home address of a student determines which schools the student will attend, and students are not allowed to attend schools that do not belong to the corresponding zones. For students who attend zoned public schools, it is critical for their families to choose a high-performing school district if parents want their children to excel. In fact, some scholars (Gardner, 2001; Parker, 2012) even find that students' zip codes can largely predict their probability of going to college.

People may expect that parents who send their children to public schools usually wish to send their children to the best school district and to have them attend the best public schools. However, the quality of public schools is often positively associated with the living expense (especially housing) in that area. Thus, not every family can afford to live in a district with excellent public schools. Moreover, not all parents have the knowledge and resources to choose high-performing schools.

Many Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity, choose their housing based on school district, but they may be limited by their income and available budget. It is common that families with different income levels reside in school districts with large variations in quality. Researchers find that middle-class families usually choose to live in affluent neighborhoods, and thus their children attend public schools of better quality and have higher educational attainment (Rosenbaum, DeLuca, & Tuck, 2005). In contrast, poor families are often found to be trapped in poor neighborhoods, and their children receive lower quality education in their zoned public schools (South & Crowder, 1997).

In 2013, for children under the age of 18 in the United States, 25% lived with at least one immigrant parent (Zong & Batalova, 2015). Little is known about how immigrant families with various income levels and different educational attainment deal with many challenges (e.g., finance, language, culture, knowledge of the school system), especially related to children's education, such as families' intentions to move to "good" school districts and attend "good" schools. Despite the large number of children of immigrant families in U.S. schools, there are relatively few studies involving immigrant families' school choices (Sattin-Bajaj, 2011). Thus, it is meaningful to examine immigrant families' school choice strategies, which are largely determined by their home selection strategies. This study will illustrate how nine Chinese immigrant families with diverse incomes attempted to live in "good" school districts.

Types of Chinese Immigrant Families

This study will focus on Chinese immigrant families, because compared to other Asian American groups, Chinese American is the largest group and has the longest history in the United States (Siu, 1992b). Much of the relevant literature has suggested that the Chinese American population is characterized by a bimodal pattern consisting of a highly educated middle class and a less educated working class (Li, 2005; Louie, 2004; Siu, 1992a; Yin, 2007). However, little attention has been paid to the families that fit in between these two categories. In this study, besides the two widely known types of families, two additional types of families were included: small business families, and transitional professional families.

I categorize the families into two larger types: lower income families and higher income families. *Lower income families* include two types of families. One type is *working families*, in which family members are employed in non-intellectual sectors of the economy, such as in garment factories or as cooks or waitresses in Chinese restaurants (Louie, 2004; Siu, 1992a). They often work long hours, have relatively lower incomes and thus may not be able to afford to own a home, and have relatively lower educational attainment. Parents in this group have usually received the educational equivalent to high school completion or less. Weinberg (1997) has argued that children from these families are not high achievers.

The second type comprising lower income families is *transitional professional families,* adapted from Weinberg's "down" class (1997) and Louie's (2001) downward mobility families. These Chinese immigrants work as professionals in the U.S. However, they are usually not permanent residents or U.S. citizens, or they have received their green cards recently. Some of them may have had prestigious positions before immigration, but because of various difficulties such as restrictions of U.S. immigration law or language barriers, it is difficult for both parents to be able to work in their previous careers. Typically, only one parent works (holding an H1B visa and in a different career than before immigration) while the other spouse is unemployed; as a result, their family income is relatively low, and they cannot afford to purchase a home that meets their standards and expectations. They are usually highly educated, and some of them may have recently graduated from American institutions of higher learning.

Higher income families include two types of families. The first type is *small business families.* These families run small businesses, usually restaurants (in particular, Asian or Chinese restaurants). In research, this group of families is often treated as similar to working families. However, this group is different since small business families usually have higher incomes and can afford to own

their own homes. This type of family is more prevalent than generally believed. Like working families, they have lower levels of educational attainment, often no more than middle school. These families tend to be well connected with other Chinese immigrants with similar backgrounds. Little research has been done to differentiate between small business families and working families. In studies, these two types of families are often combined to compose one of the "bimodal model" types in Chinese American society (Yin, 2007). Consequently, how their different degrees of economic capital influence their children's education is largely unexplored.

