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“Family Keepers” or “Career Seekers”: Understanding the Life Experiences and Educational Trajectories of the Young Chinese Restaurant Owners in the United States

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“Family Keepers” or “Career Seekers”: Understanding the Life Experiences and Educational Trajectories of the Young Chinese Restaurant Owners in the United States

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Abstract

This qualitative research investigates how Chinese restaurant owners negotiate their education opportunities, family solidarity, and social identity during their migration for success in the United States. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with nine Chinese restaurant owners in Western New York and identified two types of participants on the basis of their family backgrounds and educational attainments: the "family keepers" and the "career seekers". In short, "family keepers" tend to see ethnic business ownership as a way to sustain their families, while "career seekers" regard the ethnic business as a jumping-off point toward a new career. Incorporating the concept of transnational habitus from Bourdieusian scholars, this study argues that immigrants develop different transnational habitus within which they constantly reframe distinct mechanisms to evaluate their ethnic, family, and human capital for upward social mobility. By offering a comprehensive lens to understand immigrants' human agency in coping with social and racial inequity, this study suggests one's capital is dynamic and two-sided when transferring internationally. It also raises the significance of within-group variance in understanding new immigrants' upward social mobility

Keywords: transnational habitus, ethnic business, chinese immigrants, social mobility, within-group variances

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“Guardianes de la Familia” o “Buscadores de Carrera”: Comprender las Experiencias de Vida y las Trayectorias Educativas de los Jóvenes Dueños de Restaurantes Chinos en los Estados Unidos

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Resumen

Esta investigación cualitativa investiga cómo los dueños de restaurantes chinos negocian sus oportunidades de educación, solidaridad familiar e identidad social durante su migración para tener éxito en los Estados Unidos. El investigador realizó entrevistas en profundidad con nueve propietarios de restaurantes chinos en el oeste de Nueva York e identificó dos tipos de participantes sobre la base de sus antecedentes familiares y logros educativos: los "guardianes de la familia" y los "buscadores de carrera". En resumen, los "mantenedores de la familia" tienden a ver la propiedad de negocios étnicos como una forma de mantener a sus familias, mientras que los "buscadores de carrera" consideran el negocio étnico como un punto de partida hacia una nueva carrera. Incorporando el concepto de habitus transnacional de los académicos bourdieusianos, este estudio argumenta que los inmigrantes desarrollan diferentes habitus transnacionales dentro de los cuales constantemente replantean distintos mecanismos para evaluar su capital étnico, familiar y humano para la movilidad social ascendente. Al ofrecer una perspectiva integral para comprender la agencia humana de los inmigrantes para hacer frente a la inequidad social y racial, este estudio sugiere que el capital propio es dinámico y de dos caras cuando se transfiere internacionalmente.

Palabras clave: habitus transnacional, negocios étnicos, inmigrantes chinos, movilidad social, variaciones dentro del grupo

Chinese immigrants who arrive in a new country with low stocks of capital or capital undervalued in the mainstream society tend to see ethnic business as an alternative channel for upward social mobility (Liu & Lin, 2009; Min, 2017; Song, 1997; Zhou, 2014). Chinese restaurants, considered financially the most powerful symbol of Chinese ethnic business in the U.S., help the owners gain a consistent income which in turn improves their families' living conditions and offers resources to the next generation (Smart, 2003; Yu-Sion, 1998). Nowadays, there are more than 41,000 Chinese restaurants in the U.S., three times the number of McDonalds' franchise units in the world (CCTV News, 2022).

Despite its ubiquity and popularity, however, Chinese ethnic business continues to be marginalized in the labor market. Scholars argue that the expansion of ethnic business de facto indicates the ethnic owners' inability to enter the mainstream labor market because it is an alternative way for immigrants who fail to find jobs (Archer & Francis, 2006). Despite their economic success, the low entry bar, arduous working conditions, and less payment compared to their white peers sustain a low-skilled and racialized social image associated with the ethnic owners (Brynin et al., 2019). Therefore, the social recognition of ethnic business owners demonstrates a contradiction between the prosperity of their economic status and the marginality of their social position.

Further, an intergenerational disjunction towards ethnic business is emerging: the first generation's perceptions of ethnic business as a last resort to avoid unemployment and the young generation's willingness to commit to ethnic business ownership as a career choice. Due to their marginalized social status, many immigrant groups consider their ethnic business as a temporary adaptive strategy. Their preference was to leave the economic niche sooner through advanced education and encourage the next generation to do the same through investment in education and higher expectations for education (Archer & Francis, 2006; Brynin et al., 2019; Zhou, 2014). Recent studies, nevertheless, find that the children of many ethnic entrepreneurs have expressed their keenness to continue the ethnic business even though their economic status and educational attainments have been widely improved (Basu, 2004; Katila & Wahlbeck, 2011). Yet in current scholarship, there are neither extensive explanations of the Chinese immigrant youth's choices in regard to restaurants nor their life experiences that have led to such choices.

