

HOME-SCHOOL LINK A KEY FACTOR TO EXPLAIN AN IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE OF CHINESE-AUSTRALIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study focused on congruency of culture of home and school of children from Chinese-Australian families as a major factor in their academic success. Qualitative approach was used for uncovering three key things, namely, 1) conditions and interactions at home; 2) children's behavior and interaction in classroom; 3) children's activities after school hours and at weekends. The approach considered to be appropriate to capture what teachers, parents and children say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world. Data collected by using ethnographic techniques, mainly participant observation and conversational interviews. There were seven children from five Chinese-Australian families residing in Perth metropolitan area involved in the study. The families immigrated from Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Analysis indicated that Chinese-Australian parents pushed their children far beyond their limits in their drive for academic excellence. They made their home suitable for studying and ensured continuity between homes and school. Impulse control, deferment of short term gratification, effort/hard work, and scholastic achievement were Chinese cultural values implanted by the parents. Chinese-Australian children met most of their teachers' demands. Consequently, their interactions with their teachers were in more positive ways.

Key words: Chinese-Australian families, impressive performance students

Introduction

The home-school interface is perhaps the most widely recognised aspect of the family-community relationship. The congruence between home and school can have a large and significant effect on child development, particularly on academic success. A home environment that promotes learning can operate so that a child with only average inborn ability does well in school. A very good school can operate also to compensate a child for a poor home environment (Levine and Havinghurst, 1989, p. 115). Home predisposes the child to an acceptance or rejection of the school values. When

the characteristics developed at home do not support school learning, the resultant discontinuity experienced by children, when they go to school, will affect scholastic performance. Ogbu (1987, 1991) calls it the *discontinuity hypothesis*. This hypothesis is based on the premise that an environment fosters the development of the particular knowledge, skills, learning styles and values that have adaptive value for individuals living in it. When people move from one setting (e.g. home) to another (e.g. school) their success in meeting the demands of the new environment will depend on the extent to which they can apply the competencies

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in the original environment. When this reasoning is applied to children making the transition from home to school, all children experience some problems with discontinuity when they go to school. It is argued that where parent-child interactions resemble more closely the types of interaction that one would expect to find in a school, children tend to perform well (Laosa, 1982).

Impressive academic performance of students from Southeast Asian families, settled in the Western World, is a remarkable phenomenon which has captured the imagination of social scientists. Cross-cultural studies conducted in the United Kingdom (Gibson, 1988), the Netherlands (Pieke, 1991), the United States (Flynn, 1991; Lee, 1960; Lynn, 1982; Schneider et al., 1994; Stevenson and Stigler, 1991); and Australia (Bullivant, 1987; Chan, 1988; Malik, 1988, 2000) have reported consistent evidence about the impressive performance of children from Southeast Asia. Of particular interest is the outstanding performance of children from what Ho (1994) calls '*Confucian Heritage Cultures*' (China, Japan, and Korea). In the United States the policy makers have referred to the Asian-Americans as '*model minority*' (Wong, 1980) or '*quiet Americans*' and their children as '*whiz kids*' (Brand, 1987).

However, social scientists have divergent views about this high performance of Southeast Asian children. Lynn (1982) attributes the superior performance of Southeast Asian children to their innate ability.

Stevenson and Stigler (1991, p. 50), on the other hand, regard such assertion "without merit". Instead, they argue that the superior performance of children from the Confucian heritage cultures is due to their everyday experiences at home and school. They spend most of their after-school time on academic activities. Some studies in the United States (Flynn, 1991), Hong Kong (Briggs, 1991, 1994) and Australia (Malik, 2000) have examined the ways young children divide their time between home and school.

