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La réussite éducative des élèves issus de l'immigration : regards contrastés

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### Résumé de l'article

Dans la littérature académique, peu d'attention a été accordée aux écoles ethniques complémentaires, surtout dans un contexte non ou peu anglophone comme le Québec et la Flandre. Cependant, elles jouent un rôle important dans la compréhension de l'influence des structures sociales ethniques sur l'intégration et la réussite scolaire des élèves issus de l'immigration. Dans une perspective comparative, cet article se concentre sur le rôle que jouent les écoles de langue chinoise en répondant aux besoins éducatifs des élèves d'origine chinoise. Nos données proviennent d'observations ethnographiques et d'entretiens semi-directifs réalisés au sein d'écoles ethniques complémentaires au Québec et en Flandres. Les résultats indiquent que l'impact des structures sociales ethniques sur le vécu scolaire des élèves issus de l'immigration ou des minorités est lié au profil de la communauté ethnique ainsi qu'à l'environnement socioéconomique et politique plus large de la société d'accueil.

# Comparing Supplementary Ethnic Schools and the Academic Achievement of Chinese Immigrant Students in Quebec and Flanders

Étude comparative des écoles ethniques complémentaires et la réussite scolaire des immigrants chinois au Québec et en Flandres

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**ABSTRACT** ■ Supplementary or extra-curricular ethnic schools have been neglected in the research literature, especially in non-English speaking contexts such as Quebec and Flanders. Yet they are important for understanding the influence of ethnic social structures on the educational integration and academic achievement of immigrant students. From a comparative perspective, this paper focuses on the response of Chinese language schools to the educational needs of Chinese youth. Data were collected through ethnographic observations in Chinese schools in Quebec and Flanders,<sup>1</sup> as well as in semi-structured interviews with students of Chinese origin, their parents, and school personnel. The findings demonstrate that the influence of ethnic social structures on the progression of minority/immigrant students through schooling is related to the particular profile of their ethnic community, as well as to the larger socio-economic and political environment of the host society.

**RÉSUMÉ** ■ Dans la littérature académique, peu d'attention a été accordée aux écoles ethniques complémentaires, surtout dans un contexte non ou peu anglophone comme le Québec et la Flandre. Cependant, elles jouent un rôle important dans la compréhension de l'influence des structures sociales ethniques sur l'intégration et la réussite scolaire des élèves issus de l'immigration. Dans une perspective comparative, cet article se concentre sur le rôle que jouent les écoles de langue chinoise en répondant aux besoins éducatifs des élèves d'origine chinoise. Nos données proviennent d'observations ethnographiques et d'entretiens semi-directifs réalisés au sein d'écoles ethniques complémentaires au Québec et en Flandres. Les résultats indiquent que l'impact des structures sociales ethniques sur le vécu scolaire des élèves issus de l'immigration

ou des minorités est lié au profil de la communauté ethnique ainsi qu'à l'environnement socioéconomique et politique plus large de la société d'accueil.

**KEYWORDS** ■ Ethnicity, social structures, culture, supplementary schooling.

**MOTS CLÉS** ■ Ethnicité, structures sociales, culture, écoles complémentaires.

## Background

In international literature on minorities and education, the Chinese community has often been perceived as a 'success story' of economic and educational integration (Chao 1996; Francis and Archer 2005; Kao 1995; Song and Wang 2004; Zhou and Kim 2006). In different Western societies, for example in Belgium and Canada, even in spite of social class, many Chinese immigrant pupils are found to be highly successful in their studies, their success often translating into greater economic mobility (Song and Wang 2004; Mc Andrew *et al.* 2009; Zhou and Kim 2006; Pang 2001). In many studies, differences between ethnic groups have been attributed to cultural traits and distinct behavioural patterns,<sup>2</sup> as well as to broader social structural factors<sup>3</sup> (Zhou and Kim 2006). Seeking to explain the relative educational achievements of Chinese minority youth in the U.S., Zhou and Kim have proposed an alternative framework that attempts to overcome what has become a common theoretical dichotomy between culture and structure (Zhou and Kim 2006). They have done so by focusing on specific ethnic communities, and in particular on the role and function of after-school institutions among Chinese immigrants. According to these authors, Chinese language schools established worldwide by the Chinese Diaspora – for example in Quebec and Flanders – reflect ways in which various Chinese communities use their cultural and human capital as community strengths within dominant society and mainstream institutions, including in the general educational system of the host society. The international literature identifies a whole range of purposes and benefits of ethnic supplementary schools that can directly or indirectly influence how minority children move through mainstream schools (Archer *et al.* 2009; Francis *et al.* 2010; Creese *et al.* 2006; Portes and Kelly 2008; Reay and Mirza 1997; Strand 2007; Zhou and Kim 2006; Zhou and Li 2003). Most Chinese schools primarily focus on language education by teaching the mother tongue and community languages. These produce many positive impacts on children's learning abilities, as will be discussed later in this article. Other purposes and benefits include

after-school care for working families, the preservation of cultural heritage, the provision and maintenance of social ties, the elaboration of a safe space free from racism where youth may negotiate ethnic and pupil identities, and the provision of supplementary support with respect to mainstream education.