The second type of higher income families, *settled professional families*, are usually U.S. citizens or permanent residents who have held that status for relatively long periods of time; they came to the U.S. earlier than transitional professional families. While they have an education level similar to the transitional professional families, settled professional families have comparatively much higher incomes and can afford large homes in school districts with higher academic achievement. Some researchers believe it is from the children of settled professional families that Chinese Americans have obtained the reputation of being a "model minority" (Weinberg, 1997).

Chinese American Students' Education

Studies indicate that Asian American (including Chinese American) students, on average, perform at higher levels than other populations in subjects such as mathematics (Aldous, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Whang & Hancock, 1994). For example, National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011) results show that Asian American eighth graders, on average, perform higher in mathematics than other racial or ethnic groups.

There are many theories to explain Chinese American students' outstanding performance. For example, Siu (1992a) analyzes how Chinese cultural values and Confucianism emphasize education and claims that Chinese Americans tend to define their cultural identity in terms of academic achievement. Zhou and her colleagues (Zhou, 2007; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Zhou & Li, 2003) find that Chinese Americans take advantage of Chinese language schools and other afterschool programs because these schools directly support students' education (not only in the Chinese language but also in other subjects) and serve as useful networks for Chinese American social activities.

Researchers have found that parental involvement (Li, 2006; Muller, 1995; Pan, Gauvain, Liu, & Cheng, 2006; Yan & Lin, 2005) together with other closely related factors contribute to Asian American (including Chinese American) students' success in education. These include effort and hard work (Chen

& Stevenson, 1995; Hess, Chang, & McDevitt, 1987); high standards and expectations from parents, students, and peers (Aldous, 2006; Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Yao, 1985); parents' and students' attitudes and actions (Fejgin, 1995); and a culture that supports and respects education (Diamond, Wang, & Gomez, 2006; Kao, 1995).

Research Question

Studies show that parental involvement is important for Chinese American students' educational achievement, but these studies usually focus on abstract concepts such as the high value placed on education, high expectations for students, and Chinese culture. On the other hand, Chinese American parents' actual practices in supporting their children's education largely remain unexplored; that is, what they do to support their children is unclear. Specifically, how Chinese American parents locate and relocate in order to choose school districts (and therefore the related zoned schools) seems to receive little attention from researchers. As living in high-performing school districts usually requires a high cost of living, how Chinese immigrant families with diverse income levels (higher income families and lower income families) attempt to live in good school districts is the central topic of this study. The research question addressed in this study is: What strategies do Chinese immigrant parents implement in order for their children to attend good public schools?

Methods

Context and Subjects

The study was conducted in a metropolitan area in the eastern United States. I started by enrolling families with children attending the Future Chinese School (Note: this is a pseudonym, as are all names of people, towns, and counties). The school was originally founded in the early 1990s by the Chinese Students and Scholars Association of an American institution; it now provides various courses to mainly Chinese American students. Besides teaching Chinese language, other courses include arts (dancing, chorus, orchestra), sports (basketball, volleyball, badminton, tennis, martial arts, swimming), and academic subjects such as SAT test preparation (reading, writing, mathematics). Future Chinese School classes are all offered on weekends and are not part of the public education system. All teachers and staff are volunteers. Future Chinese School is one of the most popular Chinese language schools for Chinese immigrant families in this area. At the time when I was recruiting participants, Future Chinese School had more than 4,000 students enrolled across all of its campuses.

Families with children attending one campus of the Future Chinese School were the main source of participants. However, in order to enroll enough participants with diverse backgrounds, I also attempted to enroll families through other channels, such as snowball sampling, ties to the broader Chinese ethnic community, and Chinese Christian churches. A total of nine families were enrolled in the study. Each family had one participant child and one or two participant parents. Table 1 and Table 2 show a summary of family demographic information for lower income families and higher income families, respectively. Each row represents a family's information. For example, the first row in Table 2 indicates that a parent named Cindy is a restaurant manager, she has a middle school education, and she immigrated to the U.S. 17 years ago. Her daughter, Alice, is an 11th grader who was born in the United States.

