

Unexpected destinations: Exploring the college-preparation experiences of Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant families

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Abstract:

My dissertation explores the college-preparation experiences of Chinese- and Taiwanese-immigrant families and their navigation of the U.S. university admission system. This one-year ethnographic study employs qualitative methods to provide a detailed narrative of college-preparation experiences within 11 families-- including 30 participants (11 high school seniors and their immigrant parents). This study treats navigating the admission process as an arena for complex encounters among family members' longing and belonging, perceptions of the US educational opportunities, and parent-child negotiations in matriculation decision processes (Wu, 2012). By utilizing the theoretical lens of "diaspora" (Lukose, 2007), this research shifts to a more dynamic, context-specific process of cultural production—challenging the unilinear assimilation assumption defining the "model minority" ideology.

Through an ethnographic approach, I aim for a thorough cultural analysis of these immigrant families' college-preparation process. Reaching a deep cultural understanding of their educational experiences will demonstrate the complexities of their academic achievement patterns and trajectories. This echoes what Pollock (2008) claims: "from shallow to deep" cultural analysis of the social processes, parent-child interactions and their real-life practices can discount an oversimplified explanation of a specific ethnic group's educational achievement.

Preliminary findings suggest: First, parents and children interact with "tiger mom-like" stories in their communities, which influence current parenting styles to focus on children's well-being, instead of achievement. Second, the differing economic vitality between the US and China impacts the perceptions of both parent and child-- specific to college major choice, future job chances and the family discourse in the matriculation decision. Third, the disqualification of obtaining need-based financial aid adversely affects students' matriculation decisions, such as deciding to attend in-state public universities instead of attending private or out-of-state institutions. Also, it shapes family discourses of student and home mortgage loans, and parents' retirement planning-- such as parents' consideration of returning back to their homeland.

Reference

Lukose, R. (2007). The difference that diaspora makes: Thinking through the anthropology of immigrant education in the United States. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 38(4), 405-418.

Pollock, M. (2008). From shallow to deep: Toward a thorough cultural analysis of school achievement patterns. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 39(4), 369-380.

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