However, the ways in which these ethnic language schools are able to contribute to general educational achievement depend substantially on the political, economic and social context in which these institutions function. Therefore a comparative analysis of the Chinese supplementary educational system in to contexts of the Diaspora is quite valuable. In this paper, we draw our attention to such systems in Flanders and Quebec, first tracing the development of Chinese supplementary education in terms of organizational structure and learning content. We then compare its purpose as an ethnic social structure to promote the school success of Chinese youth, which leads us to focus on different dimensions of learning that occur within these: language, culture, identity, formal support systems, social support and peer influence, and interactions with the host society. We argue that the influence of ethnic social structures on the progression of minority/immigrant students through mainstream schooling is related to the distinct profile of their ethnic communities, as well as to the larger socioeconomic and political environment of the host society.

## **Methodology**

The research was conducted with the participation of members from five different Chinese schools in two different sites. Three are located in Montreal (Canada), a city in which nearly 80% of Quebec's total Chinese population resides (MICC 2010). The other two schools are situated in two major cities in Flanders (Belgium). Both Flemish cities include a very large and diverse immigrant population and are host to two of the largest Chinese communities in Flanders, motivating our choice to focus on these.

In Flanders, the Chinese schools were either Mandarin-based or offered both Mandarin and Cantonese language education. In Montreal, only Mandarin-based schools were selected for this research, as these are more frequented by the established Canadian-Chinese community.<sup>4</sup> Three specific schools in the Greater Montreal Area (GMA) were chosen for their relatively large size in comparison to other Chinese schools.

Data were collected through ethnographic methods, in Flanders over a period of three years and in Montreal over a period of one. In both areas, the research methods included repeated individual semi-structured and in-depth interviews with school personnel (Montreal: n=10, Flanders:

n=11), pupils (Montreal: n=17, Flanders: n=26) and parents (Montreal: n=10, Flanders: n=21), as well as ethnographic observation and note-taking during lessons and break times within the selected schools and at pupils' homes. In Flanders, two additional focus group discussions were held with teachers, while in Montreal a form of participant observation was conducted by assisting teachers, giving lectures, and interacting with attendees of conferences and seminars. Field notes were taken both during observations and through reflecting on events directly after the observation (Carspecken 1996). In the interviews and group discussions, pupils, parents and school staff were asked about their experiences with the Chinese supplementary educational system and about their perceptions of its objectives, benefits and actual contributions to the promotion of general educational attainment. All interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

All the pupils interviewed were between 13 and 19 years old. Fifteen of them were boys and 28 were girls. In Flanders, the majority (80%) were Belgian-born Chinese, and of the remaining six pupils, four were born in Mainland China and two in other Western European countries. Comparable to the sample in Flanders, only four students in Montreal were foreign born. The total parent sample consisted of twenty mothers and ten fathers. In Flanders, fourteen of these were born in Mainland China, six in Hong Kong and one in Malaysia, while in Montreal all were from Mainland China. In terms of social class, 48% of the interviewed parents in Flanders were small business owners (shop and restaurant keepers), 19% were employees of some sort, 19% could be categorized as manual labourers and another 9.5% were unemployed. In the case of Montreal, three of the parents were convenience store owners, three were professionals, two were manual labourers, and another two were unemployed. The total teacher sample (n=21) included five male and sixteen female instructors, of whom the majority was born in Mainland China. Of the Flemish teacher respondents, 27% were business owners, another 27% were employees of some sort, one teacher was a manual labourer, another a Protestant vicar, and three were unemployed. Of the Canadian teachers, two were university students, three were professionals, and one was otherwise unemployed.