Table 1. Subject Demographic Information of Lower Income Families

Parent Information				Student Information		
Name	Occupation	Education	Years in U.S.	Name	Grade	Immigration status
Abby	Photo store worker, Waitress (part time)	Middle school	20	Kitty	9th	U.S. born
Hai	Restaurant cook	Middle school	5	Xueliang	11th	Arrived U.S. at age 12
Maggie	Accountant	Master's	8	Zanmin	8th	Arrived U.S. at age 5
Xuehua	Housewife	MBA	10	Devin	2nd	U.S. born
Fan; Li	Househusband Counselor	Bachelor's Master's	5 5	Tony	2nd	Arrived U.S. at age 4

Table 2. Subject Demographic Information of Higher Income Families

Parent Information				Student Information		
Name	Occupation	Education	Years in U.S.	Name	Grade	Immigration status
Cindy	Restaurant manager	Middle school	17	Alice	11th	U.S. born
Xian	Restaurant owner	Middle school	21	Alex	10th	U.S. born
Yan	Computer data analyst	Master's	18	Kyle	11th	U.S. born
Wei; Meimei	Scientist Self-employed	PhD Master's	22 22	Molly	6th	U.S. born

Note for Tables 1 & 2: In two families, both husband and wife participated in the study. In one family, Fan is the husband; Li is the wife. In the other, Wei is the husband; Meimei is the wife.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study included observation of families, parent and student interviews, and parent and student surveys. The data collection lasted for approximately six months. All activities were conducted at participants' homes except for one family. I could not conduct an observation of Abby's family because her family lived together with many other relatives, and she refused this request (but did agree to the interviews and surveys). The foci of the observations included the general environment of the family and neighborhood and also the academic environment, such as the availability of books for the children's education. Another purpose of the observations was to build a rapport with the participants so that they would feel more comfortable in the follow-up interviews. Sometimes participants would talk to me about their children and their families during the observations. Each observation took about one hour. In most families, two observations were done on different days. However, due to various difficulties in making arrangements, I did not reach this goal in three families. In total, I conducted 16 observations (in all but Abby's family). Field notes were taken during the observations, and reflective memos were written after each observation.

Interviews were separately conducted with parent and child participants in all nine families. In other words, parents' interviews were conducted with each parent only (n = 9), and students' interviews were conducted with each student only (n = 9). Interviews were usually between 60–90 minutes long. Interviews were audiorecorded and later transcribed and translated into English, as the parent interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Sample parent interview questions include:

- Can you introduce yourself?
- What is your educational background?
- What is the reason your family immigrated to the U.S.?
- How long have you been in the U.S.?
- Are you satisfied with your child's education?
- Where do you live? Is it related to your choice of your child's school?

Each participating parent and student completed a survey (available both in Chinese and English) that collected basic demographic information such as parents' income, education, immigration status, and length of time in the United States. Two sample questions used are as follows:

My highest education is _____.

(a) Less than or equal to high school	(b) Some college
(c) College graduation	(d) Master's degree
(e) Doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D.)	(f) Other_____

My occupation is _____.
(a) Jobless (b) Manual worker (c) Business owner (d) Professional
(e) Other _____

The primary method of analysis was cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2002) using the qualitative analysis software application *Nvivo9*. The results reported in this article drew primarily from the parents' interviews, as the students' interviews did not have much information about how a family chose to live in their current location. The observations helped the researcher get familiar with the families, and the surveys provided necessary information, such as an estimation of each family's income. Observations and surveys also were employed to triangulate the findings.