To offset the academic shortage and offer a more comprehensive understanding of this group, this study explores the life experiences of young adult Chinese restaurant owners living in the U.S. Through investigating the perceptions of these young restaurant owners, this study illustrates two contradictory mentalities in Chinese immigrant communities: first, their increasing economic affluence and continually marginalized social positions; and second, their perceptions of ethnic business as a last resort to avoid unemployment and their willingness to commit to ethnic business ownership as a career choice.

Contributing to resolving the two primary contradictory mentalities, the study explores the life experiences of 9 young adult Chinese restaurant owners living in a U.S. midsize city that hosts a diverse Chinese community in terms of socioeconomic status. In order to unravel the contradictions, this paper examines the sociocultural system and immigrants' human agency in the transnational context by investigating their decision-making towards migration, settlement, and integration into mainstream society. More specifically, three questions are asked:

1. How do the young Chinese restaurant owners in the U.S. narrate their family and educational experiences?
2. To what extent and in what ways do they understand such experiences when linking to their transnational lives that are constructed by social, cultural, and economic factors in China and the U. S.?
3. How do they evaluate and utilize their capital to negotiate their educational opportunities and social identity during their settlement and incorporation in the U.S.?

In this way, the investigation serves to remedy the academic shortage of Chinese ethnic business owners. Ethnic business is a significant occupation for immigrants with low skills to survive and prosper. The academic attention given to these young restaurant owners helps to understand the upward social mobility of immigrant families over time. Drawing on the within-group differences among Chinese restaurant owners based on their families and educational backgrounds, this study also profoundly understands the dynamics and diversity of global migration, as well as the intersecting influences of class, ethnicity, countries, and human agency on social reproduction under the rapidly changing class contexts of globalization.

Theoretical Framework: Transnational Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu (1980; 1984) presents that the habitus is constructed as the generative formula which accounts for individuals' dispositions based on the social existence in which their practices are structured and their objectively classifiable judgments towards these practices. The habitus has two capacities: it produces classifiable practices and works, and it also differentiates and values of these practices and products which represent social worlds (Bourdieu, 1984). Through these two capacities, the habitus continuously internalizes externality and converts the objective necessity into dispositions which generate meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions, such as the set of 'choices' constituting lifestyles, values, and taste (Bourdieu, 1980; 1984).

Further, the habitus is considered as dynamic and transportable, transferred from one field to another, because it can generatively and constantly adjust individuals' practices toward their changing social positions (Bourdieu, 1980; 1984). During people's adjustment, the habitus tends to generate "reasonable" and "common-sense" behaviors that are objectively fit into the particular social position and at the same time, is inclined to exclude all "extravagances" which are incompatible with the objective conditions.

Ground on these two features, scholars in immigration studies develop the concept of "transnational habitus" to understand immigrants' transnational experiences. Primarily, due to the transportable characteristic, immigrants bring their habitus, such as in their preferences and expectations, with them to a new country. The habitus deriving from the homeland is very distinct to mainstream social practices in the host country, which results in immigrants' disorientation and displacement (Friedmann, 2017). Bauder (2005), however, argues that immigrants' marginalization in the job market results from their habitus' inclination. Their own habitus tends to prevent them from jobs that were unfamiliar to them, Immigrants' group-based preference led to their concentration in particular occupations.

Nevertheless, the dynamic character of the habitus offers immigrants useful scheme to cope with their social marginalization. Immigrants often develop a new habitus for their better incorporation in the host country. Current scholarship suggests that when arriving in a new country, immigrants create a new mechanism to value and evaluate the capital they processed from their homeland (Bauder, 2005; Erel, 2010; Kelly & Lusic, 2006; Ryan et al.,

2009). It is also well discussed that all forms of capital do not simply transfer into the new social context, but they are differently and actively valued, devalued, exchanged, and accumulated (Bauder, 2005; Erel, 2010). Immigrants learn to reevaluate the capital in the pocket and mobilize the one which is valued in the new habitus. For example, after experiencing the devaluation of their educational accreditation in Germany, the Turkish immigrants realized their “Turkishness’ identity and language proficiency are more valuable for their upward occupational channels (Erel, 2010).

It is clearly shown by present studies that to cope with the changing and often challenging social situations, immigrants constantly reframe their own habitus, individually and collectively, into a new one consisting both of their original preferences and new validations of capitals they had in hands. This evolution, however, is not mechanically molded by the new social world as they still remain their own value of utilizing capitals and evaluating social mobility. Their changes, in fact, are simultaneously influenced by the relationship of “habitus” of the two countries

Literature Review

In this section, I analyzed current scholarship regarding different forms of capital that are significant to immigrants as well as demonstrated history and social contexts of the Chinese restaurant owners living in the U.S.