Osajima (1988) attributes Asian success to sheer effort. The proponents of this argument say that children from the Southeast Asian migrant families spend most of their after-school time on academic activities. In dedicating themselves to assisting the child to negotiate the challenge of formal schooling Chinese parents share the burden of failure as well as the uplift of success with their children. The assistance of the parents paves the way to channel effort on subsequent tasks, provides the instrumental and moral guidance to ensure that children's efforts culminate in success rather than aimless floundering (Osajima, 1988). Because the Chinese families believe their children's primary responsibility is to apply themselves seriously to their schoolwork, they arrange their home life so that it is conducive to academic activities. Culturally transmitted values, beliefs and behaviours play an important role in high academic performance of the Chinese children. While the parents believe that it is their responsibility to instil in their children

the value of education and to protect their children's time by discouraging part-time jobs, children on their part identify their self esteem with academic success and failure reflect on the family and close social group, which puts correspondingly greater pressure on students to succeed (Briggs, 1994, p.17). Students from the Confucian heritage cultures never lose contact with their teachers and school mates. Their school activities merge into home activities quite naturally.

By contrast, argues Briggs (1994), Westerners do not alter their child rearing practices according to child's age. They begin to pull back, satisfied that they have provided a favourable foundation that will enable their children to take advantage of what the school will offer (Stevenson and Stigler, 1986). Anglo-European children spend less time in academic activities (Malik, 2000). The purpose of this paper is to argue that Chinese-Australian parents motivate their children to take school seriously and the teachers interact with these children positively.

This Study

In this paper the author argues that the congruency of the culture of home and school of Chinese-Australian children from four families residing in Perth metropolitan area is a major factor in their academic success. Chinese-Australian families, with their ancestry from mainland China immigrated from Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. The pseudonym of the school is Paramount Senior High School and

the suburb where Paramount Senior High School is located is referred to as Southside. Pseudonyms are used for children and their parents.

Methodology

My choice of qualitative methodology was influenced by three key questions: What goes on in the homes of children from Chinese-Australian families? How do Chinese-Australian children behave and interact in classroom? What activities are Chinese-Australian children engaged in during after-school hours and at weekends? Qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate to capture what teachers, parents and children *say* and *do* as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world. By using ethnographic techniques, mainly participant observation and conversational interviews, I could enter into the home life of teenagers to understand their view of success at school.

Interviews were conducted fortnightly and later monthly for three years (1993-1996). Children and their parents were interviewed in their homes. At school, children were observed in my own classes, in the classes of the other teachers, in the playgrounds and on the way to home after school hours. Teachers who taught these children were interviewed formally and informally. Between 1993 and 1996 I had paid 253 visits to these families and spent 556 hours interviewing parents and their children. With some parents I played a few games

of golf and tennis, while with most of them I shared meals and went for picnics. Such occasions were beneficial to develop rapport and maintain relationship with parents and to understand their social network.

Children from four Chinese-Australian families, those who agreed to participate and provide information on long term basis, were included in the study. These families resided in Southside, predominantly a middle class suburb of Perth, which in recent years had attracted a large number of immigrants from Southeast Asia, mainly because of the academic reputation of Paramount Senior High School. The growing reputation of Paramount Senior High School also attracted experienced teachers. The principal was a dynamic and innovative leader who took pride in academic excellence as well as in good sports results. The parents were very supportive of these policies. I taught at this school for several years, including the period when this study was conducted. Description of the participating families is given in Table-1

Table-1 Descriptive Information about the sample

	Cheong	Goh	Kok	Kwang
Target Children	Victor Year 9 Pearl Year 7	Chi Chen Year 9 Tein Year 11	Lee Kuan Year9	Hogzia Year 9 Miran Year 7
Ordinal Position	First born Second born	Second born First born	First born	First born Second born
Family Size	Parents, one boy and one girl	Parents, grandmother, one boy and one girl	Parents and three boys	Parents and two girls
Parents' education	Father B.A. Mother Year 12	Father B.A. Mother Year 12	Father Year 12 Mother Year 12	Father Year 12 Mother Year 12
Parent's Occupation	Father accountant Mother secretary	Father computer technician Mother nurse	Father car salesman Mother housewife	Father porter in a hotel Mother factory worker
Year of immigration	Malaysian born parents-1988	Malaysian born parents-1980	Singapore born parents-1988	Hong Kong born parents-1989
Language spoken at home	Mandarin	Mandarin	English, Mandarin	Cantonese

