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**Which Chinese?  
Dialect Choice in Philadelphia's Chinatown**

Abstract

Immigrant communities such as Chinatowns have been primary sites for research on language maintenance and language shift. While there are many theories modeling the relationship between the mother tongues of immigrants and the dominant language in the host country, the dynamics of the languages within the immigrant communities is often not as clear. In recent years, the use of Mandarin Chinese is observed to be on the rise, displacing Cantonese Chinese and other Chinese dialects in China, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities. What might be the factors that lead occupants of Chinatowns to adopt one Chinese dialect over another? In this paper, we examine possible causes of this trend by analyzing political, economic, social, and cultural factors that affect language choice. Specifically, we study the situation of Cantonese, Mandarin, and English in Philadelphia's Chinatown, which is a typical mid-size overseas Chinese community in the US and faces similar changes as other Chinatowns. We discuss how language outcome is affected by the language status of the dialects, the policies of the US, the language maintenance institutions in Chinatown, and the tension between traditional culture and assimilation. Due to the scope of this paper, it is not possible to evaluate the relative strengths of the factors identified in this paper. However, it might be a beginning point for further research in this area, and we hope to at least bring to focus the general language scene of a part of American society that can sometimes be overlooked.\*

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## 1. Introduction

Recently, Mandarin is slowly replacing Cantonese and other Chinese dialects as the dominant dialect in Manhattan's Chinatown (Gong 2007). This trend can be seen in other Chinatowns around the world and indeed in other Chinese-speaking countries. The case in Chinatowns is especially striking, however, because most of the original immigrant settlers were Cantonese speakers. How does this change come about? There are many factors that can affect a community's language situation, but for both recent immigrants and those who have lived in the host country for a while, the choice is a result of how they perceive the languages.

When Chinese immigrants arrive at and settle in a Chinatown, several scenarios can arise: first, they may continue using the languages they have used in their place of origin; second, they may acquire English used by most people in the US; or third, they may learn other Chinese dialects to meet different needs in the new environment. Language maintenance is characterized by the first scenario, and language shift, which occurs when language speakers adopt another language over their original languages, will likely result from the second scenario. Language maintenance and language shift also arise in later generations of Chinese Americans who may not identify as immigrants. Often, a mixture of these will happen in an immigrant community, depending on the particular forces acting on it.

Our aim in this paper is to examine how changes in language status and the existing language maintenance practices bring about a pushing force towards speaking Mandarin in overseas Chinese communities. We also make predictions about the language situation in Chinatowns and the fate of Cantonese and other Chinese dialects. We start by describing the characteristics of overseas Chinese communities and Chinatowns. After having some understanding of the history, the living environments, and the people in Chinatowns, we turn to

their languages. Linguistic features of Cantonese and Mandarin are briefly introduced, but we focus on the relative language status of each dialect. Then, we review some theoretical models on language maintenance and language shift in the literature. We end by an analysis of the language maintenance practices present in Philadelphia's Chinatown, categorizing them into political, economic, social, and cultural factors.

## **2. Chinatowns**

The following section contains background information of overseas Chinese language communities residing in Chinatowns in the United States. First, we take a historical perspective and consider the rise of Chinatowns and how they have changed over time. Next, we give a profile of the inhabitants and their living environments. Finally, there is a brief description of the language situation that many Chinatowns might be facing now. While common features of overseas Chinese communities are discussed, we direct the focus to Philadelphia's Chinatown and its place in the US.

### *Historical Development*

Beginning many years ago when people first discovered how big the world is, they have emigrated for various reasons. Many Chinese immigrants who came to the US in the 1840s heard rumors about gold in California and had dreams to acquire a fortune then return to China. Sadly, most of their dreams were never realized, and they ended up being laborers in easily-exploitative fields such as mining and railroad construction. Records show more than 250,000 early Chinese immigrants, most of whom were male and Cantonese (Wang 1997). Eventually, these immigrant "sojourners" dispersed throughout the country and settled in ethnic Chinese communities. Anti-Asian feelings were strong in the US during that period of time, so aside from providing social

networks in a foreign country, an important purpose of these communities was to protect members from threats of violence.

In Philadelphia, Chinese settlement started in 1871 with a hand laundry named “Lee Fong” at 913 Race Street (Tchen 2004). Life for Chinese immigrants was no less difficult in Philadelphia than in California. Job opportunities were still limited, and most of the earlier immigrants worked in hand laundries, grocery stores, or restaurants. Due to a series of discriminatory immigration laws, including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, women had limited presence in early Chinatowns. Thus, these neighborhoods became “bachelor societies” made up of single men. Many of these immigrants never left Chinatown and were culturally isolated. Pressured to send money back home, the immigrants lived in poverty themselves. World War II was a turning point for Philadelphia’s Chinatown. The Chinese Exclusion Act was removed in 1943, and as enlisted Chinese servicemen brought “war brides” to the US, the bachelor society became more family-oriented and more sustainable. Immigration quotas opened up further in the late 1960s, bringing more diversity to the communities. Throughout subsequent years, Chinese immigrants settled in the area and Chinatown as recognized nowadays slowly emerged.

#### *Chinatowns’ Occupants and Environments*

As mentioned before, the earliest Chinese immigrants were single Cantonese men. Subsequent waves of immigration mark the different demographic profiles of the current occupants of Chinatowns. More recent immigrants are often families from Fujian, Guangdong, other provinces in mainland China, and Taiwan (Loo 1998). Immigrants from other Asian Pacific countries such as Vietnam, Burma, and Indonesia, often choose to reside in Chinatowns as well, both for work and for the community support that Chinatowns offer. They blend with the

long-time residents of Chinatowns, some of them immigrants who came years ago, and some second or third generation Asian Americans. These new additions to the Chinatown communities create much richer ethnic and linguistic scenes. Although some see Chinatowns as poor neighborhoods for immigrants, and historically they might indeed be so, the situation has changed considerably. People from all walks of life work and live in Chinatowns. Some immigrants still work as waiters, but students who have obtained degrees work as professionals, and most of the grocery stores, restaurants, and stationery shops are owned by middle-class families that live in Chinatown near their stores. Chinatowns have taken in inhabitants of greater varieties in terms of social class, occupation, as well as income level.

Besides the higher level of diversity in the communities, most Chinatowns have increased in population and in size, reflecting the phenomenon of urban sprawl in many cities. This creates problems because Chinatowns are usually located in the inner city where the living environments are already crowded and less than ideal. In a nation-wide survey on neighborhood satisfaction, 80% of the American sample felt satisfied, while 42% of Chinatown sample responded they felt satisfied. In addition, only 9% of the American sample felt dissatisfied compared to 29% of the Chinatown sample (Loo 1998). Philadelphia's Chinatown is no exception to poor living environments. At one time, it was part of the city's red-light district, and even though it has undergone major development and rezoning to remove bars and brothels, many people still prefer the suburbs and other parts of the city over it (Lou 2007b).