In the Quebec context, interviews were mainly conducted in Mandarin, though some students were interviewed in French. By contrast, in Flanders interviews were largely conducted in Dutch and a small portion of parents and teachers were interviewed in English. Most of the quotations that are used here derive from the interviews and have thus been translated to English from Dutch, Mandarin, or French. A social constructive perspective (Burr 1995) is applied to the data. Content and Foucauldian analyses

are then applied to examine how Chinese language schools react to the treatment of Chinese immigrants by mainstream society, as well as how these institutions shape ethnic boundaries (Foucault 1971, 1980; Francis 1999). All the interviewees and schools involved in this study have been assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

## **The Development of Supplementary Educational Systems**

### *The Quebec Case*

The history of Chinese supplementary education in Quebec dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, when missionaries from the Montreal Presbyterian Church opened the first Chinese Sunday School. Their initial aim was to teach English to newly arriving Chinese immigrants and to teach Chinese to the Canadian-born Chinese (Wang 2003). During this period of particular discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society,<sup>5</sup> Chinese language schools developed slowly alongside ethnic churches. Not until the 1980s, with China's Reform and Opening-Up Policy, which resulted in the increase of economic exchange with the outside world, were many Chinese language schools founded in Montreal, responding to an increased demand to learn the language. Today, these ethnic institutions have evolved into a comprehensive supplementary education system that is not limited to the function of linguistic affiliation and cultural maintenance. According to classified websites such as the *Chinese Yellow Pages* (<http://www.cn411.ca>, [www.mtl163.com](http://www.mtl163.com) and <http://www.xosearch.com>), there are now more than 30 ethnic educational institutions in the GMA. Most of these are non-profit organizations that charge about \$100-\$150 as annual tuition fees. Donations and fundraising activities are the main sources of operating budgets for these schools. Only a few establishments are for-profit, in which tuition may vary depending on the type of program, ranging from \$100 to \$500 per semester. Summer camps and intensive programs can cost as high as \$1000 per summer (usually for one and a half months). The majority of these schools are located in downtown Montreal and the neighbouring district known as Chinatown, while a smaller number of more newly-funded schools are located in Brossard and the West Island.

Most Chinese language schools in Montreal aim not only to maintain or promote Chinese language and culture, but also to meet the educational needs and to foster the academic achievement of immigrant children. Older schools usually operate on weekends, while the newer schools tend to have daily programs. In addition to Chinese language courses, the majority of these schools also provide cultural enrichment classes, such

as Chinese handicrafts, classic Chinese painting, and Kung Fu. These courses are offered not only to Chinese immigrant children, but also to people from other ethnic groups. In order to assist new arrivals to become acclimatized to Quebec society, some schools also offer courses in Western cultural heritage, such as pastries and baking, Christmas card-making, and Western etiquette. Furthermore, some schools encourage Chinese parents to participate in mainstream activities, such as offering exhibits for Saint Jean-Baptist Day. Nonetheless, the most popular programs are official language teaching and after-school tutoring. Almost every school offers French and English classes aimed at new arrivals, including international students, in addition to immigrant adults and children. Regarding classes in academic tutoring, most of these schools offer French, Mathematics, and Sciences, and all of these courses are taught in French. More than two thirds of these schools also offer programs to prepare for things like high school admission exams. In order to be enrolled in the city's top high schools, many Chinese students are registered in such programs by their parents as of Grade 5.

### *The Flemish Case*

Unlike the Quebec case, in Flanders the set-up of a Chinese supplementary educational system only dates back to the early 1980s. In 1982, a Chinese Protestant missionary opened the first Chinese language school in Flanders, and in 1985 a large Chinese association also began to organize Chinese language courses during after-school hours. Both language institutions were set up with an explicit cultural agenda of preserving the Chinese language (Cantonese and/or Mandarin), as well as with transmitting aspects of China's cultural history to second generation Chinese youth living in Flanders. However, the schools struggled with lack of resources and registration, as well as encountering difficulties in finding suitable staff. Therefore, in 1994 the Chinese association decided to end its own classes and to found a new Chinese school in close collaboration with a Chinese women's association. As a direct result, the Chinese Protestant Church ended its offering of Chinese classes, sending its pupils to the newly established school. This school now consists of approximately 200 students, mainly coming from within the district, but also from other more distant Flemish provinces, with a small minority of pupils travelling from as far as Holland. Nevertheless, for many Chinese families the distance between their home and the Chinese School, together with scheduling constraints presented by their professional commitments, hampered the participation of their children in the Chinese classes. For those reasons, in 1997 another non-profit Chinese organization decided



to establish a second Chinese school in another Flemish province. Eventually, a third one followed in yet another province in 2003. Unlike Montreal, which currently counts more than thirty Chinese educational institutions, Flanders only has three Chinese schools. All of these are non-profit organizations whose financial resources mainly draw on the annual tuition fees of pupils, which for each student amounts to approximately \$128. The student population in the schools vary between 100 and 200.