Reasons for Immigration

In their native countries male parents in three families and both parents in the Goh family were employed in white-collar middle class jobs. They were all originally economically well-placed in their countries which, when they were teenagers, were British colonies. Their own parents (the

grandparents of research students) were self-employed in small businesses like street hawkers, small grocery stores or owning coffee shops. These parents had seen hardships which their own parents had to go through and the sacrifices they made to provide them with education. They worked hard at school and settled in white-collar jobs

which enabled them to lead a much more comfortable life than their own parents did.

Three factors motivated these families to immigrate to Australia: better educational opportunities for their children, an appealing life style in Australia, and socio-political problems in their own countries. An excerpt from an interview with Yu Chin Kwang is typical of the other families' reasons for immigrating to Australia:

We liked the open space (in Australia), fresh air, and cheap food..... In Hong Kong there are only two universities. There is so much competition for education. My daughters could not be sure of a place at the university even if they could get good marks. You have to be *very smart* to enrol in the university in Hong Kong. In Australia, there are so many universities and competition is not so much.... Also, in 1997 Hong Kong will become part of China.... We wanted to get out before China took over.

The choice of Southside as a place of residence, where Paramount Senior High School is located, was not a coincidence. They bought their houses in this suburb because of the academic reputation of the school. The Kok family had heard about the academic reputation of Paramount Senior High even before they immigrated to Australia.

Overcoming the Initial Problems

With the proceeds brought from their native countries, these families bought houses in the catchment area of Paramount Senior High. Each family

bought two cars and all the necessary household items. They deposited some money in banks and left some in banks in their native countries (in case they decided to go back). With their Australian qualifications and relevant work experience in their own countries, the Gohs and the Cheongs were quite confident about getting jobs commensurate with their qualifications and experience. The Kwangs and the Koks wanted to start businesses but did not have a great deal of success. But all of these families confronted more problems than they had anticipated. Unable to get suitable jobs, (interestingly enough, all of them tried their luck in starting ethnic food restaurant with not a great deal of success. Yu Chi Kwang, an assistant hotel manager in Hong Kong, got a job of a porter at a city hotel as well as driver instructor for Chinese community. Tuan Kok, a flight attendant with Singapore Airlines, started to work in car sales yard. Kwan Wen Cheong started to work as an accountant. Ming Sen Goh and his wife Yan Form bought a news agency.

While the parents from these families struggled to make a living, their children's experiences at school were like night mares. They faced language barrier and problems in adjusting with their Anglo-Australian counterparts. Excerpts below encapsulate the school experiences of children from these families.

When I started going to school in Perth at first copied someone's work all the time, because I did not know what to do. So they called me a "copy

cat”, “ching chong”, “Hongkie bitch”. They teased me all the time.... I was afraid to tell my teachers. One day I wet my underwear because I was afraid of some kids- Hongzia Kwang.

Miran had similar experiences when she started schooling in Australia.

My early days in Australia were the hardest days in my whole life. I didn't speak or understand English. I didn't know what to do at school. I was teased all the time for being an Asian. Words like “ching chong” and “Hongkie” were said in front of my face. Although I didn't know what it meant, I knew it wasn't a nice thing to say. I couldn't make friends because I couldn't communicate with others. I not only had problems with speaking English, but understanding the Australian accent-Miran Kwang.

Lee Kuan Kok was bullied in primary school as well as high school. He ended up getting the psychiatric treatment. The heart-broken experiences of the family are discussed elsewhere (Malik, 2000).