Regarding researcher positionality, I volunteered in the Future Chinese School as an SAT mathematics instructor for one semester one year before this research project. Thus I had some connections with some teachers and parents there, as well as other Chinese immigrant parents, and I was able to obtain permission from the principal to conduct the research. However, the recruitment process still turned out to be difficult, especially during the first several weeks. I visited the Future Chinese School many times and tried to persuade parents to participate in the study. Initially, nearly all parents refused to participate, citing lack of time and difficulty in arranging for family observations. Three families did agree to participate, and then gradually more parents joined the study. Two new parents were introduced by two existing participant parents. I think I eventually overcame the difficulty of recruiting participants for two reasons. First, my volunteer experience in the Future Chinese School allowed me to at least know some parents and the principal. Second, I have a similar cultural, educational, and language background to many Chinese immigrant parents, especially the highly educated parents. Because of similar backgrounds, they may have been more likely to understand the intention of my research.

Results

The results reported in this article address two central issues: parents' beliefs about the importance of attending schools in good school districts, and parents' strategies for home location selections.

Parents' Beliefs About the Importance of Attending Good Schools

All the participating parents believed that it is very important to send their children to a "good" school district. Parents use a school's academic performance and reputation to judge it as a "good" or "poor" school. When deciding

where to live, the quality of the public school was their top priority. For example, Wei claimed, "When we were searching for a house we only considered the ones in good school districts."

Most of the parents initially lived in Springfield, possibly because of cheaper housing or convenient transportation. Among Chinese parents, this was a county believed to have a troubled public educational system. A common complaint among these parents is that the schools in Springfield County did not teach enough content to students. Xian described the school's poor quality: "When he [my son] was in Springfield County he told me he had nothing to do [in math class] because he understood everything the teacher taught—that was a waste of time to sit in the class."

Parents' Practice of Home Location Selection

All participant parents believe that living in a "good" school district is crucial for their children's education. Because the quality of public school education between school districts can be sharply different and students can usually only attend local schools in their district, families need to live in the related district—which is usually very costly—in order for their children to attend what they believe are good schools. Of course, not all families can afford to purchase a home in the school districts they believe will provide the best education. Generally, a family's economic status largely influences where the family can and does live. However, this study found that participating families, regardless of economic status, managed to relocate to "good" school districts from relatively "poor" school districts by using various strategies, even though half of them did so with great economic burden.

Families' income status and previous and current counties of residence are included in Table 3. Among these counties, parents are least satisfied with schools in Springfield County and Green County. Littlewoods County, Fox Hill County, and Hardy County have a much better reputation for academic achievement among Chinese immigrant families. However, Springfield County has a magnet high school, which Cindy's two older children attend. Parents judged the quality of school districts by visiting their websites (such as viewing the assessment report and the ranking) and by exchanging information with other Chinese families.

One case deserves special explanation. Maggie's family income, as noted in Table 3, seems to be high. But that was not the case. Her family income was far below the median income of Littlewoods County. In addition, the overall cost of living index in Littlewoods County was very high, among the highest in the U.S.

Table 3. Family Type, Income Status, and County

		Name	Income	Previous County	Current County
Higher income family	Settled professional family	Yan	$100,000~149,999	Springfield	Littlewoods
		Wei; Meimei	$100,000~149,999	Fox Hill	Littlewoods
	Small business family	Cindy	$100,000~149,999	Springfield	Springfield
		Xian	$100,000~149,999	Springfield	Fox Hill
Lower income family	Transitional professional family	Maggie	$75,000~$99,999	Springfield	Littlewoods
		Xuehua	N/A	Springfield	Springfield
		Fan; Li	$30,000~$49,999	Springfield	Fox Hill
	Working family	Abby	$30,000~$49,999	Fox Hill	Fox Hill
		Hai	$30,000~$49,999	Green	Hardy

Higher Income Families

Higher income families were better able to purchase homes in what they perceived as the good school districts. If they had multiple homes, they chose to live in the one within a school zone that had better public education.