Since the Chinatowns are limited to the space in the cities and the populations keep increasing, the existing housing options cannot accommodate the number of residents. To solve this problem, urban developers devised redevelopment plans, but these often threaten to destroy major landmark buildings, major communal facilities, or even the entire neighborhoods.

Philadelphia's Chinatown was subjected to this challenge in the 1960's. A redevelopment project was proposed for the construction of the Vine Street Expressway, which would demolish Holy Redeemer Catholic Church and School, an important community center for the Chinatown residents of Philadelphia. There was much concern from the community members, and they took action. Although often overshadowed by the much larger Chinatowns such as those in New York City and San Francisco, Philadelphia's Chinatown has its own vigor, especially shown in the solidarity and activism of its residents. The community united against this redevelopment plan, staging protests and petitions and meeting with city and state officials. After 20 years of negotiations, the plan was finally modified to spare the church and the community.

Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) was one of the organizations founded by the Chinatown community to take control over the development and improvement of the neighborhood (Wang 1997). Although space is still limited, with better planning and development, Philadelphia's Chinatown is expanding without too many immediate problems. Over the past two decades, the population in Philadelphia has steadily declined. In 2006, the population has become less than 1.45 million, experiencing a 10% decrease since 1990. Despite the decline in the total population of the city, Chinatown's population has been increasing. In a recent estimate, there are around 5000 residents in Philadelphia's Chinatown, with about 700 households added in the last several years (Lou 2007b). This rise can be attributed to the recent influx of immigrants from Southeast Asia and the Fujian province of China. With ever more people, fifty-some restaurants and more than twenty other businesses, Philadelphia's Chinatown is thriving and changing. Both the history and the current situation exert forces on the language choice of its occupants.

*The Languages*

Language is indisputably the key factor in every level of life for the inhabitants of Chinatown. Historically, individuals who could speak English served as contact persons in bridging the Chinese immigrant society and the American society. For example, Wong Wah Ding, one of the few Chinese in Philadelphia's Chinatown who spoke English in 1944, became the unofficial mayor of Chinatown (Wang 1997). In addition, the language barrier is a major contributing factor for the lack of employment opportunities among Chinese immigrants. Despite the high education level of some immigrants, due to their low proficiency in English, their social mobility in the American society is low. Even if immigrants aim to work in Chinatown, if they do not speak the dominant dialect there, they need to rapidly acquire the dominant language in order to find employment and be accepted as part of the larger community. Language also facilitates social contact and interaction. In an environment where a speaker cannot understand or cannot be understood, feelings of isolation are more likely to occur. This sometimes happens to immigrant children who fail to make friends with local students at school, but is certainly not limited to this situation.

While ethnically and linguistically diverse, the majority of the community members in Chinatowns speak Asian languages or dialects, common ones include Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Thai, and Burmese. It is difficult to generalize, since the linguistic makeup of a particular Chinatown depends on the number and the origins of its occupants. A dominant language does not always emerge, but even if it does, the language cannot permeate to all levels of usage and all community members because there are always new immigrants from places that do not speak that language. However, in most Chinatowns, Cantonese and Mandarin are spoken by a large portion of the communities, either as first language or second language. In any shop or restaurant in any Chinatown, if a patron speaks either Cantonese or Mandarin, it is highly likely

that the business owner will be able to understand and switch to that language to accommodate the patron. The comparable prominence of these two Chinese dialects in the past gives us a chance to investigate what factors may cause Mandarin to dominate over Cantonese now, and propose how the two speaker groups will develop in the future.

### 3. Chinese Dialects

This section is an overview of Chinese dialects, specifically of Cantonese and Mandarin. We give basic information about the speakers, the regions, and the main linguistic features of the two dialects. What we are concerned with is any intrinsic information that might cause a speaker to favor one over the other, such as the relative ease and usefulness of acquiring the dialect. We end this section by comparing the relative status of Cantonese and Mandarin in three places: 1. Hong Kong and surrounding areas where Cantonese is spoken primarily; 2. mainland China, Taiwan, and other places where Mandarin is spoken primarily, and 3. Chinatowns where both have a presence.

#### *Background Information of Chinese*

Chinese is more of an umbrella term than a unified language. Some linguists contend that it is a language family and the varieties of Chinese are languages, while others refer to it as a language and the varieties of Chinese as dialects within the Chinese language. In this paper, we will consistently use the term *dialect* to refer to Cantonese and Mandarin. Chinese is often divided into seven or eight dialect groups: *Mandarin*, *Yue*, *Gan*, *Wu*, *Xiang*, *Hakka*, and *Min* (*Minnan*, and *Minbei*). Also known as *fangyan*, these regional varieties found across China are largely mutually unintelligible, however, they are unified by a common writing system. The written script has two versions-- the traditional full script is used in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and



some overseas communities, while the simplified script has been used in mainland China since its inception in 1950.

### *Cantonese*

Cantonese is part of the *Yue* family of Chinese dialects and it is widely spoken in southeast China, including major cities such as Hong Kong and Guangzhou. The origin of the *Yue* dialects is not confirmed, and there is no conclusive answer to the question. Since many colloquial words in the *Yue* dialects do not have standard Chinese characters that are etymologically associated with them, some scholars believe that these words are not Chinese in origin. One proposal is that some words from the *Yue* dialects form an ancient Tai substratum (Bauer & Benedict 1997). Cantonese has preserved word final stop consonants which Mandarin has dropped. It also has six or seven tones, in contrast to the four or five in Mandarin. Although in speech Cantonese differs from Mandarin to a large degree, in writing the two are almost identical. Many Cantonese words and phrases are colloquial and the word order of the two dialects can sometimes differ. In these cases, Cantonese is less accepted than Mandarin as formal written Chinese.

### *Mandarin*

Mandarin contains several sub-dialects spoken in the Northern and Southwestern parts of China. Standard Mandarin is the official spoken language in People's Republic of China and Taiwan's Republic of China, one of the four official languages in Singapore, and one of the six official languages in the United Nations. About 70 percent of China's 1.3 billion residents speak some version of Mandarin as a first language, but regional accents can vary to a large degree. In mainland China, the pronunciation of Mandarin has been standardized to the one native to Beijing, and Standard Mandarin is taught in schools of all provinces except Hong Kong. It is a

younger language than Cantonese, preserving fewer of the Middle Chinese features such as final stop consonants and various vowels. Consequently, the sound system is simpler than that of Cantonese, and because there are more homonyms, understanding spoken Mandarin is more contextual. Spoken Mandarin generally corresponds with written Chinese to a larger extent than Cantonese does. Due to these factors, it is often easier for a Cantonese speaker to acquire Mandarin than vice versa.