Commitment to Education

Parental emotional support and the provision of *social and cultural capital* (Coleman, 1988) were evident in these families. They brought with them a cultural view that scholarship and effort was the route to social mobility. Although these families were new to Australia and did not understand the Australian education system well, they had one common goal: keeping their children committed to schoolwork. One strategy they followed was that they worked hard on low-paid jobs and

showed frugality in spending on their personal comforts but invested heavily on educational resources for their children. Fully aware of their children's social and academic problems, the parents adopted the strategy to suffer themselves but help their children overcome language-related and social adjustment problems.

Parental commitment to the education of their children was well-reflected in their investment of time, educational resources and the provision of home tutors in English, maths and science even when the possibility of success was already high. (e.g. Chi Chen, Hongzia, Pearl and Victor) or very low as in the case of Tien Goh and Lee Kuan Kok. The Kwangs were the most persuasive and even coercive in their demands for high grades. Mr. Kwang's illness (died of liver cancer in April, 1996), unemployment of husband and wife (Mrs. Kwang had resigned from her job in order to look after her ailing husband) and financial hardship did not stop Hongzia and Miran from employing a home tutor in maths. Both girls improved in English and were no longer in English as Second Language classes. The dying wish of Mr. Kwang to his older daughter was: “if something happens to me you don't give up your studies. We came to Australia for your sake. We would like you to be a doctor”. These parents' commitment to the education of their children was well-reflected in their daily routine. After observing the Cheog family for two years I wrote in my field notes:

Most days Mrs Cheong is home before 4 p.m. She works three and a half day per week. Children return from school before 3.15. Before Mrs Cheong comes, Victor and Pearl are busy doing their homework. The days when the tutor comes (to teach maths and English) both children are ready for him by 4.30. Other days Mrs Cheong sits with them (drinking Chinese tea and reading Chinese novels) while they complete their homework. Mrs Cheong takes them to the local library if they need to go. This happens at least once a week. It is at the dining table Mr Cheong instils Chinese values and cautions his children about the “ills of the Western culture”. When he talks to them they listen to him with their heads down and with no eye contact. During the weekdays after 8 p.m. their children are not allowed to watch TV. Pearl goes to her favourite

hobby (book reading) and Victor goes to his parents’ bedroom (which has a bigger study desk and a computer) to do schoolwork. Around 10 p.m. children go to bed.

With minor variations the parents in other families also had similar commitment to the education of their children. In response to a question “If the class average is 70% what score would you be satisfied with?” these parents were not satisfied with an average score. As shown in Table-2 parental expectations from their children were very high. When Tein Goh decided to repeat TEE Mrs Goh demanded, “If you want to repeat you will have to get minimum of 80% marks. I will nag you. I don’t care what you say”. In advising their children the parents were not driven as much by the interest of their children as by the career which they wanted them to pursue.

Table-2 Parental Expectations

Family	Expected score Child one	Expected score Child two	Satisfied with child one	Satisfied with child two
Cheong	Victor 80	Pearl 75	90	90
Goh	Chi Chen 100	Tein 60	90+	75
Kwang	Hongzia 100	Miran 95	95	90
Kok	Lee 55		70	

Parental Control

The most striking feature of these families was their control over their children’s after-school hours activities. By controlling where and when children go, the parents controlled the activities of their children. There was a marked parental curtailment of children’s spatial parameters outside the home. Even at home, activities

were outlined and most time was spent in doing something which the parents considered purposeful. Two factors appeared to be operative in parental control strategies: belief that they owe responsibility to discipline their children, and their fear that if they allowed them to mix with the Anglo-Australians or “some Asians who had become too much Australians” they

might lose interest in studies. Tight control and restrictiveness exerted by parents were not accompanied by hostility or coercion. The parents monitored the routine learning activities and provided corrective feedback and imposed sanctions to reinforce their children's behaviour. Strongly ingrained in Chinese culture Mr Cheong explained:

How come the Australians allow their 15-year olds to start their own lives? Instead of asking my children to do part-time work I will work longer hours and provide them with tutors in maths and English. Instead of going to the pub I will like to take my children to play golf. Chinese parents not only encourage their children to work hard in their schoolwork but they are all the time behind them... (Do) you know why the Asians do well in studies? It is because of the culture. Children are taught to respect their elders and teachers from the early age.