In contrast to the situation in Montreal, the Chinese supplementary educational system in Flanders is exclusively aimed at preserving the Chinese language and cultural heritage in the second and succeeding generations. The institutions are primarily engaged in teaching the Chinese language (Cantonese and/or Standard Mandarin) and are not directly concerned with facilitating socioeconomic integration or fostering the academic achievement of Chinese pupils in mainstream education. All three schools operate on Wednesday afternoons and on Saturdays. Whereas two schools exhibit an open-door policy, which means that they also allow native Belgian children to attend classes, one school is directed exclusively to ethnic Chinese pupils or those from mixed marriages involving at least one Chinese parent.

### **The Role of Ethnic Supplementary Schools in the Academic Achievement of Chinese Youth**

#### *Maintenance and Reinforcement of Ethnic Identity through the Transmission of Language and Culture*

The original purpose of most Chinese supplementary schools in Quebec and in Flanders, especially the ones that operate on a non-profit basis, was to perpetuate the Chinese language (Cantonese and/or Putonghua, which is also known as Standard Mandarin) and culture among foreign-born and foreign-raised Chinese youth. In Quebec, under Bill 101, Chinese immigrant children are obligated to attend mainstream schools in French, whereas in the formal Flemish educational system the language of instruction is exclusively Dutch. Most Chinese parents see the mastery of the host language as an important pre-requisite to their integration into the dominant society. However, according to our research data, in Montreal a relatively small portion of Chinese parents can converse in French. In Flanders the picture is slightly different, given that a considerable number of the parent interviews were held in Dutch. In most of those cases, at least one parent in a family had basic knowledge of the Dutch language, except for those immigrants who had most recently arrived. However, in



both contexts, many of the Chinese children, as well as their parents expressed the pragmatic need to bridge a significant language gap, given that most children encounter a loss of proficiency in Chinese. In combination with low proficiency in French or Dutch on the part of parents, this often constitutes an important barrier in parent-teen communication, especially with regards to school-related topics. In some extreme cases, family members have to choose a third language for communication at home, such as English. Attending a Chinese school allows Chinese youth to maintain or improve their knowledge of the mother tongue and to facilitate inter-generational communication. Parents in particular consider this an essential condition in supporting and controlling the children in their regular studies.

Furthermore, with the increased economic impact of China in the international arena, many parents increasingly perceive speaking Chinese (i.e. Mandarin in particular), as a valuable skillset for their children's future careers. In Flanders, this belief is underscored as more and more mainstream schools currently offer Chinese as an extra-curricular or even optional subject within the formal curriculum. We also found that Chinese teachers made repeated references to “economic rationales” or motivations (Francis *et al.* 2010) with regards to the benefits of Chinese schooling.

Yet, mastery of the Chinese language provides more than merely instrumental benefits such as the support of “inter-generational communication” and “a credential” in competitive global labour markets. The transmission of culture appears to be an indirect benefit of learning Chinese and attending Chinese schools (Chow 2004; Francis *et al.* 2009; Francis *et al.* 2010; Zhou and Kim 2006). Indeed, throughout our research parents and teachers highlighted that the transmission of culture as another key purpose of Chinese schooling. In line with the findings of Francis and her colleagues (Francis *et al.* 2010), our respondents often referred to ‘Chinese culture’ as a kind of fixed package of traditional stories, legends, handicrafts, customs, knowledge of historical facts, and celebrations. In this regard, as described above, many schools in Montreal provide additional cultural enrichment lessons and activities to both Chinese and Western audiences. Some of these schools even offer courses in the history of China. In the Chinese schools in Flanders, the perpetuation of culture occurs in a more indirect way through the method of language teaching. However, as is the case in Montreal, teachers and personnel also often celebrate Chinese traditional holidays with their students, and encourage pupils to attend summer camps in China, which is considered by some to be part of their Chinese upbringing. In addition to the provision of this vast package of cultural elements, parents and

teachers in both contexts repeatedly referred to the transmission of specific cultural values and behavioral norms, or in the words of Francis, to the perpetuation of “Chinese virtues” (Francis *et al.* 2010). Among the most quoted examples of this were Chinese courtesy, filial piety, respect for teachers, discipline, and especially the value of studying and working hard.

Many Chinese parents claim that their children have too much freedom in Canada or Belgium, and are therefore often disobedient, disrespectful, and even uncontrollable (Li 2001). Hence, such parents hope that Chinese supplementary institutions can be used as a means of reinforcing some traditional values, such as loyalty to one’s family and obedience to authority. Although the schools may be only partly successful in this regard, important here is the way in which the Chinese parents and teachers clearly participate in a discursive (re)construction of their Chinese identity. For these people, the notion of “Chinese-ness” in general is somehow placed in opposition to “*a deficient Western Other*” (Francis *et al.* 2010: 110; See also: Anthias 2001; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). In this way, which has also been observed by Francis and her colleagues (2010), the behaviour of the Chinese pupils is either “hailed or ignored according to the extent of ‘fit’ with these constructions” of identity. Illustrative of this process is the way in which the teachers and the principals of the Chinese schools spoke to us about the Chinese pupils’ divergent behaviour at the Chinese school and in their mainstream educational institutions.