Ethnic Capital and Chain Occupation

Zhou and Lin (2005) propose the concept of ethnic capital, which is conceptualized as the interplay of economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital formed by a unique ethnic community, shared by ethnic members and facilitating ethnic members’ settlements and incorporations into the U.S. The ethnic capital is beneficial to ethnic businesses’ growth because it feeds low-wage immigrant laborers and provides economic information to owners regarding pricing, technology, business, etc. and to the co-ethnic workers with first-hand information on employment and business opportunities. Therefore, to new immigrants, especially possessing inferior capital such as low English language proficiency, lacking transferable skills, and little financial capital to start up employment, ethnic capital is the predominantly resource they can depend on and mobilize toward upward social mobility (Zhou & Lin, 2005).

However, scholars are concerned that reliance on ethnic capital implies immigrant's marginalization in mainstream society. The ethnic congregation intensifies the social stereotypes of immigrants' inability in social integration. For instance, MacDonald and MacDonald (1964) argued that chain migration produces "chain occupations" which are particularly centered on ethnic or low-wage niches in the U.S. labor market. Because following old immigrants' trajectories to succeed in employment, new immigrants of particular ethnic groups are more likely concentrated in one particular occupation such as Chinese in restaurants, Filipino in nursing, Indians in retail stores (Bauder, 2005; Macdonald & Macdonald, 1964). This ethnic concentration in specific economic niches caused exacerbated competition, rivalry, and exploitation (Ryan et al., 2009). The ethnic business is actually a form of "self-exploitation" for its long working hours, low hourly earnings, year-round operation, poor working conditions and low job satisfaction (Morris & Schindehutte, 2005; Brynin et al., 2019). Zhou and Lin (2005) concern that immigrants' dependence on capital bounded by ethnicity and solidarity, in the long term, will hinder their incorporation in the U.S. as it "discourages immigrants from learning English and the American ways, stifles their incentive to make contact with members of the dominant group and mainstream institutions, and traps them in permanent isolation" (p. 263).

Family and Family Capital

Family capital is another advantage in supporting immigrants' incorporation in the U.S., especially in self-employment ventures (Min, 2017; Nee & Sanders, 2001). Nee and Sanders (2001) develop a forms-of-capital model that demonstrates how the social, economic, and human capital of immigrant families predict the sorting of immigrants into various labor market trajectories.

Economic capital is an essential resource for immigrant families looking to start ethnic businesses. Particularly families with relatively low cultural capital but a great deal of economic capital are more likely to own ethnic businesses because their skills are fungible in mainstream economies (Nee and Sanders, 2001). This observation corresponds with Bate's (1997) finding that Chinese and Korean immigrants who did not obtain a college education heavily depended on their family to support their ethnic business.

Social capital associated with immigrant families also plays a strong role as it constitutes a collective base where family and its extended members share resources through labors and social relations (Min, 2017; Nee & Sanders, 2001). Katila and Wahlbeck (2011) note that economic-underprivileged Chinese restaurant owners transformed their transitional connections and family ties into financial supports to start their business. Family-workshop-style Chinese restaurants, for instance, is a perfect operation model that aggregated family labors and distributed family members into different divisions. This family strategy is prevailing among Chinese restaurants because family labors are stable and cost less (Lin Pang, 2002; Song, 1997).

Bourdieu (1984) states the collectively-owned capital in family provided each family member a 'credential' that entitled them to credit in the various senses of the word. Family members utilize these collective capitals as adaptive strategies, however, this family solidarity demanded individual members' subordination of their own interests to family concerns and interests (Nee & Sanders, 2001). For instance, Lin Pang (2002) finds Chinese immigrant children who helped out in their parents' restaurants felt obligated to work as family laborers. Moreover, experiencing as immigrants and ethnic minorities, children well recognize their labors in sustaining their family's livelihood strategy (Lin Pang, 2002).

Consequently, current studies clearly show that immigrants bring varying amounts of capital with them to a new country and develop distinctive strategies and mechanisms in which they utilize and transfer these capitals in different ways based on their family backgrounds and migration experiences. However, current studies lack specific investigations and elaborations regarding the advantages and disadvantages of particular forms of capital in immigrants' transnational lives. For example, reliance on ethnic capital helps to immigrants' settlement in a new country but may cause their concentration in low-wage jobs and intensify the social stereotype if the ethnic capital is poorly valued in society or hardly transferred to advantages (Anthias, 2007). Thus, to offset a lack of related literature, this study will explore both benefits and drawbacks of ethnic capital and family capital which were brought and depended by young Chinese restaurant owners.

A Brief Introduction of Chinese Restaurant Owners in the U.S.

Historical contexts.