In an interview (a few months before his death due to liver cancer) Mr Kwang gave this information:

I reckon people are born lazy. They are only pieces of white papers and parents paint them colourfully. We start educating them when they are young as 4 or 5 years old. In Hong Kong children do not talk back even if parents are wrong..... Children should be raised under supervision of parents. When they make a mistake we should always correct them. If they make a big mistake we do not only beat them but tell them the consequences of their actions.

When these parents were asked: What worries you most about your child when s/he goes out with the Anglo-Australian children? They invariably said, "They may catch some Australian (bad) habits like questioning parents' authority". In order to protect their children from "picking up the wrong habits" the parents gave them frequent "mini lectures" to guard against the "negative influence of street kids". One afternoon Mr Cheong, looking through the window of his lounge, told me:

In this park there are so many children who come to smoke. Most of them are from Paramount Senior High. They bring bottles of beer. I tell my children, "Look at these kids. Where are their parents? May be in the pub. I tell my children to beware of such kids.

Hard work key to Success

The single most important factor contributing to the improved performance of Chinese-Australian students was their predisposition towards schoolwork and the inordinate amount of time they spent on school-related activities. Table-3 shows that the number of hours per week these students spent on school-related activities ranged from 15 hours to 25 hours. This stands in sharp contrast to the abysmal amount of time they spent in sports, part-time jobs, and socialising with their friends. All of them had hired tutors in maths, science and some in English.

Victor explained how concerned and committed his parents were about his education:

My parents tell me to study and work hard. They always ask me and my sister when our test or exam is. Most of the time, I finish my homework before I watch TV. When I have an exam I always go to my parents' (bed)room to study so they know I have an exam and they won't disturb me. When my sister or I get bad result they always tell us to study very hard. They restrict our watching of the TV but when we get good marks they are very happy and proud, and they tell us to keep up. My parents are aware of everything about us.

Hongzia Kwang gave a similar account:

Our parents tell us all the time to take schoolwork seriously. They

tell us 'educated man is better than uneducated'.... Mum comes tired from work. She tells, 'if you have a test, you do your studies, for your sake I will do the house chores' If we have an assignment to do they take us to the library to get some books. Before we were not allowed to watch too much TV. They expected us to study all the time. Now they know we are studying hard, they allow us to watch more TV. Now (Year 11) I work so hard my Dad says, 'don't give yourself too much pressure'. Our family doctor (Chinese) tell me that I should relax as well. But how can I relax until I finish TEE and get a good score to get into medicine.

Table-3 Number of hours spent in doing various activities per week

Student	Home-work	Part-time job	Sports	Tuition	TV/Stereo and computer	Socialising with parents	Socialising with friends	Household chores
Chi Chen	17	2	4	2	20	4	8	---
Tien	15	--	--	1	24	5	6	4
Lee	15	--	1.5	2	26	4.5	--	1.5
Kuwan								
Hongzia	24	--	--	2	18	6	--	2
Miran	22	--	--	1		7	4	4
Victor	23	--	6	2	8	6	2	2
Pearl	25	--	4	1	18	7	--	3

Even though the parents in the Kok family were shattered by what had happened to their son Lee Kuan (victim of bullying at school), they wanted their other son two sons to live up to their expectations. Mrs Kok explained:

We are very disappointed about what has happened to Lee. We will not be satisfied if our other two sons did not aim for university degree. Lee

faced language problem and to adjust in Australia. Lit Wey started in grade two and Zen Sunn was born here. For them language is not a problem. Lit Wey is doing very well in Year 7. I spend all my time looking after our children, taking them to school and other places of interest. We have employed private tutors in maths for Lit Wey and Lee.