*Chinese children who behave badly at Chinese school also behave badly in their mainstream school, albeit less badly than in Chinese school and especially in comparison to their Flemish peers. It is true that most Chinese pupils are actually more “obedient” in comparison to other children” (meaning: children with other ethnic backgrounds, also White). (Principal and teacher at Chinese school, Flanders).*

This so-called ‘exemplary’ or ‘model’ behaviour of Chinese pupils in mainstream education is seen by all parties – school staff, parents, and students – as an essential part of the Chinese identity, and especially that of a Chinese learner. These actors argued that Chinese pupils behave as they do “*because they are Chinese*”, a perspective that essentializes the cultural dimension of this behavior. What is ignored in such narratives is the relatedness of the construction of the Chinese learner identity with the general expectations within dominant society and among Western teachers, in particular with regards to Chinese-ness. As Francis *et al.* (2010) would put it, such pupils encounter, a “demand for production of symmetry between body and identity”. This could explain why Chinese

pupils tend to act ‘more Chinese’ at their mainstream schools than they actually do in their own ethnic institutions, where they are seen to exhibit more ‘relaxed’ and ‘naughty’ behavior.

### ***Formal Support with Mainstream Education***

Non-native born immigrant pupils may face significant difficulties in their integration into the new school system. This is particularly the case for first generation Chinese youth in Quebec and Flanders, where the major language of schooling is either French or Dutch, which most Chinese pupils do not master upon arrival.<sup>6</sup> Due to significant language and cultural barriers, parents may also face bigger challenges in offering their children direct assistance with school assignments. Therefore, in Montreal Chinese parents often enroll their children in Chinese after-school institutions where youth benefit from services relevant to the children’s formal education. Many Chinese schools in Montreal provide special French tutoring programs for newly arrived children, as well as free lectures and conferences aimed at assisting parents in gathering essential information on school choice and processes of enrolment. The schools also offer information on high school ranking and high school entrance examination preparation programs, as a means of increasing opportunities for Chinese pupils to be enrolled in the top schools. Some schools have even developed special strategies to help their students excel in these kinds of exams. One principal was particularly proud of the contribution that his school has made in this regard:

*Many parents have a very high level of schooling, but they cannot help their kids with their schoolwork in a direct sense, because they don't speak French very well. I know a father who has a doctorate degree in Chemistry, but he can't teach his son high school Chemistry. It may sound funny, but it is the truth. If parents want to do something helpful, they have to send their kids to a school like ours. We have helped lots of kids to get into the top high schools and CEGEPs in Montreal, as well as in top universities in North America. We have numerous successful examples. We also give advice and orientation to newly arrived kids, and all of this is for free. In this respect, we have a great sense of accomplishment.*

Indeed, the Chinese schools in Montreal aim to respond to diverse needs among their clientele. For example, for pupils who face difficulties with certain subjects, most schools offer either one-on-one tutoring or small class tutoring services, depending on the nature of the problems encountered. For those students who already excel in school, these schools additionally provide advanced courses in various subjects, as well as programs to help such pupils excel in all kinds of contests, such as in

Mathematics or Chemistry tournaments, in order to provide them with extra credentials that could benefit their application for a scholarship or university entrance.

However, the Chinese language schools in Flanders do not offer any tutoring courses. According to the personnel that we interviewed, there are various reasons for this difference. First, it is important to bear in mind that many Chinese parents in Flanders are restaurant owners and thus have very limited possibilities to transport their children to and from classes. In order to take into account the work schedule of these parents, but equally their financial limitations, schools can only organize classes during three hours of the day. Within this amount of time, they could not teach anything else but Chinese. Second, for many teachers it would be simply impossible to teach other courses than Chinese, due to their minimal proficiency in Dutch and time limitations related to the fact that they all teach voluntarily. Finally, in the opinion of some school personnel, Chinese children are doing quite well in the Flemish educational system, which in the opinion of personnel would suggest no need for supplementary tutoring. It is important to note here that the Flemish educational design is very different from the Canadian, in the sense that the latter represents a much more competitive system. In Flanders, students do not need to excel in high school in order to be admitted to high-ranked universities; almost any secondary education diploma gives access to any university or scholarship. Prior research has nonetheless shown that several Chinese pupils encounter difficulties at school, and more importantly, that many Chinese parents look for private teachers in order to overcome this problem (Braeye and Hermans 2011). Some parents even start searching for extra-curricular tutoring upon enrolling their child in primary school, just *in case* the child should encounter difficulties in the future. This trend might have a transnational dimension, as it coincides substantially with the developments in China and Hong Kong, where supplementary education has become a very lucrative and booming business due to increasing competition in the local job market. Nevertheless, the narratives of Chinese parents reveal yet another important reason for the desire to make their children perform well or even excel educationally, be it through private tutoring or not. Many Chinese parents in Belgium, and sometimes also their children, believe that because of their minority status, they have to overcompensate in order to be treated as equal, especially with regards to the labour market.