The earliest Chinese restaurants on American soil date back to the 1840s (Liu & Lin, 2009). The golden rush in California allured the first wave of Chinese immigrants who were desperate to escape from devastating warfare, economic breakdown, and drought (Wong, 1995). The transoceanic journey to the U.S. that was paved with golden mountains and streets in migration stories, however, rendered restricted job options for the pioneers from China. The first generation predominately came from underprivileged backgrounds, as most of them were peasants from the Southern provinces in China, such as Fujian and Guizhou Province (Pieterse, 2003). They brought little resources besides their own labor to the new country (Lin Pang, 2002). The low language proficiency along with limited educational attainments and social networks, therefore, prompted their concentration in the catering business (Song, 1997). Opening a restaurant, was an inevitable ethnic choice.

Further, the anti-Asian racial environment in the U.S. exaggerated Chinese immigrants' over-concentration in ethnic business. The xenophobic and racial attitudes towards the Asian influx led to the institutional resistance and legalized racial discrimination against this group. After the first migration wave, it was not long before the mainstream society considered Chinese immigrants as “dangerous”, “criminal”, and “racial and moral inferior” (Wong, 1995). Then, the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943) expelled many early Chinese immigrants out of skilled jobs (Liu & Lin, 2009; Zhou, 2014). They hopelessly huddled in the ethnic niche to avoid economic downturn and life uncertainty. The ethnic employment exclusion, nevertheless, fostered the development of ethnic communities and ethnic enclave economies (Smart, 2003).

Post-1965 was a buoyant period for Chinese immigrants. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 engendered a lenient immigrant climate which encouraged more Chinese to migrate to the U.S. Following the family reunification pattern, new immigrants had a better settlement upon arrival. In addition to the “pull” factor of seeking fortune in the U.S., the “push” factors in China, for instance, the Open Policy in 1978 that unlocked the economic, social and political gates to the global promoted the booming of a transnational movement. Despite the increasing number of Chinese

immigrants with financial, social, and intellectual resources, to this day, running a restaurant is still considered the most popular ethnic business option for Chinese immigrants coming from less advantaged families (Smart, 2003).

New paradox within young Chinese immigrants.

The early Chinese immigrants considered their ethnic business as a temporary adaptive strategy and were expecting the next generation not to continue this occupation (Archer & Francis, 2006; Zhou, 2014). Chinese restaurant owners, therefore, view education as the most effective path for the next generation and maintained high educational expectations of their children (Archer & Francis, 2006; Zhou, 2014). Juxtaposition of educational incompetents and corresponding economic hardship, social isolation, and racial discrimination triggered the restaurant owners' strong faith in education for upward social mobility (Archer & Francis, 2006; Smart, 2003). Scholars also claim that Chinese immigrants' valuing education belongs to the collective habitus root in Chinese traditional culture (Archer & Francis, 2006; Zhou, 2014). For instance, one Chinese business owner in Archer and Francis's (2006) study stated that "the culture I was brought up in, believing that if you've got a good education then it's better than money. I will always have this in my mind" (p. 40). Hence, education is an express ticket to succeed in the way defined by Chinese collective habitus that education is more prestigious than money.

On contrary, recent studies show that ethnic minorities are still motivated to pursue ethnic self-employment despite of their advanced education and wealth (Basu, 2004). Dávila and Mora (2005), for instance, show that Arabian immigrants who possess competitive English proficiency are more likely to start their business than those English is limited. However, current studies are in shortage of a specific focus on Chinese young business owners to solve the new paradox between parent's expectations in mainstream success outside the ethnic economic niche and the young generation's continuous interest in embracing ethnic business.

Methods

Research Design

The qualitative research method is applied in this study because qualitative research focuses on process, understanding, and the meaning people have constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Site, Sampling, and Participants

I conducted this study in a medium-sized city located in Western New York that enjoys a long reputation for settling Chinese immigrants and has a large Chinese community. Nine restaurant owners (6 males, 3 females) who were running or once owned a Chinese restaurant were involved in my study. They shared in common that their ages ranged from 25-40, experienced similar life trajectories as they were all born in China, had Chinese secondary education, and came to the U.S. in their twenties.

My sampling strategy was referred as "dining and acquainting," meaning I went to the restaurants, became a regular customer, and through time, established rapport with the employees or the owners themselves. I had several meals at each restaurant to gain intimacy and trust. In some restaurants, the owners often didn't show up, so I got acquainted with the cashiers or receptionists, and they were kind enough to introduce me to the owners. It is estimated that there are 30 Chinese restaurants in the city, nearly half of which are owned and operated by young people. I visited 15 restaurants owned by young Chinese and invited their participation. Although receiving refusals, this experience became a form of data that reveals to me participants' lived experiences. For instance, some owners declined my invitation because they were highly occupied by their business and not able to make any time. Others were concerned about their privacy due to their experiences as stowaways.