On their part children from these families had internalised their parents'

values and virtues of hard work. Mrs Goh described the work habits of her son Chi Chen:

Chi Chen will do his homework first. When he studies he concentrates. He tries his best to produce good work. About his schoolwork we do not have to remind him. He tries to look for information from different sources. He gets annoyed with himself if he cannot complete his work. He asks for our help. Before giving the final copy of his work he writes the final draft.

Hongzia assured her Dad that she would do her best to fulfil his wish.

How can I slow down when I haven't done my TEE? I cannot sleep because I want to improve my score.

I got 'A grade' in all subjects but my average was below 88%. Unless I get 88% aggregate I cannot get in medicine. My Dad always wanted me to do medicine.

The data reported in Table-4 shows that in the final report of Year 7(primary school) Chi Chen was rated outstanding but the others were average students in all subjects, except in English and were enrolled in English as Second Language classes. As reported elsewhere (Malik, 2000) the most frequent words that featured in teachers' comments about the behaviour and attitude of Chinese-Australian students were 'quiet', 'diligent', 'obedient', 'pleasure to teach' and 'cooperative'.

Table-4 Ability (Inter-D Score) and Performance in Year 7

Student	Final Report	Inter-D Score		Attended ESL Class
		Language %	Quantitative %	
Chi Chen Goh	Outstanding	85	95	No
Tein Goh	Average	35	40	Yes
Pearl Cheong	Above Average	80	70	No
Victor Cheong	Average	30	34	Yes
Hongzia Kwang	Above Average	70	70	Yes
Miran Kwang	Above Average	75	68	Yes
Lee Kok	Below Average	20	80	Yes

Except for Chi Chen all of these students faced enormous problems related to social adjustment and lack of efficiency in spoken and written skills in English. When the Goh family arrived in Australia Chi Chen was only two years old. So his socialisation took place in Australia. All of them reported that they faced some degree of racism and bullying at school.

At the end of high school in Year

12 except for Lee Kok, all of them did extremely well in TEE and enrolled in the university to study for professional degrees, as indicated in Table-5. Equally important to note is that they selected the career paths where not a great deal of language skills were required. This pattern of career path was in tune with the findings of other studies that argue that the Asian children tend to give preference to quantitative subjects.

Table-5
Academic Performance and Occupational Aspirations

Name	TEE/TAFE Score	Career pah/Aspirations
Chi Chen Goh	450/510	Science/Engineering
Tein Goh	335/510	Business
Hongzia Kwang	399/510	Dentistry
Miran Kwang	354/510	Optometry
Victor Cheong	367/510	Commerce
Pearl Cheong	350/510	Commerce
Lee Kuan Kok	Completed TAFE course	Landscaping/horticulture

School Experiences

Chinese-Australian students were labelled by their teachers as “they put their heads down and got on with their work”. Although not all of them were academically bright, majority of them were what Hargreaves (1967) called “docile conformists”. Generally speaking, Chinese-Australian students were guided by their parents into thinking that school was a place for learning, that teachers were to help them, and that their duty was to respect their teachers. They acted unquestionably on the advice of parents and teachers alike, and the latter spoke highly of most of them. The general feeling among teachers was that Asian children were model pupils, against which Australian children compared unfavourably. Only the physical education teachers disagreed. A senior physical education summed up: “Asian kids obey the rules, participate in all activities but they are not in our team games. All our sports stars are the Aussie kids”.

Typical comments of teachers about Chinese-Australian children were very positive. Chi Chen’s teachers gave almost identical comments:

He is bright and capable.... He wavers up and down depending upon his interest in the topic. Like the company of low achievers and sometimes wastes time but always gets high marks-maths teacher.

His standard of work is extremely high, well above the year standard. He works without seeking attention. His presentation of work is excellent. He is self-motivated and achievement-oriented-science teacher.