### *Comparative Status of Cantonese and Mandarin*

One way to compare the language status of two languages is to assess how many people speak it. In the following data of the speaker populations of Cantonese and Mandarin, L1 is defined as a first language and L2 is defined as a language acquired after the first language. In 1984, the total number of L1 speakers of Cantonese and other *Yue* dialects in the mainland China is around 52 million; and including overseas Chinese communities, it exceeds 54 million. A more current estimate of total L1 and L2 Cantonese speakers places the number at around 100 million. In contrast, in 1999, there are 867 million of L1 Mandarin speakers in mainland China and 873 million in all countries. In addition, there are 178 million L2 speakers of Mandarin in the world (Ethnologue). Hence, there are at least 10 times more Mandarin speakers than there are Cantonese speakers now, and casual observances suggest that this gap is increasing.

Aside from the size of speaker populations, language status is reflected in the speakers' attitude towards the languages, whether it is the language of instruction in education, and the amount of use in the media. Below, we examine these in three geographic areas.

#### *1. Hong Kong and surrounding areas*

Hong Kong's official languages are Chinese and English, with Chinese essentially being Cantonese. Hong Kong is widely regarded as the cultural center of Cantonese because of its use

in pop culture in the mass media. Among the Chinese speakers in Hong Kong, Cantonese has thrived as a medium of mass broadcasting and general social interaction, even after Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Owing to its social prestige in Hong Kong and its distribution in overseas Chinese communities, Cantonese has been termed "a genuine regional standard" (Ramsey 1987:99, in Bauer & Benedict 1997). Mandarin has a presence in Hong Kong mainly due to mainland tourists and investors. In long-term residents, the number of L2 speakers has only been rising in recent years since people recognized the importance to connect with mainland China.

Cantonese has also long been, and continues to be, the language of instruction in local schools, where children learn the standard Cantonese pronunciation and the traditional writing script. Mandarin is taught in some schools, but only as a second language. This political sanction is unique in Hong Kong and Macau, which are special administrative regions, among Chinese cities. The use of dialect for post-primary education instruction in a big city is against China's language policy. Possibly, the central government allows this to happen in Hong Kong and Macau to allay fears that drastic ideological changes would ensue after the handover. In spite of the lack of governmental intervention, we can see from the next section that the high status that Cantonese has enjoyed is increasingly being localized to Hong Kong.

## *2. Mainland China and Taiwan*

In other parts of China, the official spoken language is Mandarin. The central television and radio channels are in Standard Mandarin, but there are channels from different provinces using regional dialects and they are popular and accepted (Gunn 2006). As a national policy of China, Standard Mandarin is taught in schools in all the provinces. Even in Guangzhou and other regions where Cantonese has been the primary language, Cantonese is officially discouraged.

However, this language policy is not always practicable. In the poorer regions especially, teachers who speak Standard Mandarin are difficult to procure. Qualified teachers are reluctant to stay because of low wage rate and harsh living conditions. The government is probably mindful of the situation, and the language policy serves as a guide rather than a strict rule. Cantonese, like all the other Chinese dialects, is used because of traditions and ties to the family and friends. Although most people continue using regional dialects in daily communications, the younger generation usually has a working level of Mandarin, and they are aware that Mandarin is the language of the future China.

In Taiwan, the educational policy towards Mandarin is similar to that of mainland China. While the official language is Mandarin and there are fewer regional dialects, the majority of people have some understanding of Taiwanese. Taiwanese is a dialect belonging to the *Minnan* family of Chinese dialects, and it is widely used in Southern Taiwan. In general, Mandarin is used in all spheres of life, including mass media, education, and social interactions (Gunn 2006). It is used by default, especially among the younger city-dwellers. However, Taiwanese does not carry any stigma, and any debate of the status of dialects is confined to the realms of politics. In contrast, Cantonese is not spoken by many speakers, and is not distinguished among the other Chinese dialects. Other countries that have a significant number of Mandarin speakers, such as Singapore and Malaysia, promote the use of Mandarin, but usually do not consider Cantonese in their language policies.

### 3. *Chinatowns in Other Countries*

In overseas communities where Chinese is spoken, there is greater variance in the relative status of Cantonese and Mandarin. However, until recently, Cantonese presence is very prominent because speakers are wealthier on average and have a longer history of settlement.

Depending on the origins of the immigrants, either Cantonese or Mandarin, and sometimes both, may be the primary spoken language (Nieto 2003). Newspapers and radio stations within Chinatowns are similarly determined by the demands of the particular community. In many cases, the residents set up language institutions in hopes for the next generation to continue speaking Cantonese and Mandarin. These language classes are in addition to normal schooling in the American school system, and they also serve to transmit cultural knowledge and traditions.

In countries where Chinese is an official language, the governments make policies and have regulating units to monitor the language situations. In contrast to this, the languages in Chinatowns are not specifically regulated by a government department or a committee. However, general attitudes of the host countries can be inferred by their language policies. For instance, Mandarin is officially prioritized in all states and territories in Australia as an education language, whereas Cantonese is not included in the list of priority languages (Clyne & Kipp 1999). This is to be expected, given the official status of Mandarin in China and Taiwan. Since China is emerging as a political and economic power among nations, Mandarin's importance in the international arena is growing. Both Chinese people and others recognize this trend towards Mandarin, and many of them are starting to learn it in college and language schools. In summary, the trend of Mandarin dominating over Cantonese seems obvious, but attitudes towards Mandarin and Cantonese are complex and depend on many factors which we will explore in later sections.

#### **4. Theoretical Background**

In this section, we present brief accounts of major models of immigrant language maintenance and language shift. Kloss proposed eight factors that affect language maintenance in immigrant population. In additions to these, the core value theory and the marketplace value

theory provide alternative views to how immigrant languages might be determined. These models taken together give a comprehensive overview of how macro-level factors influence immigrants' language choice, and they will serve as a framework of analysis for the next section on Philadelphia's Chinatown.

### *Kloss' Clear-cut and Ambivalent Factors*

Many studies have been done to determine the factors that affect immigrant language use. Researchers have tried to generalize results to a diverse set of languages, various host countries and countries of origin, and across different waves of immigration. Kloss (1966), who studied German immigrants in the United States, identified four clear-cut factors that promote language maintenance and four ambivalent factors that can either encourage language maintenance or language shift.

#### *Clear-cut factors*

##### 1. Early point of entry and ethnic enclaves

Early immigrants often faced the unfortunate problems of discrimination and segregation. A natural and effective way to defend against these problems is to form ethnic enclaves, which are closed groups of ethnic minorities who live together for social support. Establishment of ethnic enclaves among early immigrants is conducive to language maintenance. Since there is a high level self-sustenance and homogeneity in an enclave, community members primarily use the language from their country of origin within themselves. They also have limited contact with other people in the host country, and thus have minimal chances to acquire or use languages in the host country.

##### 2. Indigenusness of speech communities

As noted in the previous factor, the history of settlement in a language community promotes language maintenance efforts among the community members, but this impacts new immigrants differently. Since it is a common view that the existing language situation ought to be preserved, when immigrants join a language community that supports their languages from home, it is easy to maintain them. On the other hand, newcomers who do not speak the language in the indigenous community are often expected to conform and blend in with the local language scene. Thus, accommodation is one-way and late-comers are compelled to acquire new languages if they do not already speak the languages in the community. In other words, new languages may be extinguished quickly without community support, but established languages are resistant to change even with points of contact with other languages.