Settled professional families with sufficient financial resources chose to purchase homes in what they believed were good school districts. When they talked about the reasons why they chose to buy houses in their current locations, unlike the small business families and working families, who mainly rely on the rankings of the general reputations of schools, these parents provided more detailed information by comparison with the previous schools their children had attended. It was because they were not satisfied with the previous schools that they moved to their current ones. For example, according to Yan, teachers from better school districts teach more than those from other schools:

> At that time I was employed, so our incomes were higher. So we wanted to buy a bigger house. I also wanted to buy a house in a school district with good high schools. School was our priority when we were looking for a house. Teachers from good schools teach differently than others, and they teach more to kids.…When we were in Springfield County, the elementary school did not teach kids much knowledge. – Yan

Another settled professional family described why and how they decided to move from Fox Hill County to Littlewoods County. Similar to others' rationales, the ranking of schools was the most important factor in choosing

where to live. As Wei pointed out, "The reason why we moved to this county is because its schools rank high. We definitely want our children to go to good schools."

Wei and his wife believed that elementary school was very important for their children's education, because having a solid foundation was crucial:

> We moved here when my son was in second grade. When we were searching for a house we only considered the ones in good school districts. The relevant elementary school must be good. – Wei

They believed that their perspective is different from people who think high school is the most important.

The specific reason why they left Fox Hill County was because they were disappointed by that county's inability to offer a magnet program for their son when he was in first and second grades. The approach the school used for their son was to let him keep skipping grades, which the couple believed to be harmful for developing the boy's social skills. After consulting with their Chinese friends, they moved to Littlewoods County when the son was in second grade:

> Before we moved here we lived in Fox Hill County. My son was in first grade at that time; he was learning faster. However, that county only has a magnet program after about fifth grade—I am not exactly sure. The school had to focus on educating the general students [not the talented kids]. So they told my son to skip a grade. Then my son went to second grade. However, half a year later, they suggested that my son skip again because he was doing so well. – Meimei

The two small business families, due to their sufficient financial status, each own at least two houses in the area. For example, Cindy's family has two houses. Cindy said that the old house is located in a good school district while the new one is in a weaker school district. Cindy's husband, Sam, is well-informed about the different school districts. Thus, even though most of the family members moved to the new house, Cindy sent her children to school in the old district because it had better elementary and middle schools:

> We like the old house very much because it's in a good school district, including both elementary school and middle school. The school district in our new house is not as good as the one where my old house is located.…Sam knows which school districts are better, and he told me. The reason why we bought a new house here is because the old house is too small to accommodate so many people.…Now even after we moved here, the kids will go to their previous schools because we own two houses. – Cindy

The other parent who also ran an Asian restaurant, Xian, said he had three houses and rents out two of them. The one he was living in was located in the best school district in the state, even though it was much more expensive:

> The schools are better, and the houses are much more expensive. However, the most important thing for us is to live in a good school district.… I got the school district information by visiting the schools, reading newspapers, and hearing from my friends. It's widely accepted that this school district is good. It's the best school district in [the state] which has three excellent [high] schools. It has the best public schools. These three schools are the top three even though their rankings change slightly sometimes. – Xian

Lower Income Families

Transitional professional families, unlike settled professional families and small business families who can purchase houses in good school districts, also attempted to live in what they believed to be good school districts despite their economic difficulties. One transitional professional family, Maggie's family, managed to purchase a house in Littlewoods County despite financial hardship. (This was the same county where the two settled professional families, Yan and Wei, were living.) In order to save money, they rented out their master bedroom to a Chinese couple, while Maggie and her husband lived in the basement. More evidence of her family's economic struggle was their relatively lower capacity to purchase goods for their home and family. She and her husband had been planning to replace their 1995 car with a newer one for a long time but could not do so due to their tight budget. These sacrifices enabled them to live in Littlewoods County:

> [The reason we moved here] was because the school district is good. We moved here for our children.…The real estate is more expensive—houses in good school districts are always expensive. You will be able to know the status of the school district by reviewing the school reports from the whole [the state] school reports. – Maggie