He works at A level. He is inclined to be talkative but still works well. In class he asks questions which are very intelligent and analytical-Japanese teacher.

He is an A-grade student and works well in all situations. Always aims at a perfect score. In class he sits next to the average ability Anglo-Australian boys at the back. Perhaps so as not to be seen as too conformist. His performance in class is outstanding.-English teachers.

He participates in all activities and enjoys sports-physical education teacher Hongzia’s maths teacher commented about her:

Hongzia is a perfectionist. She cannot accept anything less than hundred per cent. She has got to understand that seventy or seventy five per cent also is a good score. This end of term test she stuffed badly. She got fifty five per cent marks, which is a C grade. She was shattered. But during the term she had worked hard and still ended up with B grade. She is not naturally talented but she is one of those who work hard. I believe as the difficulty of the work increases Hongzia will experience problems in being anything less than top in the class. If things don't go her way then others have to put up with the 'shit'. I really wonder how many friends in school Hongzia would have. I suspect none.

Victor's English teacher gave a similar description about his positive attitude. (He is) very keen to do well, very attentive but rarely asks questions in class. I praise this delightful student who is friendly, very polite, organised, prepared and willing to learn. His manners and level of maturity set a fine example for the others to follow. He has a wonderful effect on other students near him. Some slightly silly and immature behaviour from certain students diminishes when Victor worked in the group.

In classrooms, unless teachers enforced a seating arrangement, Chinese-Australian boys and girls mixed very little with Anglo-Australians. Whenever there was a single Chinese-Australian pupil in class, he or she tended to sit alone or

at the front of the class. Except for Hongzia and Chi Chen, during lesson time none of them asked questions but all of them listened attentively. They were never disruptive. This is not to say all Chinese-Australian students at Paramount Senior High were paragons of schoolroom morality, for outside my small sample there were a few non-conformists some of whom caused teachers to get upset, if not outright angry. At one stage a teacher sent a Chinese-Australian student out of his class and scolded him. "You should be thankful to be here. You shut up and listen to what I tell you".

The school system tends to favour the Chinese-Australian children because with their positive attitude toward schooling and 'docile disposition' (Ho, 1994) they impress their teachers who interact with them in a warm and positive manner. Thus, the culture of the Chinese-Australian homes tends to match the culture of the school which is not quite the case in Anglo-Australian homes (Malik, 2000). Chinese-Australian children have a dual advantage: academically supportive homes and teachers who reward students who follow the rules of classroom and try hard. With their docile dispositions (mainly attributed to their home life) these academically-oriented students tended to get favourable attention from their teachers because they were distinctively competitive, hard working, enthusiastic and pleasure to teach. It was their conformity to authority of teachers at school, that contributed considerably to their higher educational achievements. As a group,

Chinese-Australian students in this study were punctual, had a very low rate of absenteeism, were not reported for misbehaviour, were regular users of libraries, laboratories and computers, were not involved in serious anti-social behaviour like vandalism and took their schoolwork seriously.

Discussion

There is compelling evidence from these families that the family life of Chinese-Australian families was structured; parents organised their life-style around the education of their children; guided their children to certain career paths; were less satisfied with their children's performance even if they got 'A grade'; were very involved with their children's homework; were regular, rigid, and task-oriented in their children's educational activities and provided stable home learning environment. Customarily, activities taking place in Chinese-Australian homes were related to the education of their children. Parents hold high expectations and set high goals for their children and remain physically and emotionally involved with them. Regular family discussions on educational matters and career pathways have a modelling effect. The key feature of these families was that parental involvement in their children's school-related activities remained high throughout the high school time of their children. The latter obliged their parents by working hard at schoolwork. Their children internalised their parents' values and took their schoolwork seriously.