Data Collection

After obtaining the IRB approval, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with my participants because open-ended discussions are helpful to generate a comprehensive understanding of participants' daily experience

and life circumstances (Glesne, 2016). Most interviews took place in the Spring in 2019. With continuous sampling efforts, I interviewed two more restaurant owners in January, 2020 and one in April, 2021. Each interview lasted 1.5 to 2 hours (I interviewed some participants twice to acquire more data) and was predominantly conducted in public sites such as coffee shops or participants' restaurants, depending on their preferences. All conversations were in Mandarin, the native language of the participants and myself, to achieve better communications. During each interview, participants' life experiences regarding family, educational trajectory, career choice, race and ethnicity, and future plan were interrogated. I acquired oral consent with each participant and I used my computer and phone to record our talks with their permission. Pseudonyms were used in the study to protect participants' privacy.

Data Coding and Analysis

My data analysis was fundamentally grounded in my participants' real lives. When interpreting and theorizing, I primarily focused on the richness and holistic nature of my participants' narrations. This revealed the significance and complexity of their families, education, and careers.

The data were coded and analysed manually. I initially conducted open coding and summarized all key concepts into an analytical memo for each transcription. During this period, I focused on the significance of participants' narrations at times more than the frequency of occurrence of particular narrative elements. By employing ground theory's Initial, Focused and Axial coding, I developed the coding categories of "family and education", and "family and transnational journey". Further, I divided the participants into two groups based on their family backgrounds and educational attainment, and then created the third coding category, "two distinctive ways to utilize different kinds of capital".

Throughout the data analysis process, participants' perceptions were constantly compared to ensure that the claims were sufficient and valid. After the analysis reached a saturation point, I moved on to an inductive mode. All themes were sorted and grounded in my primary research question and scholarly literature. After finalizing this step, I gave each central theme a proper name based on my findings.

Findings

The narrations of my nine participants showed large within-group variances in family education and transnational experiences. Therefore, I divide them into two groups for a better elaboration: the "family keepers" and the "career seekers", and analyzed the similarities and differences in their life experience in the U.S., respectively.

Family Keepers

I allocated Fen, Xinyi, Bin, and Jiazhen into this group as they generally came from a low-income family where parents plowed lands or selling sundries for living. With limited family resources, their achievements in education were also constrained. Their schooling trajectories ended up in community colleges or high schools. I categorized them as "family keepers" as they developed a habitus centering on family bonds and valuing family collective mobility. Family success is a key that motivated their transnational movement and determined their incorporation way in the US. They are the keepers of family success.

Transnational parenthood: working-abroad dad and family-care mom.

Family keepers' migration to the U.S. predominantly follows a classical chain-migration model, in which the father comes to the U.S. alone and then brings other family members abroad after his settlement. This longstanding family separation leads to unique parenthood in which the father works abroad as the family breadwinner and sends remittance home, while the mother stays in the home country to take on caregiver responsibilities.

This migration pattern significantly improved their family's financial conditions where the family made a living by farming and had several children to feed. For instance, the overseas remittance sent by Fen's father afforded the family's relocation from village to city and supported her and her siblings' admission to the best public high school in the city. As Fen noted,

My father became a migration worker to improve our family's economic situation. His work was indeed very toilsome, but his hard work financed our education. My family has three kids to raise; that is really a lot.

The transnational remittance, in addition, provided children more parental involvement through freeing the mother from farming land or the labor market. Xinyi's mother, for instance, became a stay-at-home caregiver for the family after her father migrated to the U.S.

We were born in a rural county and moved to a city after my father worked in a Chinese restaurant in the U.S. At that time, my mother did not work and paid all attention to look after me and my two younger sisters.

Bourdieu (2018) states that the transition of economic capital into cultural capital within families demands an expenditure of time, particularly the mother's free time. Thus, the movement to urban city not only meant better living and schooling to family keepers, but also a more middle-class way in which parent invested more time in children's living and schooling.

In general, family keepers' mothers obtained relatively lower educational attainment than their fathers, and most of them dropped out of their middle school. Mothers' lower educational achievement resulted in motherhood is less effective and helpful than fatherhood in family keepers' rearing practices. Although family keepers remarked their father's role in schooling, the long separation prevented him from close watching. Fen noted her father's strong influence in her life, but it faded away because of the ocean,

In middle school, my father's words meant a lot to me. I followed his words and knew I should study hard. However, in high school, although I still remembered my father's words, my life was lonely—just me and myself. No one guided me. If someone could have guided me, things would have been different

This transnational pattern of parenting was developed by the family keeper's parents in response to the challenges in the transnational context. This pattern, dislocating family members yet diversifying risks for the entire family, helped all family members gain different types of opportunities at home and abroad. The work-abroad father accumulated economic capital for the family and through transnational connections, effectively transferred the economic capital into cultural capital. The care and time offered by the stay-at-home mother made this transition process more efficient due to their full-time commitment. Although this pattern led to family separation over a long period and unbalanced parental involvement in children rearing, it provided

long-term returns for the family. The transnational movement provided family keepers with economic and educational resources which were barely able to accumulate based on their family's original socioeconomic status.