Another transitional professional parent, Li, was working in a nonprofit organization, and her husband, Fan, was not permitted to work legally in the United States due to immigration restrictions. This couple had always lived in an apartment after they moved to America with their son. During the time of the study, they had just moved from Springfield County to Fox Hill County, where they believed there were better schools. They believed that having a good school environment is important for a child's healthy development and said that they will never move back to Springfield County:

> We will never move back to Springfield County, but we may move to better places. Even though we settled for what we had and let him develop naturally by himself, but, to be honest, we still want him to grow up in a relatively good environment. – Fan

Xuehua is also from a transitional professional family. Her family lives in Springfield County, a county many interviewed parents believed to have many poor schools. She was extremely disappointed with the school and even considered moving. Xuehua's family purchased a small house in Springfield County, mainly due to lower prices during the U.S. economic recession. However, Xuehua was dissatisfied with the school her son attended, which is, according to her, already the best elementary school in the area, especially for its mathematics education. In terms of mathematics, Xuehua asserted that her son learned nothing from that school, and her son's mathematics knowledge came from the work she and her husband did with him at home. Xuehua's perception of the school's mathematics instruction reflected her knowledge of mathematics, an indicator of cultural capital that helped her to make a judgment of the quality of the school. Her family had considered moving to a better school district, but it was not feasible:

> No, he cannot go to another school because the county has specified the school district. You can only go to the ones relevant to your school district. You cannot go to the schools that are not in your school district.…I have considered moving, but my situation is complex. You see, my husband does not work in this area. – Xuehua

One working family, Abby's family, lived with her parents-in-law and her brother-in-law in Fox Hill County. They did so mainly because she believed that the high school in that area is above average (according to her, the school is good but not top), and it was also convenient for her child to go to school as it was within walking distance from their home.

Hai was from a working family—he was working as a chef for a Chinese restaurant. He did not have a house or rent an apartment. Instead, his family stayed with the family of one of Hai's best friends. The male householder of the family originally came from the same village as Hai. His friend assigned Hai and his wife a room upstairs and divided the living room into two parts—one part was used as the living room, and the other part became a bedroom for Hai's son.

Hai had the potential opportunity to open his own restaurant in another state—a dream for many Chinese immigrant working families that would have improved his economic situation, but it might have jeopardized his son's education. He made the decision that his son's education should not be harmed and thus gave up the idea of opening his own restaurant:

> We can move anytime. We have no roots in the United States, so it is easy to move anytime. I had an opportunity to open my own restaurant, but I did not do that because I needed to move to other state in order to open a restaurant. It would be a hit to my son's education so we decided to stay here. – Hai

Discussion

Family income can profoundly influence students' education, as socioeconomic status is often linked to students' academic achievement, and family income is one of the core components of socioeconomic status (Coley, 2002; Palardy, 2008). However, how family income influences students' education needs more exploration (Davis-Kean, 2005; Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). One direct influence of family income is the choice of housing, because where the family lives will determine which schools the students can attend for those enrolled in public school. To live in a good school district usually requires a high level of economic resources for housing, which is a challenge for many.

Surprisingly, no matter what kind of income the Chinese immigrant families in this study had, they nearly all managed to live in "good" school districts by using different strategies. For higher income families (settled professional families and small business families), their sufficient economic status enabled them to purchase houses in expensive school districts, and they could thus send their children to good schools. Their strategies are not surprising as most families who are well off financially do the same thing. For lower income Chinese immigrants, however, economic difficulty did not seem to be an insurmountable obstacle for them to live in good school districts and thus send their children to good schools. These families applied multiple strategies to achieve their goals, including renting out rooms to others, living in apartments, lodging in friends' houses, or sharing houses with extended family.

These Chinese immigrant parents' practices are determined by their beliefs, that is, children's education is their top priority. Some parents even sacrificed other aspects of life. For example, Yan's husband works in Springfield County, and they have houses in both Springfield County and Littlewood County. They choose to live in Littlewood County as it has better schools, despite Yan's husband needing to travel much further to work every day. Similarly, Wei works in Fox Hill County, but he believes that Littlewood County has better education. Thus, the family moved to Littlewood County even though it means that Wei needs to travel further to work. This is the same case for Xian, whose business is in Springfield County. Although he owns two houses in Springfield County, his family chose to live in Fox Hill County as it has better schools.