Peng (1995, p. 172) noted similar pattern about the Asian-American students. The socialisation of Asian-American students follows a complex interpersonal process that transforms into intrapersonal one. The need for approval through doing well becomes internalised, though children are typically unaware of the process.

The pathways Chinese-Australian families choose to motivate their children is partly based on their cultural values which emphasise scholastic excellence, and partly on their own experience in their native countries as well as in the host country. This investigation lends support to Takanishi's hypothesis (1990, p.359) which states that the children of parents who were middle class professionals but in the host country own small businesses are likely to have the attitudes and values that place great emphasis on educational and economic success. Gibson (1987, p. 273) made similar observation: "Parents of immigrant children are more willing to work hard at low paying jobs and to endure prejudice because from their perspective there will be return from their investment". The folk theory (Ogbu, 1987) to success of these Chinese-Australian families appeared to have its roots in their cultural values which emphasise impulse control, deferment of short term gratification, effort and scholastic achievement. Ogbu's (1987) *cultural thesis* purports that the Asian minority groups are voluntary immigrants. They perceive their social identity as primarily different from the social identity of

the dominant society. Initially, the immigrants tend to accept the dominant group's folk theory of getting ahead with the belief that they can get ahead through hard work, school success and individual ability.

Coming from the large urban cities, with middle class values and with ancient culture which traditionally has valued education, Chinese-Australian parents gave secondary importance to their own interests and saw the vision of social mobility through their children by encouraging them to work hard at school to get good grades in order to facilitate their entry to tertiary institutions to pursue professional degrees.

Even though the *migrant drive* (Smolicz and Wiseman, 1971, p. 8) was noticeable in these four families, they tended to achieve such goals through *acculturation without assimilation* (Gibson, 1983) or *alteration model* (Ogbu, 1984). According to this model while immigrants may not give up their benefits and practices they strive to play the classroom game by the rules and try to overcome all kinds of difficulties in school because they believe so strongly that there will be a pay off later. It is, perhaps, this belief system which explains parents' strong involvement with their children and their protection strategies from the peer group influence. Parents in these families acted strongly to overcome their children's initial problems, adjust socially and motivate them to take schoolwork seriously. In each family children were guided and encouraged to develop good academic habits

and perseverance, and their children obliged parents with good grades.

Conclusion

To sum up, in their drive for academic excellence Chinese-Australian parents pushed their children far beyond their limits. They made their homes suitable for studying and ensured there was continuity between homes and school. The mental illness of Lee Kok and occasional depression of Hongzia Kwang were stress-related problems caused by such very demanding homes. On the positive side, Chinese-Australian parents succeeded in converting average children into high achievers. At school, Chinese-Australian children fitted the stereotype models of their teachers who consequently interacted with them in a more positive warm way. Chinese-Australian parents appeared to guide their children *by holding the hand* (Stigler and Stevenson, 1990).

It is hard to say whether the folk theory to success in education of Chinese-Australian families has its origin in their experiences in Australia or whether they brought these values with them. Values such as impulse control (e.g. not to question parents' authority), deferment of short term gratification (e.g. no part-time work, no intimate friends of opposite sex), effort (e.g. we are new to the country we must work hard to establish ourselves), and scholastic achievement (e.g. with Australian education you can get good job) can be attributed to the Chinese cultural values as much as

parents' perceptions of opportunities for their children in Australia. This approach appears to have its origin partly in parents' cultural values, and partly in their own and their children's experiences in the host society.

Teachers' comments on students' reports indicate that the former make higher evaluations and give greater pedagogic commitment to those students whose academic and social behaviour is closest to the classroom standards and rules set by them. Some of the most common behavioural signals teachers expect to see pupils give are quiet social interactions, ask questions, participate in class activities, be obedient, respect their authority, use standard English when speaking, accept personal responsibility for their actions, perform the given tasks and actively and harmoniously interact with others in classroom. Chinese-Australian students meet most of these demands. Consequently, their teachers interact with them in more positive ways.

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