*I push them to study hard, and I want them to have more diplomas, not just one. Because, you know, for you it is ok when you have one diploma, you can find a good job. But for us, we need more. When the boss can choose between a Belgian and a Chinese person with one diploma, he will choose the Belgian.*

*That is what I think and what I hear from friends and family. So, we need to have more, very good grades and more diplomas.* (Chinese mother, Flanders)

### **Social Support and Peer Influence**

For many Chinese immigrant parents in Quebec and to a lesser extent also in Flanders, communicating with formal schools is a big challenge due to their low French or Dutch proficiency. For that reason, most Chinese schools in Montreal offer free translation services. For example, when parents receive a letter from a French school, they can bring it to the Chinese school in which their children are enrolled and the staff there can usually help them with the translation. Some schools even write letters or make telephone calls to French schools for Chinese parents. Furthermore, several offer counseling and psychological services to pupils who have difficulties, as well as advice for the Chinese parents on parenting. Some teachers even take on a mediation role between pupils and their parents in situations of conflict. All of the above-mentioned services facilitate not only parental involvement in the formal educational system, but also in the process of adaptation to a new school environment for newly arrived immigrant children. The following quote is illustrative:

*The kids in my class always tell me what happened to them in the formal public school, but they never talk about that to their parents. So their parents often phone me to ask their situation in school or ask me to talk to them about their school life. There is a generation gap between the kids and their parents, because the kids have grown up. I know them very well, and we are like friends, and they trust me. For example, when some kids have been absent from school, and their parents wanted to know the reason, the kids would not say anything because they don't think their parents would understand. In this case, the parents would give me a call and ask me to talk to their kids. I am not only their teacher, but also their friend. They trust me.* (Hope Chinese School, Montreal)

Despite the fact that the Chinese schools in Flanders do not provide translation services, our research data show that teachers and personnel in the Flemish Chinese schools equally take on an encouraging role *vis-à-vis* Chinese pupils and their parents, albeit in a more informal fashion. For example, the pupils were described as sometimes speaking with the teachers about the difficulties they encounter at their mainstream school, to which teachers would respond by giving advice and orientation. Furthermore, some school personnel spoke about giving advice on parenting and educating children to Chinese parents, even though parents do not necessarily follow the given advice. One Chinese principal in

Flanders claimed that she routinely dissuades parents from calling in private tutors before evidence of need; she argued that children should work hard in class – not afterwards – and ask their regular teachers for help if necessary. However, many parents continue to do so and start searching for private tutoring at the beginning of primary school, regardless of the child's actual performance in school.

In general, immigrant parents often face difficulties in forming tight networks with other adults, and there might also be a cultural gap between foreign-born parents and their native-born children (Zhou 1997). Supplementary educational institutions can make an important contribution in overcoming these difficulties and gaps, as these institutions become physical sites where formerly unrelated immigrants come to socialize and rebuild social ties (Zhou and Kim 2006). Through these, Chinese parents also share information about their children's education, although this sharing often goes hand in hand with comparison and competition, which become motivations for parents to encourage or even pressure their children in their academic studies.

For many Chinese youth in both contexts, after-school institutions serve a vital role in forming and developing co-ethnic peer networks. More specifically, these schools provide a pleasant ambience (see also Strand 2007) and a social environment for Chinese pupils to socialize with their co-ethnic peers who have similar experiences. Unlike in mainstream schools, these schools provide a "safe space" where pupils can express their identity without fear of being rejected or mocked (Francis *et al.* 2009; Zhou and Kim 2006). Some students specified that the ethnic homogeneity of the student population in the schools is behind the good atmosphere they feel there. According to these youth, they form a cohesive group because of their shared ethnic background. This is in contrast with the situation in Flemish schools, where more cliques were observed, often based on ethnic origin and between, sometimes leading to conflict. In Montreal, the peer networking is especially important for newly arrived pupils. Not only do they share information on French public schools, but also on study strategies and test-taking techniques, as well as helping one another with school assignments.