Family-centered habitus: family mobility and responsibility.

Both to family keepers and their family, migration to developed countries, Australia, Canada, or U.S. is believed to be a magical spell to live a better life. Their narrations underscored this vision of transnational mobility is a collective habitus shared beyond just family, by the entire village. All family keepers in my study came from Fujian Province, located in Southeastern China, once among China's poorest, but now known for its emigration culture and large numbers of descendants overseas (Pieterse, 2003). Family keepers recalled the economic immobility in Fujian at 1970s as barren flatlands to plant and rare opportunities for foreign trades. After the Open Door Policy at 1978, Fujianese started to emigrate en masse in order to escape from the reproduction of low mobility; and the entire village established a collective habitus encouraging each member to seek opportunities overseas. Bin pointed the movement to the U.S. as a trend in his hometown: "In our village, all youth went abroad when they reached a certain age, to the U.S. or other countries. This is a trend. We, the entire village, went to the U.S. when we became adults."

This migration habitus was allocated intergenerationally as Bin was instructed about his certain future path when being a kid, he grew with and within this migratory trend. Small single boat cannot sail across the ocean unless they united. Family keepers are same. Their migration practices relied high premium on family solidarity: family members supported each other to overcome obstacles in the transnational movement. Bin's family, as one example, arrived in the U.S. through different means and eventually realized family reunification,

My father was applying for a business immigrant visa, but his visa only allowed him to take one family member. He chose my younger sister. My elder brother and I stowed away to the U.S. with the help of a "snakehead" (a smuggler). Then, my mother came to us when my younger sister got her legal status and applied for the family reunification for my mom.

The boundary between legal and illegal is negotiable and blurry when it came to family survival and success. The value that each family member sacrificed a part of themselves to ensure the family mobility is deeply rooted in their habitus.

Family keepers processed a low-stock resources and skills; therefore, family ties were the only but most significant recourse they can rely on to settle down and find jobs. In order to remain this benefit, they had to continuously invest in their family business to sustain financial stability even if it was labor intensive and demanded strong family solidarity. As Fen narrated her father's extensive contribution to her family,

On the day when we came to the U.S to reunite with my father, he called a taxi and picked us up at the airport. When the taxi stopped in front of a condo, it looked very average but at least had two stories. We thought our father's life here is not bad! However, then he opened the door and went downstairs to the basement. Then we realized that our family would live in that basement.

The first-generation Chinese immigrants with minimum resources collectively chose to endure hardship to accumulate capital for their family. The father's family-centered practices deeply impacted family keepers, thus, they actively took the responsibilities assigned to them as family members. Fen said,

My father never talked about sending me and my sister to school. Both of us understood and accepted his decision. We thought we were supposed to work in restaurants to share burdens with our father. Therefore, we helped in restaurants once we arrived in the U. S.

Education is particularly valued by disadvantaged Chinese families for jumping out of low-class reproduction (Archer & Francis, 2006; Smart, 2003), yet family keepers' dilemma told us they choose not to buy the ticket. Pursing education is a long-term investment of money and labor but they have a family in need of immediate care. At last, Xinyi and her sister choose to drop from high school even though their parents refused.

Worshipping the contribution from parents to family's solidarity and prosperity, family keepers continuously adjusted their choices of working and schooling after arrival in the U.S. This adjustment preferring family interest

over individual's, however, witnessed family keepers' struggles and sacrifices. Their choices are giving in not only to their parents or bigger family but to the social structure where their skills were not valued, they had to exploit their opportunities for money.

Strategies of running restaurants: reevaluation and navigations of ethnic capital and family capital

Ethnic capital is the pillar resource for family keepers to strive in the U.S. For instance, to Xinyi and Bin who were a young couple running a small-scale Chinese restaurant famous for its authentic ethnic taste, the Chinese ethnic economic enclave is the most available ethnic recourses to offset their family's low economic status. Initially, they were introduced to work in Chinese restaurants through their extensive social ties in the local Chinese community. After years of helping in several Chinese restaurants, they earned the "first plot of gold" to start their own catering business.

However, this tedious labor work prevented family keepers from improving language proficiencies and obtaining higher educational degree. They normally worked around 12 hours per day and only had one day off per week. Xinyi and Bin described their lives as "self-exploited",

We got up at 8 am and went to bed around 11 pm. We had a joke about our life: we lived between our kitchen countertop and the pillow because we lived above the restaurant to save a lot of time.

This working tense and environment did efficiently generate economic returns, but severely reduced their opportunities to acquire competitive skills for mainstream jobs, making it likely to produce a vicious circle of low social mobility. Wu (2019) argues that migrants with less human capital are more likely to be trapped in a low-skill, low-income situation -- a life trajectory they perhaps would have rather not taken.