### 3. High legal status

Kloss also notes that the environment of a new country can be hospitable or hostile depending on the government: language maintenance is encouraged if the government recognizes that discrimination is a social problem and people have the freedom to speak different languages. Naturally it also helps if the language has a high legal status. The highest language status in a country is the national official language, the next high is an official language of a major regional unit such as a state or a province, but immigrant languages are usually not classified into either of these unless the country (for example Singapore) consists of a large immigrant population. In some countries, languages are not explicitly arranged into a hierarchy of statuses, but authorities may promote a language in implicit ways, for example using the language in public schools, public notices, and public libraries. The least the government can do to affirm a language is to tolerate its use in private spheres, for example in newspapers, broadcasting, and in nonpublic schools.

#### 4. Pre-migration experience with language maintenance

Another factor found by Kloss to influence language maintenance behaviors is the level of pre-migration experience with language maintenance, and this concerns both immigration history and the types of immigrant. When immigrants have had experience maintaining their language prior to immigration to the host country, they have more success with language maintenance. Examples of these are people who are minority language speakers in their countries of origin and people who have lived in several countries but retaining ties with their original language. This is due to more familiarity with ways to preserve a language and their higher motivation to do so.

##### *Ambivalent factors*

#### 1. Educational level of immigrants

For the ambivalent factors, Kloss suggested that the education level of the immigrants can work to promote both language maintenance and language shift in a language community. A higher education level enables a person to engage in a greater range of cultural activities that facilitate language maintenance, but it allows more contact with the dominant group in the host country and promotes language shift as well. In contrast, a lower education level restricts an immigrant to socialize within the immigrant community, so language maintenance can be easily upheld. However, while an immigrant may stay within the community, a lack of education limits the participation of cultural activities that support language maintenance, for example newspaper reading or fine arts appreciation. Compared to the uneducated immigrants, a higher percentage of educated immigrants assimilate with the larger society and adopt the languages in the host countries. These highly educated immigrants often occupy a superior place in society than their counterparts, and the association between immigrants belonging to higher and lower social class



is weak. However, when they have a reason to unite, such as starting a national movement for the rights of immigrants, they can create a major social force to support language maintenance.

## 2. Numerical strength

In addition, Kloss also noted that the size of an immigrant group can help to preserve languages from home countries, but also encourage language contact. A larger group can easily contribute to language maintenance efforts because more human resources are available and the community can become self-sustaining. In addition, a large group has more political influence in the larger society to resist pressures for language shift. However, it is hard to remain isolated because a large group has more needs and encounter more problems, so acceptance from the surrounding neighborhoods is important. The increased contact with the dominant language group may then result in assimilation and language shift.

## 3. Linguistic and cultural distance from dominant groups

Conceivably, the more differences there are between the languages and cultures in the country of origin and the host country, the harder it is to acquire the dominant language, so language maintenance is promoted. However, where the host society operates very differently from the culture of origin, it might be more difficult to preserve a separate identity, thus language shift might result. There is no standardized measure on cultural and linguistic difference, so this is hard to study empirically. It has been suggested that cultural distance from the host society is a clear factor promoting language maintenance, while linguistic distance is ambivalent (Clyne 1991:88). Another variable to take into consideration is that societies differ in their level of acceptance, so a relatively close immigrant culture can fare well in an open host society without language shift, but in the reversed condition, the immigrants may feel pressured to fit in by not speaking their home languages.

#### 4. Attitude of majority

The last factor that Kloss identified as ambivalent is the attitude of the majority in the host country towards the immigrants. A history of language shift in a host country may create an expectation of abandonment among immigrants, which in turn becomes a cause to the attitude that language shift is natural. The basic attitudes towards language maintenance seem to differ between nations, specifically, the Americas tend to view language shift as a norm, while Europe and Asia consider the opposite true. This factor is ambivalent because when the majority group holds a welcoming attitude to immigrant languages, both language maintenance and a gradual introduction of the dominant language are facilitated. On the contrary, negative views of immigrants and suppression of immigrant languages can lead to assimilation or more reactive efforts to maintain the original languages.

A final factor that was not included in Kloss' categorization is geographic contiguity, which helps immigrant language maintenance in a clear-cut manner. Contact with neighboring groups that speak the same languages reinforces language maintenance because these outside exchanges provide continual support in speaker population and expands the applicability of the language. For example, the use of Spanish in the Southwestern part of the US is boosted by the proximity to Mexico.

#### *Core Value Theory*

Smolicz (1979, 1981), who developed the core value theory, researched languages in Australia. The theory posits that each cultural group has its own fundamental values that ensure its continual existence as a group. Members are expected to adhere to practices that are in accordance to the core values, and those who reject the values will be excluded from participation in the community. Examples of values that might influence language maintenance

include group solidarity, a focus on shared history, and respect of the language of origin. A group built on these core values has a lower likelihood of language shift. However, group identity is a fluid concept, and one may move from one group to another without rejecting its core values: as in the case of immigrants, they must abandon their original community and participate in a new one as a result of the changes in geographic locations. Hence, individual needs can sometimes win over loyalty to a group and this act does not incur too many costs.

### *Marketplace Value Theory*

The “marketplace” notion as applied to languages is introduced by several linguists individually (e.g. Bourdieu 1982; Haugen 1980), and focuses on the instrumental functions of language. This concept relies on the fact that a language should be actively acquired so long as it is valued socioeconomically and serves as a preferred medium of communication. With globalization and the disappearance of market boundary between countries, languages of powerful nations have increased “linguistic capital,” which means they can provide higher economic and social status (Coulmas 1992; De Vries 1983). When a person can speak a language with a high level of linguistic capital, his or her earning capacity and social status are increased. In contrast, those who only speak languages with low levels of linguistic capital might be precluded from participation in the labor force or at the least, have limited access to more desirable occupations. This is why bilingual people see their languages as an asset; in essence, the more languages one speaks, the more upward mobility one has.

Although it is reasonable to assume that economic influences exist wherever a language choice is present, there are also oppositions to the notion of comparing languages to economic commodities. Grin (1996) criticizes the marketplace notion for ignoring the significant symbolic weight that language carries for its speakers, and he sees it as a problem that the analogy is not

clearly defined with respect to the terminologies used. For instance, researchers have not identified price and quantity, or supply and demand in correspondence to linguistic features, and cultural factors do not appear to have a counterpart in the marketplace. Thus, it is a question how far one can take this analogy, and whether using economic principles to predict linguistic changes is valid.

As we can see, some concepts in these models are related to each other and may interact to influence language outcome. These different theories and models cannot completely account for the phenomenon of language maintenance and languages shift, but they complement each other, so taken together, we can get a more complete sense of the language situation of a particular place and community.