One working-class parent, Hai, in order to keep his son in his school, gave up the opportunity to open his own business in another state.

It must be pointed out that social networks played a very crucial role for Chinese immigrants' selection of public school districts. It appears that a strong ethnic social network can reduce the negative influence of inadequate economic resources to some degree. For example, Hai could not afford to purchase or rent a house or an apartment in a good school district, so his whole family lived with his friend's family in order to provide quality education to his son. Through social network communication with other Chinese immigrant families, parents developed shared beliefs about the quality of their public schools, that is, which counties and which schools are considered "good." When parents were not satisfied with the quality of the public schools, they discussed this with others and chose to move to better school districts. For example, Wei consulted his friend about the quality of schools in Littlewood County, and the family actually visited the schools before they moved.

The Chinese immigrant parents used the term "good" schools or "good" school districts frequently during the interviews. What constituted a "good" school or a "good" school district? No parent provided a specific definition of it. However, based on conversations, parents mentioned several characteristics that "good" schools or school districts should have: the county has a high reputation for its public schools among Chinese immigrant parents; the ranking for the school should be relatively high (one parent actually opened the website and showed me the ranking of the high schools in the state); the availability of magnet or gifted programs, especially for lower grades; a good atmosphere (such as low crime rate); and low poverty rate. For participants, a "bad" school or school district has the opposite characteristics: a bad reputation in education, ranking is low, the magnet program is not available at the desired grade levels, high crime rate, and high poverty rate.

Contribution and Future Research Directions

First, this study contributes to a better understanding of Chinese American students' educational experiences, as there is little prior research on the housing choices made by Chinese immigrant families. This study illustrates the common practice of Chinese American families sending their children to the best school districts. They not only believe in the value of living in good school districts but also applied various strategies to achieve their goal no matter what kind of economic status they had. Chinese immigrant families' house location selection strategies mirror very well the high value they place on education and the high expectations they have for their children's education.

Second, the Chinese immigrant families' strategies of family location selection shed light on what may be achievable for various families and communities

even if economic status is relatively low. If families place a high value on education, the use of ethnic networks may be able to contribute to the community members' opportunities in education. For example, friends may provide useful information about how to choose a school with higher quality education.

Third, this study suggests that schools, districts, and broader political systems need to do more in order to make good schooling available not only to higher income families but also to lower income families. These Chinese immigrant families' willingness to make these moves is understandable; however, it also underscores that the inequities in the educational system persist and cause hardships on families.

This study only included nine Chinese immigrant families, and all families came from the same metropolitan area; thus the author cautions the generalization of the findings to all Chinese American families. This study recruited the participants mainly from the Future Chinese School and used the snowball sampling strategy. This recruitment strategy might result in a lack of diversity of participants because there were other immigrant families that did not send their children to weekend Chinese schools. Future research should expand the number of participants substantially and also include Chinese immigrant families from various geographical locations. Additionally, all students from the nine families were high achievers in academia. In order to have a more balanced voice from families it would be beneficial to include families with academically low achieving students. Also, it would be helpful to examine other ethnic and racial groups' beliefs and practices in home selection and, finally, compare the beliefs and practices across different groups.

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Author's Note: This research was supported by a Joint Undergraduate Studies and Asian American Studies fund and by the Center for Mathematics Education, all at The University of Maryland. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the perspectives of the funding agencies.

Senfeng Liang is an assistant professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point. His research interests include parental involvement in students' mathematics education, immigration and education, and Asian American students' mathematics learning experiences. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to University of Wisconsin– Stevens Point, Department of Mathematical Sciences, ATTN: Senfeng Liang, Stevens Point, WI 54481 or email liangsenfeng@gmail.com