Moreover, family keepers expressed their depression as their skills were not transferable and valued in the U.S. due to linguistic and cultural barriers. Fen felt a sense achievement of working as a translator in a foreign company, but she had to give it up when her father got legal status in the U.S.

I have worked for one year in China, and I liked it. Thus, even my boss assigned a lot of work to me, and I had to get up very early every day, I was willing to do it. But I feel forced if I was told to get up at 6 am for the restaurant. Although opening a restaurant earned much more but my job in China is more decent and comfortable. Now, my life is too boring and too tedious.

During the transnational movement, immigrants created a mechanism where constantly reframed their values and evaluation of certain capital (Erel, 2010; Ryan et al., 2009). Family keepers' depression remarked the complex effect of certain capital in their transnational lives. The family capital that brought them family solidary yet degraded their happiness and sense of achievement. From "decent and comfortable" to "boring" and tedious", family keepers evaluated family networks as an invisible burden to individual choice.

Family keepers, nevertheless, developed a new habitus to deal with the dilemma. Within this habitus, they learned to utilize their transnational resources: they connected and combined the networks and resources between the homeland and the host society. For instance, when Jiazhen and her husband were unable to take care of her son because of overwhelming workload in restaurants, they sent their son back to China. It was same to Xinyi and Bin that they asked their family members in home country to look after the child, "actually, people in my province all did this, sending a baby back to China after three months of his birth. And after he finished preschool, we brought him back."

Family keepers developed a new coping strategy that emphasized the application of bilateral resources. They successfully resolved the pick-one choice between family financial status and child care. Now, both couples are capable of sending their children to the top local schools.

Career Seekers

In contrast to the family keepers, the other five participants benefited more from their family finance or higher educational degrees. Every participant received their college education in the U.S. and some pursued more advanced degree. I call them "career seekers" because they considered restaurants as a stepping stone for further career advancements.

Family capital: educational opportunities and financial supports

Career seekers' parents normally obtained better educational achievements and placed great educational expectations on their children. However, their migration to the U.S. led to the same transnational parenthood as in the case of family keepers. At this stage, there is no remarkable gap in academic achievements between family keepers and career seekers because of their different amounts of family capital.

However, this gap gradually appears with their arrival in the U.S. as the family reunification imposed parental influence back upon their schooling. For instance, Hao aspired to better education after he came to the U.S. to “comfort” his father’s “disappointment” to his failure in college entry exam in China,

My father always wanted me to get a college degree because he did not make it when he was young. When I was in China, my father often called back to ask about my schooling. He was very disappointed because I did not take the College Entrance Exam.

He regained a bachelor’s degree in computer science from a well-reputed university after coming to the U.S.

Furthermore, career seeker’s family afforded cultural capital in terms of educational and cultural resources for their settlement and incorporation in the U.S. For instance, Xing’s father paid for Xing’s private tutoring for better preparation for his high school applications, and also asked Xing to help out in his street-fair stores to foster his adaptation into the American cultural and social context. As Xing narrated,

This (children’s part-time work) is American culture. Most American kids became independent when they become 18 years old. My father wanted me to know about this culture and know more about U.S. society.

Xing was then admitted to a prestigious university and awarded a doctoral degree in physical therapy.

Besides, family offered primary financial resource as the start-up capital to career seekers’ own business. Hence, different from family keepers who spent years of saving money, all career seekers skipped this long-lasting

period to start their own restaurants. Moreover, this financial privilege allowed their productive reproductions of economic capital for further investment. Dongbei told me that he was planning to open another restaurant, while Xing said his third restaurant is in the works.

Why restaurant? --- negotiations of ethnic, racial and social identities.

Based on career seekers' own accounts, their preference in ethnic restaurants is rooted in a collective habitus valuing ethnic business and their individual evaluation of human capital. Although receiving mainstream education, their growing up in an environment where people steamed from ethnic business formed a collective habitus breeding their familiarity and affection for Chinese restaurants. All career seekers shared experiences of helping out in family-run or other co-ethnic restaurants, through which they learned the "rules of game" of ethnic business. Wangtian, for example, worked as a part-time helper in Chinese restaurant during his college while was surprised by the restaurant's economic returns:

I have helped out in a buffet restaurant; the owner did not speak any English but his business made \$20,000 in profit each month. This shocked me. He did not receive much education and often asked me to make phone calls to deal with any stuff related to English. And he even rarely stayed at the restaurant. Then I thought if he could run a restaurant, why couldn't I?

The large profit margin of the restaurant business while little requirements of education and language proficiency explained the popularity of employment option.

This group-based preference not only echoed career seekers' evaluations of their own human capital, but indicated their concerns about the racial and social position as an immigrant. Career seekers recurrently mentioned their racial identities as "foreigners or Asians" devalued their human capital and prevented them from rising beyond a certain level in the social hierarchy. For instance, Xing earned a PharmD but chose to become a restaurant owner to avoid the glass ceiling in the labor market. As he stated,

I thought about finding a job and climbed to the management position but I gave up. I am a Chinese immigrant in the U.S., it is unrealistic. In those big companies, few Asians can become managers.