### **5. Philadelphia's Chinatown**

In this section, we look specifically at Philadelphia's Chinatown according to the domains that impact language maintenance and language shift among the occupants. First, political factors such as immigration policies, language policies, and national views on multilingualism affect immigrants' view of their place in the larger American society and the likelihood that they will sustain the use of their home languages. Second, people consider the economic value of languages, such as whether they increase the chances of employment or lend social prestige. Third, the immediate environments of Chinatown and the social setting of this community can influence which languages occupants choose to speak. Finally, there are motivations for many Chinese people to keep their ties to their homeland by acquiring and maintaining their languages, and this also applies to non-Chinese people who are interested in Chinese culture and language. By analyzing these factors as related to Philadelphia's Chinatown

occupants, we examine what compels speakers to make their language choices and deduce what the language outcome of this community might be.

The current analysis is based on the reasoning that the comparative outcome of Cantonese and Mandarin in Philadelphia's Chinatown can be determined by comparing information from the following groups: 1. Cantonese and Mandarin speakers who enter the Chinatown community (+); 2. Cantonese and Mandarin speakers who switch to English (-); 3. Cantonese and Mandarin speakers who acquire the other dialect (+/-); and 4. other immigrants and English speakers who acquire Cantonese and Mandarin (+).

<b>L1\ L2</b>	<b>Cantonese</b>	<b>Mandarin</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>Cantonese</b>	+	+/-	+/-
<b>Mandarin</b>	+/-	+	+/-
<b>English</b>	+	+	/

The plus sign after a group indicates that the number in that group is positively related to language maintenance, whereas a minus sign indicates that the number in the group is positively related to language shift. This characterization of language outcome is necessarily simplified, and it should be noted that these groups are not mutually exclusive. The speed of the changes in speaker populations might be both rapid and slow, as some immigrants acquire a language in months to ensure employment and some generational changes take more time.

*a. Political Issues*

In many ways, the social and political climate of the host country affects the success of the establishment of immigrant language communities. A general atmosphere of cultural freedom-- such as that in religion, dress, and establishment of social organizations— fosters language maintenance. This atmosphere is cultivated in the whole society from the government down to the individual, and is reflected in the most general way by the government's

immigration and language policies. Even though governmental effort has been shown not to be the deciding factor in maintaining a heritage language, it nevertheless assures immigrants of the country's acceptance of and willingness to foster a diverse environment.

### *Immigration Policy*

The Immigration and Nationality Act, created in 1952, although amended many times over the years, is still the basic body of immigration law in the United States. However, it does not mean that the situation has stayed the same. The immigration policies in the United States have become increasingly less restrictive in the last few decades since the post-war period, and there is almost a year by year increase in the number of admitted immigrants. This is attributable to improving economic conditions, declining prejudice, foreign relations considerations, and lobbying by ethnic organizations.

The immigration process does not stop after immigrants are granted access and come to the US. As immigrants settle in this new country, they still aspire to the American dream, and they are attracted to the promise of more freedom and equality. What they encounter may not always meet their expectations though, and this applies to the use of language no less than prejudice based on skin color. Even though there is no overt and direct hostility to language maintenance in the home and private space, it may be a problem to some immigrants that English (and Spanish in some parts of the US) enjoys an exclusive status in most of the public sphere. A quote found on the website of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services summarizes the position of the government:

*“Though we are a nation of diverse cultures and backgrounds, we are bound by our shared history, the common civic values set forth in our founding documents, and the English language.”*

This quote reveals clearly that the English language is an important part in the consideration of belonging to the nation in the US, especially for immigrants who aim to become a citizen. It is a constant struggle for immigrants to naturalize and become a citizen, because of the rights and benefits, and also because they wish that their children will be accepted in the mainstream society and will not be caught between cultures. Although many immigrants try, it is next to impossible for non-English speakers to pass the naturalization test, which means that immigrants who fail to acquire an adequate level of English are forced to remain resident aliens even if they immigrated many years ago. In Chinatown and elsewhere, there are agencies that prepare immigrants for the test and the interview, charging an amount that some immigrants find hard to afford, but they pay in the hopes of improving their future. In summary, the US is free and it is not. Immigrants are free to use their own languages, but they are required to speak English to fully assimilate to the society. Both Cantonese and Mandarin speaking immigrants, then, experience a strong push towards acquiring English.

### *Language Policy*

Language policies can regulate anything that uses language as a medium, including education, finance, mass media, and laws themselves. They are usually intended to be more general guidelines and do not extend to the private spheres. Language policies can be separated into implicit and explicit ones. In some countries, explicit guidelines for language use in general are put forward, usually to promote social equity, cultural enrichment, and economic advantage.

In Australia, the language policy adheres to the following principles (Clyne & Kipp 1999):

1. *Competence in English for all*
2. *The maintenance and development of languages other than English (both indigenous and community languages)*
3. *The provision of services in languages other than English*
4. *Opportunities for learning second languages*

While the US does not have a set of guidelines that are comparable to these, there are a number of federal and state laws that relate to language use. A chapter in *Immigration, Language, and Ethnicity* (Vaillancourt 1997) delineates the language policies that Canada and United States have adopted since 1965, many of which relate to the use of French and English in Canada, and the use of Spanish and English in the US. The author's analysis of the policies are divided into four categories—language of education, language of work, language of business, and language of government. There have been several laws for language of education in the US, the major aim of which seems to be promotion of English, although some have argued that it is actually maintenance of the mother tongue of minorities through bilingual education. The language of the government depends on the demographic makeup of the particular geographic area, but is not explicitly stated in a law, and the US also does not have explicit laws regulating language of work and language of business. Besides these, there have been some legal debates concerning the voting rights of non-English speakers; advocates for bilingual voting ballots maintain that it is an easy way for people who are not literate in English to express their political preference.

Implicit language policies are, as the name suggests, policies that exist in the public domain as a standard, but not explicitly stated as a government policy. This is expressed markedly in the range of languages taught in public schools and in print and broadcast. As mentioned before, the prevalent language in the US is English, and it predominates in the school environment. It is the language of instruction in all public schools, where free mass education is available; and although a small number of schools offer Chinese as a second language, practice and use of the language is confined to the classroom. This suggests why language maintenance effects in school are minimal, except when the schools are conducted bilingually (Clyne & Kipp 1999). Similarly, on television and radio broadcast, English is always present. Due to the lack of



natural support for Chinese in the larger society, children who have acquired English in school can quickly lose Chinese, which they do not use frequently. For adults who do not already know English, it is much more intimidating, because they are essentially helpless without the language. Due to this reason, they may choose to remain in the community where they are able to communicate, and language maintenance is more likely.

### *Linguism*

In thinking about a country's treatment of languages, another dimension to consider is how important languages are to the definition of the nation. It has been suggested that in the literature as well as in daily life, people equate nations and languages; thus, when boundaries between them do not coincide, they expect struggles over linguistic differences (Blum 2005). Linguism is this notion that a single language embodies the spirit of the nation: for example, some people view English as a binding principle for the US as a nation. This prevailing opinion may be a result of Western influences over the world. Societies of considerable sizes everywhere in the world are multilingual, but some nations are better able to accept linguistic differences among its civilians. The view of languages, in regards to how they function in a society, varies with different national history and cultural values.