Furthermore, aiming to encourage and set role models for current students, some Chinese schools in Montreal provide free conferences given by young Chinese adults who became enrolled in top high schools or top universities in North America, as well as those who have obtained scholarships. The parents of these young role models would also be invited to give speeches on their parenting experiences. According to our observations, the parents attending these conferences often exchanged phone numbers or emails for further contact. In this fashion, these activities



serve to form and develop social capital for both Chinese immigrant children and their parents. At the same time, within the Chinese community pupils often use competition as a means for motivation, by seeking to perform better than their peers as a means of honoring one's parents.

### *Interaction with the Host Society*

Most Chinese schools in Montreal have an additional shared objective, which is to help Chinese immigrant families better integrate into mainstream Canadian society by teaching Western culture and encouraging them to participate in mainstream activities. These lessons and activities offer opportunities for immigrant families to interact with mainstream Quebec society.

*We have stimulated Chinese kids and their parents to participate in many mainstream activities so that they can have a sense of belonging. You know when you participate in a demonstration team on St. Jean-Baptist Day, you don't feel that you are an immigrant any more, you are one of them. We also organize discussions about faith and beliefs, for example on the differences between Oriental and Occidental culture, values and educational ideology.*  
(Maple Chinese School, Montreal)

According to Chinese school personnel and students we interviewed in Montreal, the Chinese community is identified as “culturally inassimilable” by mainstream Quebec society. The common perception is that most Chinese people do not want to learn French or make friends with *Québécois* (as people originating from Quebec are known). To change this impression, efforts have been made by Chinese schools to connect with mainstream communities and to encourage Chinese families to reach out to the larger Quebec society.

In Flanders, however, the Chinese schools do not offer programs or activities aimed at sharing culture and values with Flemish society. As mentioned above, this is partly due to insufficient financial resources. Interesting to note though, is that two of the three Chinese schools in Flanders now focus increasingly on offering the Chinese language and culture to a Belgian public, instead of uniquely to Chinese youth. Whereas in the past these schools were only aimed at the second generation Chinese immigrants, two schools currently show a more open-door policy by also allowing enrollment by Flemish pupils. This, together with the fact that these same schools are hosted in mainstream Flemish school buildings, reveals that the Chinese community in Flanders is also willing to reach out to dominant Flemish society, albeit without necessarily giving up its ‘Chinese identity’.



## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The central aim of this paper has been to develop a wider understanding of ethnic supplementary education and its influence on the educational attainment of Chinese immigrant students through a comparative analysis of two major contexts: Quebec and Flanders. Our data allowed for an in-depth analysis of the services offered by extra-curricular Chinese schools and for the identification of a range of contributions that these schools make to the educational integration of Chinese immigrant students. The Chinese schools in Montreal clearly represent a main source of capital for Chinese families through their formal, institutionalized support system. Meanwhile, in Flanders the support occurs on a more informal and indirect basis, as a sort of unintended consequence. However, throughout the text, we have highlighted further possible advantages of Chinese schooling, such as the transmission of ethnic language and culture, which not only generates instrumental benefits such as extra credentials and improved inter-generational communication, but also the development of an ethnic learner identity that can promote educational success. In Quebec and in Flanders, the Chinese schools also represent important sites for the provision of social networks and support, and especially in Canada, for interaction with mainstream society.

Although there are many similarities between both contexts researched, throughout the study substantial differences also appeared and are worth critical analysis. Most of these differences result from the divergent profiles of the Chinese communities between Quebec and Flanders, as well as from the specific socioeconomic and political contexts of these host societies.

The migration history of Quebec is quite different from that of Flanders. Canada has a very long history of immigration, starting with the New World expeditions centuries ago. The first steps to the implementation of a multiculturalist policy were taken in the 1960s, culminating in the “Multiculturalism Act” of 1988. Moreover, still today Canada is politically committed to the active recruitment and selection of immigrants. In Belgium, it was only after WWII that the government actively started recruiting a foreign workforce for local industries. It was, however, believed that the presence of these migrants would only be temporary; they were called ‘guest workers’. Only in the 1980s, when these workers remained as residents, were the country’s first immigrant policies developed.

In general, both Flanders and Quebec have experienced extensive immigration and multilingual practices, and both have adopted multicultural policies, albeit not to the same extent. Quebec has developed a vaster expertise in matters of integration and inter-cultural relations (Mc Andrew

2012), as well as a general openness to multiculturalism. For example, despite the obligation of the dominant tongue as the language of instruction in education in both contexts (French in Quebec, Dutch in Flanders), Quebec also offers a Heritage Language Teaching Program (PELO) in mainstream schools. The program is nevertheless poorly developed, mainly due to resistance on the part of some teachers (Mc Andrew 2012). In Flanders, similar initiatives (OECT) have emerged, but most either died a quiet death or were politically brought to an end more recently by the Flemish Ministry of Education. Therefore, Chinese parents in both Quebec and Flanders are likely to send their children to Chinese supplementary schools in order to learn Chinese.