This concern on limited opportunities in career advancement challenges the notion of “model minority” that labels and promotes Chinese immigrants’ flexibility and priority in navigating the U.S. labor market. It is ironic to note the career seeker’ one foot admitted to the elite class due to his advanced degree but one foot left in the ethnic niche due to his racial background. Guo (2015) argues that the glass ceiling hinders immigrants’ promotion into management position revealed a systematic racial hierarchy in the mainstream job market.

Bourdieu (1980;1984) emphasize that when facing the new social world, people tend to develop habitus to produce "reasonable" practices that are compatible with the objective conditions and exclude all incompatible and negative behaviors. This subjective and spontaneous adjustment prevents people's inclination to things that are unfamiliar to them. Thus, compared with the potential unfairness and uncertainty in professional employment, ethnic business was familiar and profitable, and thus is a more "reasonable" choice for career seekers.

The “reasonable” choice, however, did not realize their ideals of upward social mobility. Career seekers were struggling with their social identity as Chinese restaurant owners. The social stigma associated with Chinese restaurant owners, which tacitly suggested low levels of language proficiency and educational achievement, carried on in their self-recognition.

To negotiate this unspoken social and racial bias, career seekers sought emotional compensation from their human capital. They distinguished themselves from others:

Being a restaurant owner does not fit my expectations of myself. Thanks to my doctoral degree, I think it is not very low (low status) as a restaurant owner, but at the same time I think this catering business is very low (low status). (Xing actually used the English word “low”)

The young generation owners emphasized the symbolic value of education because the degree itself was a silent defense to the “low” status racialized by the society. They developed an internal value system to distinguish themselves (“I am not very low”) from other entrepreneurs (“the catering business is very low”). This value system, however, indicated the

marginalized location of the entire ethnic business in the labor market (Archer & Francis, 2006).

All career seekers emphasized that they would eventually achieve their career transition (zhaunxing 转型). They expected to expand their self-employment to a higher level company or transfer to other occupations. Hao has left his restaurant to his parents and has become a programmer in a computer science company because he wanted to have a "meaningful" job,

Because I want to influence more people. When you own a restaurant, it can only impact a small group of people around you. But the CS, for example, if you develop an app, a lot of people can get benefits from your work. I made decent money from my restaurant, so it is time to do more meaningful work.

Restaurants are perceived as an efficient route for career seekers to improve their economic status but also a "less meaningful" job which fails in their standards of social status. Therefore, a restaurant owner is a temporary identity which would be replaced by a new one once career seekers complete the economic accumulations for their career transition.

Discussion and Conclusion

Immigrants are "living simultaneously in two countries" (Friedmann, 2017, p. 311). This study shows that during the transnational movement, Chinese restaurant owners generatively develop and adjust their own habits to the changing cultural and social contexts between individual and family, individual and society, and home country and host country.

Although recent studies comprehensively argue that capital provided both benefits and disadvantages for immigrants' settlement and incorporation in a new country. For instance, ethnic capital resulted in racial-ethnic hierarchies among ethnic workers (Hill, 2017) and family capital perpetuated positive and negative influences in ethnic business (Zhang & Reay, 2018). This study demonstrated the process in which Chinese restaurant owners constantly reframe their values and evaluations of different forms of capital to negotiate their racial and social positions in a new country in order to promote upward social mobility. They subjectively made choices regarding what to value and what to utilize to achieve profit maximization of each form of capital they owned. For example, family keepers used their extended family networks in

China to take care of children, while career seekers preferred ethnic business to complete the accumulations of economic capital for further career promotion.

The within-group variance adds an analytical dimension to the “transnational habitus.” My findings that family keepers and career seekers developed distinctive coping strategies acknowledge the role of socioeconomic status and education attainment in habitus (re)formation. Xu (2017) introduced the concept of “transborder habitus” for the purpose of elaborating on the habitus transmission of Chinese mainland students studying in Hong Kong. This new spatial dimension sheds light on more nuanced research into understanding “transnational habits” within the rapidly changing global context. This study used within-group variation in terms of family background and educational background to understand participants’ adaptive mechanisms for utilizing different kinds of capital. The statement emphasizes the dynamics of transnational habitus, which should be embedded in a complex of generations, social classes, and ethnicities.

However, the dynamic transnational habitus raises question to the game of human agency and class structure. Despite the family and educational difference, the Chinese restaurant owners displayed the human agency that is proactive to minimize limitations under the umbrella of class and racial hierarchy. During their habitus transmission, varying capital is valued, disvalued, and exchanged in different ways, which indicated productive possibilities within the transnational mobility.

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