Three types of views of linguism have been described in the literature: boundary contesting, boundary shrugging, and boundary celebrating. First, boundary contesting societies take monolingualism as the imperative and ideal state of any language situation, and the language is tied inseparably to nationalism. There is a pressure for convergence, as may be shown by standardization of an official language, programs to promote literacy for everyone, and centralized administrative control for schooling and media. Blum (2005) argues that the prototype of boundary contesting countries in the world right now is the US, and most countries

in Europe also belong to the category. One of the reasons that linguism might be an effect of Western domination over the world is that historically, claiming status as a world language, such as Latin, or French, or English, has always been a European idea. There have been long discussions in the US of whether it is necessary to make English a *de jure* in addition to a *de facto* national language.

This obsession with one national language is not seen in boundary celebrating societies at all—instead, they actively exaggerate the many languages that they have because they find the differences interesting. Although they are not as common, some cultures in Papua New Guinea can be classified as boundary celebrating societies. Between these extremes is the boundary shrugging societies, and they do not find multilingualism a problem and accept it as the natural state of things. An example of boundary shrugging societies is China, due to three characteristics. First, linguistic difficulties were rarely mentioned in the context of war, political struggles, and the establishment of the nation. Second, variation in the language is not suppressed, in fact relatively little attention is paid to the characteristics of speech compared to raising the literacy level of the general population with regard to written Chinese. Lastly, it is acknowledged that people from different regions speak a variety of dialects. People acquire multiple Chinese dialects if they can, and it is such a matter of fact that the general disposition is to tolerate rather than reject linguistic differences.

These national characteristics are visible in several places; for example, China's constitution (1982 version) mentions language only once and in the context of ethnic minorities: "*all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs.*" It was not until some political parties saw linguistic matters as part of the problem of the independence of Taiwan that the

Chinese language made center stage on the Chinese political platform. Blum (2005) suggests that setting Mandarin as the official language was just for convenience, because the Communist regime needed to uproot illiteracy so as to modernize and enter the international stage. Hence, modern Chinese efforts to promote a national standard did not stem from the urge to be a monolingual country, and the laws and programs on language still presuppose the continuation of multilingualism.

Historically, since the writing system was unified in the Qin Dynasty (around 200BC), people could communicate in writing even though speech was not unified. There are historical records of cultural and ethnic differences in people, but regional dialects were hardly ever mentioned in official documents. People nowadays are still comfortable and accepting that people speak different dialects. Some linguistic evidence that supports this view is that in Chinese, people do not use the word *dialect* to refer to what people speak; for instance, *Hunan hua* and *Chuan hua* mean the Hunan language and the Sichuan language respectively. These labels only refer to geographic locations, and the concept of dialect is not apparent in the words. Speakers of local varieties show great solidarity within the language group, and speaking in dialects has little stigma attached. Leaders in mainland China do not emphasize a national spoken language as a mode to call forth nationalism; indeed, many of them are proud of their origins and speak with a regional accent. It appears that in China, being Chinese means to be part of the larger Chinese society, rather than speaking a unified language.

This difference of the American society and the Chinese society may be one of the central challenges that Chinese immigrants face. Before immigration, they lived in a diverse linguistic environment in terms of speaking in dialects; after immigration, the diversity is even greater, because now English enters the scene. Not only is English a much different language

from Chinese and there is no way for the immigrants to communicate in writing as they could have, but the receptivity and willingness to accommodate their difficulty is low. Immigrants negotiate a new way of using their languages, fitting the languages in the host country into languages from their home country. As the Chinese immigrants learn new languages, they become immersed in the power relations of the US culture and are subjected to the structures of social inequality, because speaking with an accent places them in a less privileged position (Espin 2006). The implication of this is, again, that a polarization may result for first generation immigrants and their descendants—new immigrants may have to stay within Chinatown due to their limited language skills or restrict their participation in the larger society, but once their children acquired English, it becomes difficult to maintain Chinese.

*b. Economic Factors*

We take economic factors broadly, and look at a number of influences on Chinatown languages that relate to economic concepts or economic conditions. First we consider the interaction of the actual economic situation and languages used by Chinatown occupants. The middle- and high-income Chinese immigrants tend to settle in the suburbs; among those who become Chinatown occupants, some struggle financially, while others are reasonably affluent. We should be aware that the analysis may only apply to a subset of Chinatown occupants because there is large variance in income level and social class within the immigrant group. Another direct link of economics and dialect choice is the utility value of a dialect: the higher it is, the more likely people will adopt it.

As shown previously, an economic model of demand and supply can be used to explain the rise and fall of language speakers. Taking this view implies the objectification of language, and certain languages with high market value, such as English and Mandarin, are looked upon as

a property belonging to only a limited number of people. Speakers who “own” the language are protected by various assessment procedures that are established to separate those who speak the language and those who only aspire to (Clyne & Kipp 1999). Governments could also use language policies to regulate languages to achieve economic efficiency, such as regulating resource costs, employment level, and income level (Vaillancourt 1997). However, limiting speakers’ access to prestigious languages is a delicate act because it plays into the power struggle of socioeconomic classes, and it is easy to cause social unrest.

Due to increasing income, middle-class immigrants have higher buying power and more bank deposits than previously and are becoming a major group of clients. The economic conditions and potentials of the Asian Americans in Philadelphia seem to be overlooked by local American banks; seeing this, Asian banks are now targeting the Asian American market (Lou 2007a). Asian banks have a comparative advantage in this case because of a cultural gap between the local banks and the immigrants. The local banks often could not meet the needs of the immigrants, such as a lack of credit history and different customs in treatment of money. Some Asian banks, on the other hand, are more sensitive to what this group requires and cater to their needs. They may provide bilingual forms and help with their questions about the way of living in the US. Although seemingly an unlikely source of support, having a sympathetic bank might relieve immigrants from dealing with misunderstandings owing to language barriers and differences in customs.

For some immigrants, acquiring a language is a survival need. Others might try to learn additional languages to equip themselves for a more competitive labor market. In both cases, learning Mandarin is preferable to learning Cantonese. The increasing market value of Mandarin and the declining value of Cantonese can be traced to China’s rise in the global market. Whereas

Hong Kong had been economically superior to mainland China for a long time, the huge potential that China possesses makes Mandarin more attractive than Cantonese. Due to the higher demand of Mandarin language classes, institutions within Chinatown have designed more classes for both adults and children. One school that previously operated grade-school Chinese classes for 16 years and has had on average 90% Chinese students and 10% non-Chinese students, now has a changed customer profile. In the new adult class established two years ago in the same school, 50% of students are Cantonese-speaking immigrants, 30% are American-born Chinese students, and 20% are non-Chinese (Gong 2007). In Chinatowns, Cantonese speakers are now finding it useful to acquire Mandarin, and more non-Chinese adults and children are learning Mandarin also.