Besides language policies, socioeconomic factors also play an important role here. Chinese immigrants in both Quebec and Flanders have been confronted with diverse individual and systemic barriers leading to exclusion from the official labour market, such as language difficulties, lack of experience, non-recognition or devaluation of their credentials/work experience, and discrimination. In both contexts, many have therefore experienced downward social mobility and exhibit a lower social status than previously in China. Yet, in general, those in Quebec tend to have a more diversified socioeconomic background due to the selective Canadian immigration policy. For example, even among the first generation, a majority of those who have worked or have been trained in the field of technology (i.e. computer sciences, engineers, biomedical sciences, etc...) or in the trades are able to find professional jobs. In Flanders, however, immigrants have never been 'selected' as such. Of first generation Chinese, many are small and independent entrepreneurs who do not generally compete for jobs in the formal labour market. Notably, many have worked as professionals in their country of origin, or received a degree in higher education in China. Once in Belgium, many feel that they were 'forced' to work in the catering business. This nevertheless represents a highly accessible niche sector that has enabled them to become economically independent (Liu Huang 2008). In a period of 30 years, the Chinese in Belgium have managed to improve their economic and social position, in spite of relatively low education standing among the first generation that was compounded by poverty and often discrimination.

Furthermore, the Chinese community in Quebec is much older and larger than in Flanders, and is mainly concentrated in Montreal, where it has established a mature institutionalized and efficient network to support its own members, including new arrivals. As one sector of diverse ethnic institutions there, Chinese language schools have become an important community resource for Chinese families. Contrary to the

Quebec case, the Chinese in Flanders live very dispersed and in this way they do not form a “visible community” that resides in specific and delineated neighborhoods. In general, the Chinese in Belgium have not received much attention in the local social and educational theory and research or the media, at least not in comparison to other ethnic minority groups who are often labelled educationally or socially problematic. As mentioned above, the Canadian educational system is more competitive compared to the Flemish one, suggesting that school personnel in the latter do not generally encounter the necessity of providing tutoring programs.

In both Quebec and Flanders, respondents also raised significant concerns about the funding of Chinese supplementary schools. For non-profit schools, especially in Flanders, the possibility of developing a more elaborate support system, with current levels of funding is still in question. In line with international literature, we believe that Chinese ethnic supplementary education has the inherent ability to play a pivotal role in the educational success of Chinese minority youth. Therefore, the issue of greater recognition of their contribution and government funding needs to be addressed. Finally, although the Chinese schools’ interaction with the host society is often still kept to a minimum and for instrumental purposes, especially in Flanders, we believe that there is great potential for a higher exchange of social, cultural, and human capital in the future. Further studies are needed, especially at a policy level, concerning the possibilities of collaboration between mainstream and ethnic supplementary school sectors aimed at promoting the academic achievement of minority students.

Finally, some Chinese parents in Quebec and in Flanders raised the issue of the foundation of a Chinese-centric school, where a full K-12 program is developed and adopted. In this fashion, they echo other examples of Arabic-speaking, Greek and Jewish communities that have established their own ethno-specific schools. Before discussing the feasibility of founding a Chinese-centric school, it is important to highlight that these above-mentioned groups seem to have a strong desire to maintain their identity, especially their religious identity. As for Chinese immigrants, especially new arrivals, most would choose to forego their preoccupations with linguistic and cultural maintenance if the reward were their effective integration into the mainstream school system.

## Notes

1. Flanders is the mainly Dutch-speaking northern part of the country of Belgium. As Quebec in Canada, Flanders is a linguistically distinct region within the larger country.
2. Many scholars relate the higher achievement of Chinese pupils to traditional Confucian principles such as work ethic, a desire to learn, respect for teachers, diligence, and so forth.
3. Examples of structural factors are: social class status, labour market conditions, residential patterns, racial/ethnic stratification, immigration selectivity and so on. (Zhou and Kim 2006).
4. Today, there are few Cantonese-based schools in Montreal because of the increase of immigrants from Mainland China, although some (less than 5) Mandarin-based schools still offer Cantonese classes.
5. From 1855 to the 1950s, Chinese immigrants experienced an era of discrimination. In this period, the government of Canada passed two immigration laws and “head tax” system to restrict and regulate Chinese immigration (Li and Lee 2005).
6. Since most Chinese immigrants have English as their second language, it might be easier for them to communicate in English.

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