Joseph Low, who served as President of the Chinese Benevolent Association for many years, came to Philadelphia in 1949, the first of his family to immigrate to the United States (Wang 1997). Joe's advice to young parents:

*Encourage your children to speak Chinese because when they grow up they regret that they do not and they blame their parents for this. Families who come to America with young children from 6-14 years of age have something special in their favor. The children naturally know the Chinese language and they learn to speak English fluently within one to two years. They are bilingual. Children of similar ages from second and third generation families know little more than a few words of Chinese. It is smart for children to know their mother language. It is good for China and good for the United States. Frequently, important jobs are obtained by young adults who are bilingual.*

This piece of advice incorporates many of the reasons that Chinese immigrants engage in language maintenance practices and later-generation Chinese Americans try to acquire Chinese. Upward mobility can be achieved via acquisition of languages: certainly English, and to an increasing extent, Mandarin.

### c. *Social Factors*

Immigrants frequently rely on social support when they first arrive at a new country, and they continue to benefit from the community as they reside there. Studies have shown social efforts to be an influential factor in maintaining a language (Fishman 1966, 1985 and 1991), and they work on multiple levels for the language speakers, the language community and the society that it is situated in. This section mainly focuses on language maintenance institutions, and how they assist Chinatown residents to maintain their heritage language as they acquire English at the same time.

Institutions that cultivate language maintenance can be set up by the government, charitable organizations, and the language communities themselves. Those with a primary function to preserve languages include Saturday schools, theatre groups, literature circles, newspapers, and radio programs. Those with functions in addition to language maintenance include religious congregations, art institutes, restaurants, and ethnic shops. The importance of language maintenance institutions to the individual is that the social setting reinforces the motivation to use the language. Even though the primary purpose of some of the institutions is not concerned with language at all, by encouraging immigrants' participation in communal activities, they help immigrants adjust to a new linguistic environment. There is mutual dependence between the institutions and the language speakers, since the institutions monitor the language maintenance, but the probability of continuation of the institutions depends on the successful transmission of the language to the second generation speakers and their attitudes toward further language maintenance (Clyne & Kipp 1999: 34-35).

### *Religious Institutions*

Immigrants come to the US because of push factors in China, including increasing competition in the job market for adults and college entrance for the younger generation (Chang

2007). As they come to the US expecting better conditions, they often feel disillusioned before they fully adjust to the immigrant life. Religion offers comfort on both the social and the individual level. A church community often lends support in translation, health care, or job referrals. Since many new immigrants come from poor places in China and speak little English, they tend to find solace at religious gatherings that are conducted in their native language.

In Philadelphia's Chinatown, both the Chinese Christian Church, and the Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church are religious organizations targeting the Chinese American and immigrant groups. The Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church is located inside Philadelphia's Chinatown, and has been a worship center in the community since 1939. Unlike most Catholic Churches it was not established for Catholics, but as an outreach to a mostly non-Catholic Asian American community, and it claims to be the first one in the Western hemisphere. Over the past few decades, they have been joined by new immigrants from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Vietnam; especially in the last decade, Mass attendance has gone from about 90 people per week to more than 200.

Mass is offered every week in Cantonese, Mandarin and English. According to Father Tom Betz (2007), the largest number of church members (about 175 people) attends the English Mass, next is the Cantonese Mass (around 80) and the Mandarin Mass has the lowest attendance so far (about 60 people). Members differ a great deal in demographics, and the poorest people now are in the Mandarin group, although this was not the case in the past. A few years ago, the Mandarin group was mostly Taiwanese immigrants who are reasonably wealthy, but it changed with a large influx of recent immigrants from Fujian Province. The Mandarin group has become the poorest in terms of monetary assets and is least likely to speak English.



The definite trend is away from Cantonese towards Mandarin, especially as more Fujianese speakers join the Church, but this is occurring slowly over time. Although some people who do not understand English well attend the English mass so that their children might better learn it, others who are comfortable with both English and a Chinese dialect choose to attend either Mass depending on where their friends worship. In addition, both the Chinese groups stay for lunch together and for other spiritual fellowship, and religious worship also extends into weekly social gatherings. We can gather from this information that church attendance really serves multiple functions other than worship: people go to socialize in a community where they are accepted, and it is part of the language acquisition process especially for the children. Since each language group frequently meets with other language speakers of similar backgrounds, they can maintain the usage of their languages of origin.

#### *Educational and Art Institutions*

Affiliated with the Holy Redeemer Church, but established later, Holy Redeemer School offers kindergarten through 8th grade education for about 280 students, most of them children from immigrant families. Most of their students speak English as a second language and come from low income families, but they graduate to go on to high school and colleges. The Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School is another school in the Chinatown community which provides low-cost education for students and especially encourages students' appreciation of their cultural heritage. It was reported that 20 board members from the school went to Fujian Province to learn about the areas from where many of their students originate in order to bring a more realistic image of their place of origin to the students. Education is obviously going to affect the view of the future generation; in Philadelphia's Chinatown at least, it seems that children are encouraged to preserve their languages.

Other organizations may promote the arts, or take a more political stance. The Asian Arts Initiatives is an organization that supports local artists expressing any type of Asian American culture. It publishes a book entitled *Chinatown Lives: Oral Histories of Philadelphia's Chinatown*, which contains rich portraits of 22 Chinatown residents. Philadelphia Folklore Project made a documentary on folk art and social change titled "Look forward and carry on the past: stories from Chinatown" (co-directed by Debbie Wei, Debora Kodish and Barry Dornfeld). It was the first of the "Space Wars" efforts to document and support embattled communities facing gentrification. These efforts to put forth the Chinatown culture can be influential to community members, who may feel more connected to the community and be more motivated to communicate in Chinese dialects.

The religious, educational, and cultural institutions together provide recreation facilities, tutoring and youth services to hundreds of children in the neighborhood. They also offer English, computer and literacy classes for adults and artistic ventures for people interested in Asian cultures. These are the community centers of Philadelphia's Chinatown, without which people may have little chance to use their language outside of their homes. They are essential for language maintenance for reasons that also connect with the heightened sense of cultural belonging.

*d. Cultural Factors*

Even as immigrants spend long years into the US, they are never fully divorced from their places of origin. We may gain some insights in the language scene in Chinatown by looking at the situation in Shenzhen, which also has a substantial number of both Cantonese and Mandarin speakers. Next, we can draw some parallels between the Chinatown in Winnipeg in

Canada and Philadelphia's Chinatown. By focusing on the cultural similarity and differences, we may infer how some immigrants decide on which languages they speak.

*Code-Choice in Shenzhen*

Shenzhen is located in Guangdong Province, just north of the border from Hong Kong. It is a bi-dialectal city with individuals speaking Mandarin as standard dialect in school and formal situations, and their regional mother-tongues in other social situations. Governmental and state educational efforts promote Mandarin as the standard dialect to unify the languages spoken in Shenzhen. Although governmental efforts may have an effect, the more decisive factor is the market needs to speak Mandarin to communicate with government officials or businessmen in other parts of China. However, Cantonese remains a dialect that has relatively higher status because it is the dialect spoken in Guangzhou, the provincial capital, and Hong Kong. People tend to associate Mandarin with being educated and Cantonese with being more trendy and urban.

One study investigates how code choice is established in a Cantonese phone-in radio program (Xiao 1998). Scripts of the radio program are transcribed to locate when and how the callers or the host switch their use of Cantonese and Mandarin. The main results are that the host always initiates the call by speaking Cantonese, since it is a Cantonese program, but if callers switch to Mandarin at any point, the host will accommodate and switch to using Mandarin. This accommodation is not found in Mandarin radio programs. Callers are expected to speak Mandarin, even if they can only speak it with an accent, and the hosts do not typically accommodate to local dialects. Hence, the standard dialect determines the direction of code-switch, and this is seen as a link between the macro- and micro-level of language structures.

Perhaps it may be assumed that Mandarin speakers are less willing to accommodate other dialect speakers because there is an entitlement to speaking the official language. It has been

noted that Chinese people do not generally discriminate against speakers of other dialects, but there is an imbalance in the likelihood of acquiring Mandarin versus other dialects. Although most dialect speakers do not abandon their local variety, they do try to acquire Mandarin to communicate with a larger number of speakers of other Chinese dialects. In short, there is a higher probability for Cantonese-speakers to acquire Mandarin than for Mandarin-speakers to acquire Cantonese. The official language status of Mandarin in China does not naturally carry over to the immigrant community; instead, the utility value of the dialect seems to be more important. However, Mandarin is gaining language status purely by the huge number of its speakers and its market potential; thus, it is likely that in overseas Chinese communities, like Philadelphia's Chinatown, this asymmetrical trend of dialect acquisition will continue.

#### *Chinatown in Winnipeg*

Another study summarizes the linguistic makeup of the Chinese community in Winnipeg, and the historical shifts it underwent (Zhang 2005). Until the end of 1960s, most Chinese immigrants in Winnipeg spoke Taishanese, which belongs to the *Yue* family, and is local to the area of *Siyi* in Guangdong Province. Due to the cultural and economic superiority of Hong Kong, a new wave of Cantonese-speaking immigrants overtook the community, and Cantonese replaced Taishanese as the dominant dialect. Using a survey combined with field observation, the author assessed the language background, language competence, and language use in the community. She found that there is nearly universal knowledge of Cantonese and English, while Mandarin is a close third. Taishanese remains an important dialect among the old sectors and has some second-language speakers within its network, showing in-group vitality. It was also found that having familial and friendship ties were conducive to using Chinese, and most of the community members patronize Chinatown businesses.

If we take the language situation in Philadelphia's Chinatown to be comparable to that of Winnipeg's Chinatown, we may predict that Cantonese will eventually become a dialect that is limited in usage as Taishanese is in Winnipeg. However, the two situations do not exactly parallel, since there are many low-income immigrants from mainland China who have lower socioeconomic class than immigrants from Hong Kong. It is difficult to predict when the living standard in every province in China will catch up with the standard of first world countries, but in the immediate future, poverty will still be a major problem in mainland China. Additionally, Hong Kong has a separate pop culture that is a standard in the region, standing at the same rank as that of Taiwan and mainland China. Hence, it is likely that Cantonese will remain in Philadelphia's Chinatown for a long period of time.

The language choice in Chinatown is a complex problem that involves the languages in themselves and the well-being of the language speakers. We have seen that Chinese is likely to be maintained because of continued immigration from China and existing social ties and use within the language communities. However, intergenerational transmission is less robust, and Chinese is lost rapidly between the second and third generation of Chinese Americans. This may be attributed to the reasons we have identified before and also to the high assimilative power of American institutions (Glazer 1966). Since language is linked to a culture, speaking different languages may imply being guided by different cultural codes; for example, in an immigrant family, the dominant language can be seen as a reflection of cultural choices. It is simultaneously a binding and dividing force because affiliating with one culture seems to alienate one to the other one. The diversity and differences among the Asian American groups that live in Chinatown can be so great that sometimes it paradoxically results in English as the common language (Huebner & Uyechi 2004). Adding to the other influences that propel immigrants to

speak English, Social rules and cultural identities sometimes create conflicts in later generations of Asian Americans.

## **6. Conclusions**

The analysis of the language maintenance of Mandarin and Cantonese in Philadelphia's Chinatown is a slice of what the language situation is like at the current stage. We have compared the changing numbers of dialect speakers and describe the dynamics of the changes, while the categories of Mandarin and Cantonese were held constant. This is not to ignore the fact that languages change through time constantly-- by foreign interference, dialect interference, and language drift driven by the language itself. However, the scope of this paper limits the extent in which we can examine changes in Mandarin and Cantonese that result from language contact. There are also many other factors that we have barely touched on, for example religious practices, illegal work by some immigrants, and the individual language choice of bilingual speakers in different circumstances.

We have seen that recent immigrants to the US are mainly Mandarin speakers rather than Cantonese speakers, which is to be expected because in countries of origin, Cantonese is declining. These immigrants have strong incentive to acquire English, and may acquire Cantonese or Mandarin in response to work or living demands in Chinatown. Since there are an increasing number of Mandarin speakers in the community and people are sensitive to the instrumental value of acquiring Mandarin, new immigrants are more likely to acquire Mandarin. In addition to acquiring new languages, it is a separate issue whether Chinatown occupants maintain their original languages. As with other immigrant groups, on average, Chinese Americans lose their languages of origin between second- and third-generations. However, since bilingual speakers are at an advantage in our present society, a tendency is emerging for Chinese

Americans to re-learn their heritage languages in college, and other people who are not Chinese also learn the language for various reasons. Since Mandarin is the official language of China and Taiwan, it is often the sole Chinese language taught in schools in the US. There is a consistent choice of acquiring Mandarin over Cantonese, perhaps made by language institutions in addition to the language speakers themselves.

In short, both Mandarin and English are gaining speakers, while Cantonese is not. A question, then, is will Cantonese disappear from the language scene in Chinatowns entirely? It is far from that yet, since its presence in the community is still strong, and immigrants from Hong Kong and other Cantonese-speaking regions replenish the number of speakers. The celebration of cultural roots also leads people to maintain the language against declining market value of the dialect. However, it is still possible that Cantonese will be relegated to the status of other Chinese dialects and other smaller dialects might become extinct, at least in overseas Chinese communities.

Many languages in the world are on their way to extinction, and one of the causes of language death is speakers' decision to abandon that language in favor of another. The deeper causes that lead to the speakers' choice can perhaps be reflected in the pressures exerted on speakers of smaller language communities. A final remark concerns Chinatown and its linguistic community, which can mean different things for different people. For many, it is purely a tourist attraction, but Chinatown is nevertheless a place where real people live and die. The places where Chinatown residents dine, obtain education, and attend religious services are no different from what others are familiar with. The growing group of Chinese immigrants and Asian Americans belongs to the American society, but are sometimes denied equal treatment on linguistic bases, so there should more efforts to make their integration a smooth process.

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